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BTS™ Setting & Villains

Dweomer Mage & Magic

Rifts® Short Story

Palladium Fantasy®

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The Rifter® Number 17

Your guide to the Palladium Megaverse®!

Writing

Violence and the Supernatural

The original source of Palladium Books' are violent, deadly and filled with supernatural
elements. Our editorial boards often refer to our "violence" as "horror" and our "supernatural"
as "fantasy". Our editorial boards and designers are well versed in the genres of horror and fantasy
and we are confident that the violence, magic and supernatural elements of the games supported
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Please note that some of us at Palladium Books consider our employees to be the best
of people, the one of a kind, or unique.

First Printing – January, 2002

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Palladium Books® Presents:

THE RIFTER #17

BRANDT -97

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.

Contents — The Rifter #17 — January, 2002 —

Page 6 – From the Desk

of Kevin Siembieda

Palladium's President, CEO and Chief Game Designer, Kevin Siembieda, gives the reader insight for what's coming in 2002. And he has some big plans (many already in the works). New sourcebooks for *The Palladium Fantasy RPG*®, cool stuff for *Heroes Unlimited*™, great books for *Rifts*® and three new role-playing games! *Mechanoid Space*™, *Void Runners*™ and *Beyond the Supernatural*™, *Second Edition* (okay, that more like two and a half new games). Get the entire lowdown right here! Oh, and Happy New Year, everyone!!

Art by Mike Wilson.

Page 9 – Palladium News

Rifts® Movie update (not that there is anything to tell), Kevin & Maryann's trip to New York City and fun at the Compleat Strategist. The newest set for the Rifts® CCG (*The Gargoyle Empire*™).

Page 10 – Coming Attractions

Palladium Books' schedule through May, 2002. Details and information about new releases like the *Palladium Weapon Series*, *Rifts*® *Adventure Guide*, *Phase World*® *Anvil Galaxy*, and other good stuff. And speaking of new releases, **After the Bomb**® RPG appears to be a bonafide hit with reorders coming in fast and furious. If you missed this fun new RPG (ideal for use with *Heroes Unlimited*™ as well as a standalone game) or can't find a copy to scope out, pester the heck out of your local store, because this is one excellent game.

Page 16 – Questions and Answers

Wow, this is the biggest, juiciest section of questions and answers ever, by Rodney Stott, Shawn Merrow and Kevin Siembieda. Includes a new Minor Super Ability, information on swimming, deep sea depths, the bends and the oceans, plus rules for mistreating weapons, S.D.C. for weapons and equipment, penalties on damaged body armor (the types of damage too), footwear, vampires and "Defining the -10 dodge bullets" rule! This issue has it all! Helpful information and material officially endorsed by Palladium Books.

Artwork by Kevin Long, Ramon Perez and Freddie Williams.

Page 25 – Beyond The Supernatural

Last Street; scenario setting

Newcomer Todd Yoho presents an interesting and creepy setting for BTS including notable places like the Center for the Study of the Arcane, Things Forgotten Antique Shop, Land's Outfitters and a number of other places, as well as notable NPCs. As if that were not enough, Mr. Yoho presents a few mysteries, equipment items and adventure ideas.

Art by Wayne Breaux Jr.

Page 35 – Heroes Unlimited™

The Thropo Aliens Revisited™

Wayne Breaux Jr. is the mastermind behind *Aliens Unlimited*™ and the *Galaxy Guide*™ for *Heroes Unlimited*™. This

interesting feature takes a closer look at the apish Thropo aliens and their role in the Atorian Empire and universe at large. Background, society, military alliances, galactic travels, bionics and the Thropo Super Soldier.

Illustrated by Wayne Breaux Jr.

Page 45 – The Palladium Fantasy RPG®

Stilt City

Sonny Rice presents *Stilt City* in the remote and mysterious Land of the South Winds. He presents the city's history, population, and notable people and places. No place would be finished without some notable local folk like Duke Theadin, Guildmaster Swan, Kraigen the Assassin and others. Plus some adventure ideas. We just have one question: Where are the maps? Fun stuff even without them.

Art by the impeccable Kent Burles.

Page 56 – Rifts®, Palladium Fantasy

& Other Palladium RPGs

Dweomer Mage O.C.C. (and new magic)

James Calder presents the *Dweomer Mage*, inspired from the pages of *Rifts*® *Federation of Magic*®, but suitable for most any setting that has magic and spell casters.

The *Dweomer Mage* O.C.C. presented in detail, followed by a host of new magic spells for the mage or others (with G.M. approval). Spells include See Magical Aura, Alter Magical Aura, Curse: Leak, P.P.E. Barrier, P.P.E. Bolt, Void, Erase Ley Line and many more.

Artwork by Michael Wilson.

Page 69 – Rifts®

The Bandits of Hollow Hill

Adventure source-material by none other than Patrick Nowak, author of *Coalition Navy* and contributor to a number of *Rifts*® world books. The Hollow Hill bandit lair (with maps), the bandits, monsters, surprises and adventure ideas.

Art by Apollo Okamura.

Page 79 – Rifts®

Blood Magic

Nathan Bingham adds to the gruesome mythos of "Blood Magic." Come and see the latest ... if you dare.

Art by Wayne Breaux Jr and Tyler Walpole.

Page 84 – Rifts®

One Chance in a Million

The third and final chapter in Paul Sillanpaa's *Rifts* story.

Art by Apollo Okamura.

Page 93 – Rifts® Phase World®

Hammer of the Forge

The 17th chapter in James M. G. Cannon's gripping *Phase World*™ story, and this one has a few surprises.

Artwork by Apollo Okamura.

Part One: The Great Cataclysm

Kevin Siembieda has decided to serialize his new vision for **Chaos Earth™** a complete new role-playing game. Ever want to play in an apocalyptic setting? You know, the complete collapse of human civilization. You have? Good, here's your chance. Enjoy.

The theme for issue 17

Hmm, this issue has a little bit for most everyone with an emphasis on **Rifts®**, mayhem and chaos. What better place to introduce the first look at *Chaos Earth*. We hope you enjoy it all.

The Cover

Scott Johnson expanded upon one of the cards he has created for the *Rifts® Collectable Card Game: Gargoyle Empire*. Wow. That's what everyone at the Palladium office said when they saw it. Wow. That Scott Johnson is amazing with his computer painting. It depicts a Triax Black Knight engaged in combat with a host of bloodthirsty Gargoyles. As if we had to tell you that. So keep a look out for the new CCG set coming out February or March 2002.

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.

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Coming Next Issue

The Rifter™ #18

- **Chaos Earth™, Part Two: NEMA Agents and their missions.**
 - **Material for *Nightbane®*.**
 - **More material for *Rifts®*.**
 - **Material for *Palladium Fantasy®*.**
 - **The next chapter of the *Hammer of the Forge™*.**
 - **The latest news and developments at Palladium.**
 - **Source material for the entire Palladium Megaverse®.**
 - **New contributors and fun.**
- So please join us.

Palladium Books®

role-playing games ...

infinite possibilities,

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Palladium games are

found in stores everywhere



From the desk of Kevin Siembieda

For us at Palladium Books, 2002 is shaping up to be a year of excitement and challenge.

Excitement

Excitement because we have a lot of dynamic products coming out and three or four *new* role-playing games planned for 2002.

First off, there is the **After the Bomb® Role-Playing Game**. This is an updated, expanded and improved take on the original After the Bomb setting created for use with *Heroes Unlimited™*. Erick Wujcik has put more emphasis on the genetic engineering aspect of the characters and world, and has woven a cool game that should appeal to first-time gamers, you old veterans and players of *Heroes Unlimited™*. As far as I'm concerned, it is just plain cool and fun. I'm always taking mutant animals and putting them into my *Heroes Unlimited™* games.

Erick has a number of adventure-sourcebooks planned for the series that should surprise, excite and tantalize.

New adventure sourcebooks for *Palladium Fantasy RPG®*, *Heroes Unlimited™*, and *Rifts®* are coming your way!

For Rifts®

By the time you read this the **Rifts® Adventure Guide** should be finished and at the printers for a Mid-February release date. It includes player and G.M. suggestions on how to play, how to develop and run a campaign, lots of quick roll creation tables, 101 adventure ideas and other good stuff.

Next, for me, is **Rifts® Aftermath** – the followup to the **Coalition Wars™: Siege on Tolkeen™** series, setting the stage for things to come. Scheduled for a March 2002 release.

Rifts® Dimension Book Five — Phase World®: Anvil Galaxy™. Bill Coffin explores the Anvil Galaxy, the key people and places within it, new alien races, conflict, adventure ideas, and the search for the *Cosmic Forge!* Scheduled for an April release.

Rifts® Dimension Book Six – Phase World®: Cosmo-Knights®, a book that examines the legendary Cosmo-Knights, their powers, purpose and goals, as well as more on the Cosmic Forge. Spring or Summer release.

Rifts® Dragons and Gods, will present more information and details on dragons (including hatchling player characters), and notable gods from around the world. Summer release.

Rifts® World Books – more on the Cyber-Knights, Lazlo and other people, places and events.

For The Palladium Fantasy Role-Playing Game®

Land of the Damned™ Two and Three out this spring (Bill is finishing work on #2 even as you read this). Number two out in April or May. **Land of the Damned One** shipped at the end of December, 2001. If you haven't seen it yet, ask around because it *is* available right now! And, baby, is it good!

Adventures in the Northern Wilderness, Second Edition; updated and expanded, along with some new information and artwork. Spring release goodies will hit the store shelves this year too.

Palladium Book of Magic. Tentative pending approval of the freelance manuscript.

Other fantasy titles are also likely.

For Heroes Unlimited™, 2nd Ed.

Hardware Unlimited™, guns, gizmos and more by Brent Lien and Bill Coffin.

Atorian Empire™, by Wayne Breaux, companion to the *Aliens Unlimited™* series within HU2.

Mutant Underground™, by Kevin Siembieda. A look at mutant animals, mutant humans and the world that fears them.

New Role-Playing Games

I gotta tell ya, my mind is brimming over with ideas for new game worlds, concepts and adventures. Consequently, I am planning to write and publish two entirely new role-playing games, **Mechanoids® Space** and **Void Runners™**, and do a re-tooling of **Beyond the Supernatural™** as a second edition. Meanwhile, I will be serializing **Chaos Earth™** in the pages of *The Rifter®*, starting this issue. And that does not even include additional projects by Erick Wujcik and Bill Coffin under discussion right now! All of us at Palladium are just bursting with ideas and cutting loose in 2002.

Mechanoids® Space

The first new game will probably be **Mechanoids® Space**. The story follows the “original” *Mechanoid Invasion® Trilogy*, with the time-line picking up a few generations after **Home World**.

The premise is simple. Some years ago, something had gone wrong among the Mechanoids and they all seemed to perish from a mysterious plague. “Aberrant Mechanoids” were questioning too much, disrupting and scrambling Mechanoid society. Something had to be done. So they purged themselves. Wiping out 90% of their own race. The rest – the elite, the pure – went into hiding where they rebuilt themselves. Made themselves better, more single-minded. And more powerful. Now the Mechanoids are back! Trillions and trillions of them across the universe.

Their mission: To seek out and eradicate all humanoid life forms. The conquest of the Confederacy of Planets and the reclamation of their own Mechanoid Home World will be left for last. For the Mechanoids want their old nemesis, the Confederacy of Planets, to suffer. They want their hated enemies of the past to feel the loss of every planet – and to suffer from the knowledge that each loss is one more failure of the Confederacy to stop them, and brings humanoids one step closer to total annihilation.

The Confederacy of Planets will not sit idly by while humanoids throughout the universe are obliterated by the Mechanoids. Over the years, the Mechanoid Home World has given up many of its secrets. Secrets that may just give them the edge they need to stop this new madness. Thus, armed with knowledge, advanced technology, and firm resolve, the people of the Confederacy abandon their native worlds and take to the stars. They go to find and warn unsuspecting planets, to enlist entire new worlds as allies, and to fight alongside those already under attack. And so it is, these selfless heroes begin an epic adventure of rescue, salvation and hope. Making them the new seekers of worlds and the defenders of the universe. They have vowed to stop the Mechanoids ... or die trying.

Beyond the Supernatural™

I want to do **Beyond the Supernatural™**, “2nd Edition” in the worst way.

Yes, it will have all the stuff you expect from BTS and more. More history and background. More mood and setting. More on Victor Lazlo and his legacy, the *Lazlo Agency*. More direction and ideas for adventuring. More to make your spine tingle and imagination run rampant.

You’ll like it. Trust me, you’ll like it.

Void Runners™

Void Runners™ is something different and challenging. It won’t be for everybody, because it will focus heavily on “role-playing,” being a true hero, and working as a team. But for the experienced and exceptional gamer, I think it will be a real treat.

Void Runners™ has been knocking around my head for about two years now. In fact, I had scrapped it at one point, because it just didn’t work the way I needed it to. But the ideas kept percolating in the back of my mind until, one day, it all finally fell into place. I’m still working out the bugs and details, and the project remains something of an experiment in storytelling and strong characters. So I can’t tell you too much – not yet, anyway – but I can tell you this, it is a blend of science fiction, super-heroes, horror, reincarnation (sort of) and the metaphysical.

The game starts with the players. The player characters’ first “awareness” starts in a *void*. Absolute Blackness. Each is a fully conscious essence without body or form. They have no knowledge of their own past nor the greater history of any time or place. They intuitively know they are a force for *good*, and they are given a chance to go forth to stop the *unspeakable evil*.

Accepting that mission places them in a world both familiar and strange. A place where the Unspeakable Evil had dominated, until they arrived. An environment where they have just become the hunters. For they possess the power to defeat the evil and bring a new age of hope and goodness into the world.

The player characters appear together, instantly recognizing each other as fellow heroes and *teammates*. They possess all the knowledge they need to win the day, but must find the courage and cunning to succeed. They will also learn they are each a piece of a greater whole. That together they are at their most powerful, and that alone, they are terribly vulnerable. Even more amazing, they can not die! But they will learn there are things worse than death. Much worse.

And so they come running out of the *void* to face an uncertain destiny. They don’t know whether they are eternal champions, super-heroes, angels, electronic characters in a computer game, or the stuff of dreams. Although their purpose is clear, their past is an enigma. The future, an obstacle course of combat and personal challenge. Their fate, unknown.

And if they succeed, they grow in powers and wisdom, appearing on a new world that needs them. Facing new challenges and an increasingly familiar and vile enemy. Such is the life and many deaths of a Void Runner.

The Challenge

The year 2002 will be a *challenge* because the market is slow, money is tight, and buyers (on every level) conservative. Even if you and your family are not the ones experiencing layoffs, losing one's job or a cash crunch, you probably know more than one person who is. Meanwhile, the uncertainty of the War on Terrorism abroad and on our own shores is scary, frustrating and depressing. America's once bright future seems cloudier these days.

It all adds up to an uncertain and slow economy. Even role-playing game sales have been affected. Some stores buy only what they know they can sell. So while Bob, Tom and Jason get the books they pre-ordered, YOU may not. Why? Because that extra fourth or fifth book to put on the shelf was not ordered for the silent buyer to get. Some stores are even cutting role-playing games (and CCGs and other items) from their shelves. Distributors are doing the same. And even more tragic are the outfits closing their doors for good.

Sales on everything are so flat, that store owners, managers and buyers just don't know what to sell anymore. That's where you guys and gals come in.

How can "you" help?

Simple. Talk to the folks at your favorite store and tell them what YOU want. Seriously, it is as easy as that.

Let them know that you are excited about **After the Bomb®**, and/or **Mechanoid® Space**, **Void Runners™**, **Beyond the Supernatural™**, **Palladium Fantasy RPG®**, **Heroes Unlimited™**, **Rifts®**, **Nightbane®** or *whatever*.

Tell them to make sure they order you a copy! And make sure you buy it (don't stiff the store by not coming back to make the purchase).

Unless you talk to the store managers about what you are excited about and want to purchase, they don't know and may not buy it.

You can not imagine how many times we hear from gamers that they can't get product X from their local store (or several stores). We hate hearing that, because store owners, distributors and our own lines of communication tell us Palladium Books continues to have one of the best selling role-playing game lines in America (maybe the world)! But at the same time, we see our sales down. And it drives us crazy to hear how our fans can not find our books when we have a warehouse full of them!

Talk to your favorite store. Tell them what you want. Tell them what you honestly think will be hot. Let them know you are excited about a particular product.

Most stores will **special order** any role-playing book you might want. You might have to pay half or all of the cost in advance, but they *will* do it. Ask about special orders. Oh, and if you get some grouchy, biased or lazy store clerk who blows you off, check with the store manager or owner next time. And if they refuse to "special order," you might want to check out a different store or the local "chain store." Barnes & Noble, Borders, Waldenbooks, and most others can and will special order Palladium Books' products for anybody. However, any store who cares about its customers *will* special order for its regular customers. All you have to do is ask.

Remember too, just because *you* may love Palladium's RPG products, or because they are hot in one place, doesn't mean they are hot *everywhere*. You might live in an area where some other game line is big and Palladium is overlooked. Or maybe the store just doesn't sell role-playing games at all. Or had a bad experience once and doesn't carry them anymore. If you and your buddies keep talking about the games you like and, more importantly, keep *special ordering* products, maybe the store will try them in a bigger way. That's how "consumer power" works.

You may be fighting a lack of knowledge or personal bias too. The owner, manager or sales staff may not know anything about role-playing games, so they don't stock them. If you tell them about RPGs and assure them YOU (and a buddy or two) *will* buy most of this line or that, the store may consider stocking them. Another situation may be that the owner or sales staff are huge fans of one or two particular game lines, and have decided all others "stink," Palladium included. Hey, it happens. I actually had a store owner tell me at a trade show that he, personally, loves Palladium RPGs and would like to buy them. However, his sales staff love two rival game lines and a) refuse to sell other RPG lines, and b) discourage gamers from playing anything else. My knee-jerk reaction was to tell the store owner to fire these clowns, but as he continued to talk, it was obvious that these guys were good, hard workers and he liked them, they were just letting their personal bias interfere with good business. Now, don't argue with these folks about the virtues of Palladium Books or your other favorite RPG company, teach them otherwise with your sales dollars by *special ordering* your other RPG wants.

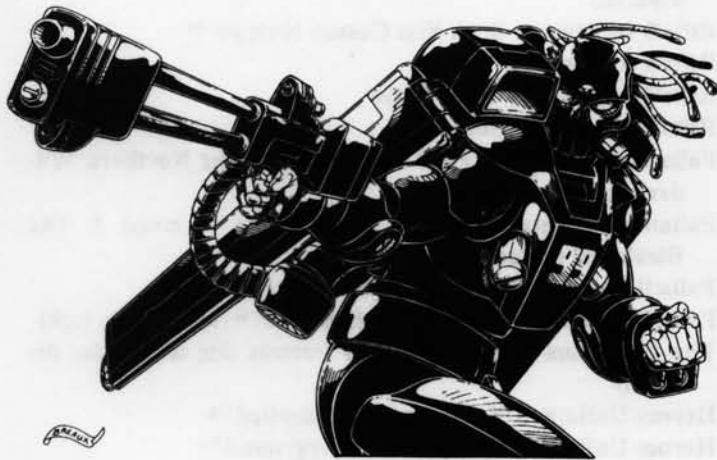
And know that Palladium always prints plenty of copies of new releases so unless a product is an unexpected mega-hit, we have thousands of copies in stock. Even old titles rarely go out of print for more than a couple of months unless we have a revised edition coming out (like *Rifts® Conversion Book One*, *BTS 2nd Edition* and *Adventures in the Great Northern Wilderness™*; all currently out but *soon* to be released with new material and changes).

The point is, Palladium Books has a bunch of great stuff planned for 2002 for its existing role-playing lines like **Rifts®**, **Heroes Unlimited™** and **The Palladium Fantasy RPG®** as well as its new games: **Mechanoids® Space**, **Void Runners™**, **Beyond the Supernatural™ 2nd Edition** and **After the Bomb®**. The stores need YOUR help to know what to buy. So give 'em a hand, won't you?

— Kevin Siembieda, January 2002

News

By Kevin Siembieda (the guy who should know)



Rifts® movie update

Sorry, nothing much to report this month. We are still locked in negotiations trying to work out an agreement that is acceptable to all parties. A much more difficult task than you might imagine.

For those of you haven't heard about this yet, a while back, Palladium Books was contacted by **Jerry Bruckheimer Productions**. Thanks to a **Rifts®** fan, the game caught the attention of Mr. Bruckheimer and he fell in love with it 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" and trying to work out a movie deal ever since. Don't get too excited, 'cuz there is no signed agreement yet, and there may never be a **Rifts®** movie unless we can work out a number of important concerns and issues. Meanwhile, keep your fingers crossed.

We will let our readers know how things are progressing in these pages (and online), 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 *Blackhawk Down*, *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.

New York City book signing at the Compleat Strategist was a blast

Manhattan was a little less crowded and a bit more subdued this year in the wake of September 11th – not that you could not tell by the multitude of folks who came to the Compleat Strategist at 33rd Street to visit, chat and get books signed. The entire event was cool, people were fun, and we were glad we came. Easily 80-100 people showed up and we had a ton 'o fun for the entire four and a half hours. Got to meet a couple of freelancers like artist *Mike Dubisch*, face to face, as well as some online characters like *Grand Paladin*, *Kromelizard* and *Liam the Genius*. Not to mention big Joe who has come to every one of our store signings at the Compleat Strat over the years, and who, it turns out, survived the World Trade Center disaster, escaping from the 85th floor! Needless to say Joe, we are thrilled you made it out unhurt and that you seemed to still have that old sparkle in your eyes and the same generous spirit. All of you, thanks for coming and take care.

Afterward, Danny (the owner) and his right-hand man, Larry, too us out to dinner and more conversation – it's a good thing Maryann and I are blabbermouths. The rest of the trip was good too. We look forward to a return trip to the city soon.

The Gargoyle Empire™ is next for the Rifts® Collectable Card Game

Production of the next booster set is in full swing. I've been approving black and white and color artwork left and right, and can hardly wait to see the final outcome. Freddie Williams, Drew Morrow, and a host of others from the first set have returned for an encore appearance, plus there are some new artists. *Scott Johnson* has done gorgeous cards, our favorite of which we had him turn into the cover for this issue of **The Rifter®**. Boy is Scott's color work getting good. You can count on seeing him do more covers for Palladium in the future (starting this year with the covers to the books in the Palladium Weapons series of sourcebooks).

Kevin Tewart, the chief designer of the CCG at Precedence, seems pretty excited about this next part of the CCG saga, and promises all of us fans will not be disappointed. It is supposed to ship to stores in February or March, 2002.

Basic Gargoyle Empire Deck \$14.99

Booster packs \$3.49 each, \$89.94 for an entire box.

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

Coming Attractions

New & available now!

Land of the Damned™ One: Chaos Lands™ – for *Palladium Fantasy*. The Northern Mountains and the Great Rift inside the Land of the Damned. Over 200 adventure ideas! 192 pages of action, mystery, magic and demons.

After the Bomb® the Role-Playing Game. If you have not taken a look at this complete role-playing game, you don't know what you are missing. Over 100 mutant animals, plus mutant humans, world information and adventures by game designing guru, Erick Wujcik. 224 pages; completely compatible with *Heroes Unlimited*.

January, 2002:

The Rifter® #17 with all the usual good stuff and the start of **Chaos Earth™**, but then you know that already, since you are holding it in your hands. Now get two of your buddies to start buying *The Rifter®* and we'll be all set.

February, 2002:

Weapons and Armor: 48 pages presenting approximately 600 different weapons and 30+ suits of armor for use in *ANY* role-playing game.

Each and every item is illustrated and all are real historical weapons from around the world. Only \$7.95 for this amazing reference.

Weapons and Castles: 48 pages presenting all sorts of bow weapons, siege machines, and 15 castles, complete with basic floor plans. All are real world castles. As always, stats are such that they can be adaptable to *ANY* role-playing game. Everything is illustrated. Only \$7.95 and found in stores everywhere.

Rifts® Adventure Guide – our third “master” sourcebook and reference guide with all kinds of information, tips and material for creating and running **Rifts®** adventures, as well as player tips too. Written by Siembieda, Coffin and Wujcik.

March, 2002:

Rifts® (Minnesota) Aftermath – what happens after Tolkeen falls? It's all here.

April, 2002:

The Rifter® #18 with all the usual good stuff and part two of *Chaos Earth®* (combat and investigation O.C.C.s).

Rifts® Dimension Book Five: Anvil Galaxy™ – The quest for the “Cosmic Forge,” an overview of the galaxy and a look at the key aliens and civilizations that play a key role.

May, 2002:

Land of the Damned™ Two: Eternal Torment™ – Don't miss it. 'Nuff said.

Coming in 2002 but not yet scheduled with a definitive release date:

Rifts® Conversion Book One; Revised Edition (some new material)

Rifts® Dimension Book Six: Cosmo-Knights™

Rifts® Africa Two

Rifts® Australia Two & Three

Rifts® – and a few surprises ...

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

Palladium Fantasy RPG®: Land of the Damned 3: The Bleakness (Citadel)

Palladium Fantasy RPG®: Mysteries of Magic™

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

The Palladium Weapons Series (returns due to popular demand)

Heroes Unlimited™: Hardware Unlimited™

Heroes Unlimited™: Mutant Underground™

Heroes Unlimited™: The City of Cascade™

Heroes Unlimited™: The Atorian Empire™

New After the Bomb® sourcebooks

Plus these new games ...

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

Mechanoid Space RPG® (a new epic series)

Void Runners™ RPG (something different)

And who knows what else?

Available in stores everywhere



After the Bomb® The Role-Playing Game

Don't take our word that this is a great new role-playing game, take a look at it for yourself!

Erick Wujcik has outdone himself. **The 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.

- Over 100 mutant animals – more if you include the many additional “breeds” tables.

- 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.
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- More on the Empire of Humanity.
- More opportunity for adventure.
- Compatible with *Heroes Unlimited™ 2nd Edition* and *Ninjas & Superspies™*.
- \$20.95 – 224 pages. A complete game.

After the Bomb® Sourcebooks – Available Now!

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, a 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.

For The Palladium Fantasy RPG®

Adventures in the Northern Wilderness™, 2nd Edition

Ships Early 2002 – may be slotted in as an *April* or *May* release.

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 *ShadowFall*, the Wolfen capital.
- The 12 Wolfen tribes (updated).
- 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.
- \$21.95 – 190+ pages.

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: Chaos Lands

— available now

- Over a dozen new monsters.
- Over a dozen new demons and another dozen Demon Lords.
- Over 200 adventure ideas! No kidding.
- The Northern Mountains and key places described.
- Historical accounts from the *Tristine Chronicles*, the origin of the Land of the Damned and more.
- The Great Rift canyon — a bottomless abyss that is home to legions of demons and Deevils locked in combat, and doorway to hellish infernos and alien worlds.
- Written by Bill Coffin.
- \$20.95 – 192 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.
- \$21.95 – 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.
- \$21.95 – 224 pages. Probably an early 2002 release.

The Palladium Weapon Series

For use with *any* role-playing game

A series of small, 48 page, sourcebooks that presents historically accurate data and information about ancient weapons from around the world.

For use with *ANY* game system. You heard right. The statistical information is designed and set up in such a way that it can be applied to virtually any game system that uses dice.

Much of the information in the series has been compiled in Palladium's Compendium of Weapons, Armor & Castles, but gamers continue to ask us for the "small weapon books."

One reason, I think, is that the books are small, but packed with a ton of information. Thus, a player or G.M. needs to only grab whichever book in the series he needs for reference, and he is ready to go.

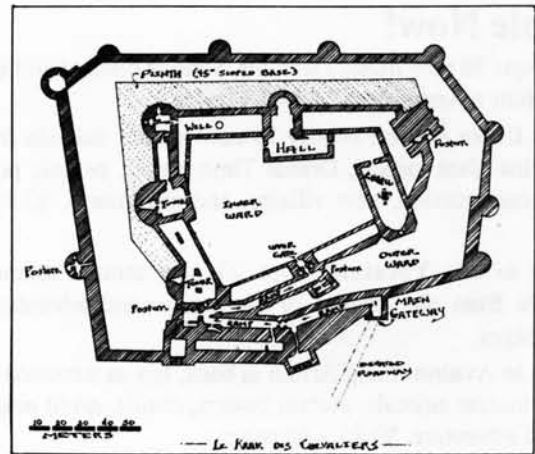
Another reason is that there is simply something convenient and appealing about this size and format.

Ideal for fantasy and historical games, as well as modern games that use ancient melee weapons (knives, swords, axes, maces, ball and chain, picks, spears, pole arms, etc.).

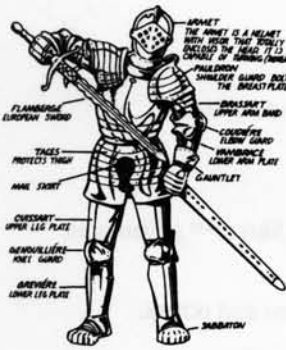
And the price is right at \$7.95 each.

The bottom-line is if our fans (and gamers in general) want a product, we'll try to give it to them. So you asked for it, you got it.

- Compiled by Matthew Balent.
- Color cover by Scott Johnson.
- \$7.95 – 48 pages. Square bound, comic book-sized reference book.



MAXIMILLIAN ARMOUR
1500-1600



BALL & CHAIN European	H	2m	2.0kg	2	2	Impact	2	2
BALTA Turkish battle axe	H	2m	1.8kg	0	2	Chop	2	2
BATTLE AXE European	H	2m	2.1kg	1	2	Chop	2	2
BEARDED AXE European T	H	1.4m	2.3kg	1	2	Chop	2	2
BECOE CORBIN European	H	2m	1.5kg	0	2	Chop	2	2
BILCHON Mongolian spearhead	H	2m	1.3kg	0	2	Chop	2	2
BONNET Indian hat	H	2m	1.8kg	1	2	Impact	2	2
BUPHENS European	H	2m	2.0kg	1	2	Chop	2	2
BIBACUTA European sickle T	H	1.1m	2.0kg	2	2	Chop	2	2
BU-TARAN Australian club	H	2m	2kg	0	1	Impact	1	2
BOUTOYAN Polish mace	H	2m	2.0kg	2	2	Impact	1	2
BROAD AXE European	H	2m	2.2kg	1	2	Chop	2	2
BULAKIA Russian mace	H	2m	1.8kg	0	2	Impact	1	2
BULLOVA Indian war axe T	H	1.0m	2.0kg	1	2	Chop	2	2
BURTON Australian	H	2m	2kg	0	1	Impact	2	2
CAT O' NINE TAILS European whip	H	2m	2kg	0	1	Impact	2	1
CROWBILL European	H	2m	1.2kg	0	2	Chop	2	2
CROUDEL European	H	2m	1.0kg	0	2	Impact	2	2
CLAMBER JUNG Indian sword-hat	H	2m	1.4kg	1	2	Impact	2	2
DAIR Arab mace	H	2m	1.3kg	0	2	Impact	1	2

The Palladium Book of Weapons & Castles – in stores mid-February, 2002

- The bow and arrow, and cross bow weapons from around the world.
- Castles and design features
- 15 different, real world castles. Each illustrated and with a *basic* floor plan.
- Section on siege weapons and layout for a castle under siege.
- Historically accurate.
- For use with any game system. Some adaptation required.
- Compiled by Matthew Balent.
- Color cover by Scott Johnson.
- \$7.95 – 48 pages. Square bound, comic book-sized reference book.

**Additional books coming in
the Weapon series 2002...**
Weapons & Assassins
Weapons & Castles of the Orient
Exotic Weapons

Contemporary Weapons to follow throughout the year. Assuming people want them.

The Palladium Book of Weapons & Armor

– in stores mid-February, 2002

- Over 600 different weapons. Each illustrated.
- Over 30 different types of armor from different periods of time. Each illustrated.
- Historically accurate.
- For use with any game system. Some adaptation required.
- Brief descriptions on the types and styles of ancient body armor from around the world.

For Rifts®

Rifts® Game Master Guide

– Available Now!

Arguably the 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®** adventurers!

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 references 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 blindness and dodging bullets and energy blasts.
- Stats for a ton of weapons and body armor on Rifts Earth.
- Condensed stats for most robots and power armor.
- Condensed 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

– February, 2002

The Adventure Guide has been delayed from its original December, 2001, release date to make it the best G.M. & Player's guide and sourcebook possible. 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 a adventure and parlay it into a campaign and a bunch of other useful information, tables and fun stuff.

- Rules clarifications.
- Rules and data on travel rates and consideration for all types of environments.
- Game Master and player advice.
- Suggestions for building fun and memorable characters.
- 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.
- More on Rifts Earth, equipment and all kinds of details.
- Adventure ideas and more.
- Art by Ramon Perez, Scott Johnson, Freddie Williams and others.
- Cover by John Zeleznik.
- By Kevin Siembieda, Bill Coffin, and Erick Wujcik, with additional material by others.
- \$21.95 – 190+ pages.

Rifts® Aftermath™

– March, 2002

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
- \$17.95 (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:** March, 2002.

New for Phase World®

Rifts® Dimension Book Five:

Anvil Galaxy™

At last, an overview of the Anvil Galaxy and key people, civilizations and worlds. More about the mysterious *Cosmic Forge* and the insanity and terror that surrounds its search.

- Overview of the galaxy.
- Legends of the Cosmic Forge.
- The search (and ensuing madness) for the Cosmic Forge.
- Notable new, alien races and planets.
- Adventure ideas and more.
- Art by Ramon Perez, Scott Johnson, Freddie Williams and others.
- Cover by John Zeleznik.
- Written by Bill Coffin.
- \$17.95 – 160 pages.

Coming for Rifts® later in 2002

Rifts® Phase World®: *Cosmo-Knights™*
Rifts® Australia Two
Rifts® Africa Two and more yet to be announced.

Mechanoid Space™

A new role-playing game

— coming Summer 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 Summertime. 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 Mechanoids® computers on their Home World spring to life. All repeat the same message, making one thing clear: The Mechanoids have returned stronger, more numerous and more bloodthirsty than ever. Insane beings bent on sweeping the universe in a campaign to eradicate all human and humanoid life forms! That mission begins now!!
- *The Mechanoids®* redefined. Including new designs, new types 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. No release date has been set, but we are shooting for Summer.

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Systems Failure

When the cities fell, and the world went "off-line," all seemed lost. Anarchy reigned.

All that is left are the Survivalists, Nature-Lovers, Farmers, Gun Bunnies, Eggheads and backwoods wackos living on the fringe. Most are people found in remote regions — many because they were prepared for the Y2K Bug and the collapse of civilization.

Oh, there are "bugs" all right. Alien bug-like things that feed on energy and turn humans into zombie-like slaves.

Things are even worse than those "prepared" could have imagined, but these survivors aren't ready to give up. America (and then the world) will be free! And they mean business.

That's right, play one of the "wackos" fighting to save the world in a post-holocaust environment that makes worries about the Y2K Bug seem like a picnic.

- **A complete, new role-playing game.**
- **Everything you need to play in one dynamic package (dice and players not included).**
- **Quick, easy-to-learn rules.**
- **Fast paced and dynamic fun.**
- **The Villains: Inhuman invaders from another dimension.**
- **The Heroes: Society's castaways, nutcases & survivalists.**
- **The adventure: Reclaiming the world for god-fearing humans.**
- **128 page role-playing game.**
- **Only \$12.95**

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- Join in on talks with V.P. Maryann Siembieda.
- See why we get over 70,000+ hits a month.

Questions & Answers

By Rodney Stott, Shawn Merrow & Kevin Siembieda

This column has an eclectic mix of questions and answers, but generally all these questions are adventure and equipment related. We think the answers may be of assistance to many a Game Master and player out there.

How long can a character hold their breath underwater?

There are no "official" rules printed anywhere we can think of, but here is what other Palladium Game Masters do. **Note:** This also applies for those buried in sand, trapped in an avalanche, locked in a chamber without air, etc.

In *real life* the "typical" person can hold their breath for 90-120 seconds (i.e. two minutes or less; 6-8 melee rounds). Navy Seals and other "rare" specialists and exceptional individuals can manage about 180-240 seconds (three to four minutes); rarely any longer than that.

Kevin Siembieda usually makes it two minutes unless a character has exceptional Physical Endurance, say a P.E. of 19 or greater. Every P.E. point above 19 (20+) gets the character an extra melee round (15 seconds). So a character with a P.E. of 23 can hold his breath for three minutes, P.E. 27 for four minutes, P.E. 31 for five minutes, and P.E. 35 for six minutes. For Kevin, six minutes is the maximum even if the character has a P.E. of 36 or greater. The only exceptions are characters who possess some *other* natural, alien, animal, mutant or super abilities that increase the duration or provide some superhuman ability.

Rodney and Shawn suggest that a character can hold their breath for their P.E. attribute in melee rounds, after this a character will need to make a saving throw each melee round against falling unconscious or coma/death. Thus, a character with a P.E. 4 can hold his breath for one minute, P.E. 8 for two minutes, P.E. 12 for three, P.E. 16 for four, P.E. 20 for five, P.E. 24 for six and so on.

Either way works reasonably well and okay with game designer, Kevin Siembieda. And before anybody asks, Kevin has worked up the *Minor super ability* of Hold Breath.

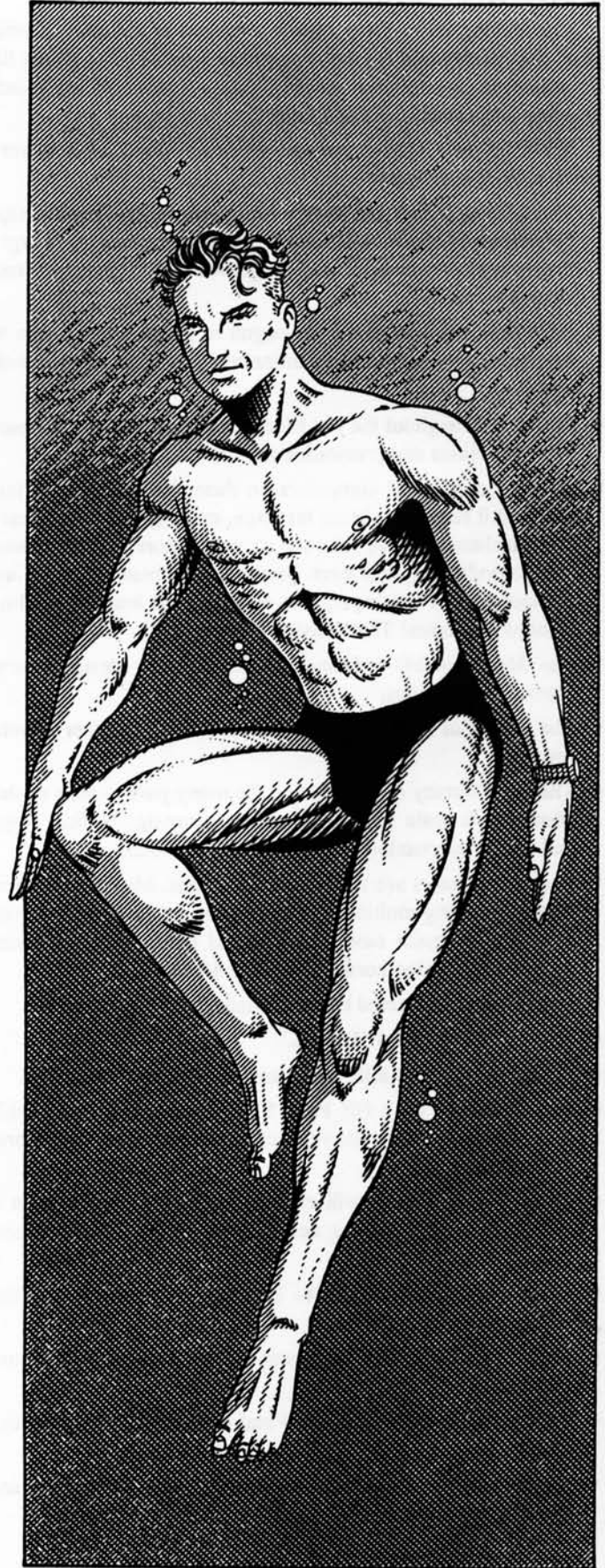
Minor Super Ability: Hold Breath (new)

The character has an extra large lung capacity, highly oxygenated blood, and can hold his breath for *one minute* per each point of P.E. with a single, deep breath of air. Thus, a character with a P.E. of 12 can hold his breath for 12 minutes, P.E. of 24 for 24 minutes, and so on.

This super being also fatigues at half the normal rate, but is -2 to save vs gas-based attacks, smoke and fumes (unless he is already holding his breath). Can withstand underwater depths up to 160 feet (48.7 m).

How deep can a character go before being hurt or killed from water pressure?

Theoretically, the pressure would vary from individual planet to planet. On Earth, the average human can only dive and swim about 50-60 feet (15.2 to 18.3 m) without special equipment. Beyond this depth, oxygen has a poisonous effect.



Snorkelers and Divers (no special diving equipment): Up to 60 feet (18.3 m) maximum; 30-40 feet (9-12 m) is more comfortable and risk free.

Skin Divers (basic diving equipment): Up to 160 feet (48.7 m).

Deep Sea Divers: Up to 850 feet (259 m), but requires helmeted environmental suit and breathing a mixture of helium and oxygen.

Power Armor & Cyborgs: Up to 450 feet (137 m) for most types of power armor and full conversion cyborgs NOT designed for deep sea, underwater operations. 200 feet (61 m) for partial cyborgs who have half or more of their bodies converted with cybernetics.

1000 to 2000 feet (305 to 610 m) for aquatic power armor and cyborgs specifically designed with deep sea, underwater operations in mind.

Advanced Submarines: One mile (1.6 km) is common even among mini subs. Two miles (3.2 km) is the depth for most modern military and state of the art submarines. Three miles (4.8 m) may be possible with experimental, super advanced subs (G.M.'s discretion).

Alien Technology: No limit for highly advanced alien submarines and the most advanced alien spacecraft (air, space and ocean capable).

Sharks: Most *sharks* can survive depths of three miles (4.8 km) and possibly deeper. Sharks can be found anywhere from the deepest oceans to the comparatively shallow continental shelf, coral reefs, and water as shallow as two feet (0.9 m) deep!

I am running a Rifts® Underseas campaign but there are no rules in it for decompression sickness (the bends), can you help me out here?

Rules for decompression sickness can be found in *Mutants in Orbit*, the *Rifts®/After the Bomb®* sourcebook.

Those adapted to life where pressure can change often, like those in orbit, have some resistance to the bends, and suffer nausea and dizziness for 1D4 hours (-2 to strike, parry, dodge and initiative).

The typical penalties for the Bends are much more extreme. Symptoms will last for 1D4 days and victims who survive, suffer from terrible headaches, dizziness and nausea. **Penalties:** -4 to strike, parry and dodge, -8 on initiative, -15% on all skills, speed is reduced by half, and lose two attacks per melee round.

Severe cases will cause system shock and hemorrhaging, sending the character into a coma for 4D6 hours and possibly dying; roll to save vs coma/death. If the character survives they will be too weak to move for 1D4 days (one action per melee, speed and all bonuses reduced by 85%). Afterwards the character suffers from the typical penalties (above) for 1D6+1 days.

Those who use *environmental body armor* or *power armor* within safe depth limits do not suffer from the bends, as the armor maintains pressure internally. To go any deeper, special deep sea diving suits or power armor are required to maintain the pressure.

Are there any rules about "sea legs" or a moving surface such as a ship's deck? And what about sea sickness or motion sickness?

There are no rules for sea sickness in any of the books, but the following penalties can be applied for those suffering from sea sickness.

Reduce speed by half, and skill performance is -20%. The character also suffers -2 to initiative, -2 to strike, parry and dodge, and loses half their attacks per melee round.

As for sea legs, even landlubbers will get their "sea legs" in 1D4 days. Until then, they are -20% on balance, -10% to speed, and -2 on initiative. Once a character is acclimated to the movement of the boat at sea, it does not seem like a moving platform.

Can you give me some basic facts about Earth's oceans & seas?

Sure can, thanks to material excerpted from *Rifts® World Book 7: Rifts® Underseas*. For more about oceans, and for a host of sea monsters and sea magic easily adapted to S.D.C. games, check out *Rifts® Underseas*.

The average ocean depth is roughly 2.4 miles (3.84 km). The *Atlantic Ocean* is comparatively shallow, with typical depths of 1.8 to 2.5 miles (2.8 to 4 km), but has rougher and colder waters than the Pacific Ocean.

The *North Pacific Ocean* has the largest area of deep ocean; typically two to four miles (3.2 to 6.4 km).

- Only the great *ocean trenches* are dramatically deeper, 5 to 10 miles (8 to 16 km).
- The average *sea* is located on a Continental Shelf and is roughly 700 to 2000 feet (213 to 610 m) deep. However, some are as deep as the Pacific Ocean.
- The "Seven Seas" are really the four main oceans: The Pacific Ocean (49%), Atlantic Ocean (26%), Indian Ocean (21%), and the Arctic Ocean (4%). All others are marginal seas or extensions of the four oceans listed above. The percentage in parenthesis represents each ocean's share of the Earth's total sea area.
- 94% of the Earth's water is salt sea water.
- Most of the fresh water is underground.
- *Tidal waves* or "tsunamis" are created by earthquakes or volcanic eruptions. At the point of the tremor or explosion, the waves generated may be barely a foot high (0.3 m), but these sea waves travel at hundreds of miles per hour and create waves 60 to 120 feet (18.3 to 36.6 m) high. These giant waves strike land with devastating force. Small ships along the coastline are dashed on dry land and the coastline is hammered up to a mile inland. Vessels that head away from land, back out to sea at least 50 miles (80 km), should be able to weather waves of only 10 to 20 feet (3 to 6 m). Japan, the Philippines and Hawaiian Islands are randomly struck by tsunamis on a regular basis, but are only struck by a terrible one every 2D4+6 years — varies with earthquakes in the region.
- *Gale Waves and Swells* are tall, fast moving crests created by wind. They can attain a height of 20 to 30 feet (6 to 9 m).
- *Hurricanes/Typhoons:* Rainstorms with damaging winds of 90 to 150 mph (144 to 240) and gale-sized waves; boats and even ships can be capsized, become waterlogged and sink, or

literally torn apart. Hurricanes are common in the Gulf of Mexico, Caribbean Sea, Bay of Bengal, South China Sea and Philippines, the coast of Japan, the Hawaiian Islands and all magic triangles like the Demon Sea.

- 65% of the human body weight is comprised of water (0.9 saline content) — roughly the same percent of the Earth is covered by water.
- The *Upper Stratum* of the ocean is known as the *euphoric zone* and goes from the water's surface to about 300 feet (91.5 km) deep. Fishermen and sailors of Rifts Earth often call it the *high waters*. This stratum of ocean is the most abundant with warmth, light and life. The great amount of sunlight that bathes these waters is ideal for photosynthesis, producing life forms including algae, plankton, and krill; most of which are microscopic and unicellular. They are eaten by thousands of different sea creatures, who are in turn eaten by a variety of large fish and sea mammals. Even Baleen whales and manta rays subsist on a diet of krill and microscopic organisms. Kelp, sea grass, seaweeds and other smaller plant species are most common to continental shelves and serve as the habitat for hundreds of different sea animals including shrimps, crabs, starfish, snails, worms and sea urchins. They also provide tasty morsels of food for large fish and sea mammals like the otter.
- Next is a twilight world of dim, cool water even during the brightest day. The dim waters ocean zone begins around 1000 feet (305 m) to about 3000 feet (914 m) below the surface.
- The deepest waters are eternally black and known as the *abyssal zone*. These eternally dark waters typically start around 3500 feet (1066.8 m) and extend to the bottom of the ocean. The water temperature of the ocean twilight zone is cool but beyond one mile (1.6 km) deep to the ocean floor, the water is icy cold. Until the late 20th Century, many scientists believed there was no life at these depths. However, it was discovered that a variety of sharks, fish and other life forms thrived at these incredible depths.
- *Coral reefs* are created by the build-up of millions of tiny animals known as "coral polyps" (to a surface dweller they may be reminiscent of plants or small sea anemones) and plants known as "coralline algae." The remains of creatures calcify, collect and stick like a sort of organic *cement* and slowly build into miniature underwater mountains, walls and ridges.

Coral grows best in an environment where there is ample sunlight, clean water, a warm stable temperature of around 68 degrees Fahrenheit, plenty of oxygen, and a good food supply. These conditions are ideal in the Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn. Although coral reefs are a common feature of tropical seas, coral does not grow well in waters that are too warm.

Where are the effects of mistreating equipment? And if they are not in any of the books, what are the effects of mistreating equipment?

There are no specific or official rules for *mistreating* equipment, but generally, mistreated equipment may break, jam, and become otherwise unusable, as well as suffer a reduction in S.D.C. and look shabby (battered, scratched, rusted, and

dented). We tend to leave the determination of whether a weapon or item is being "mistreated" and the resulting consequences to the Game Master's discretion. Use common sense.

For example, dropping a portable computer on the floor, or throwing it at an opponent or using it as a club is likely to *break it* in any number of ways (very likely beyond repair). But even using a sturdy item like a sword to lever open a door or to snap or chop a lock is definitely mistreating the weapon and will cause at least some cosmetic damage (dulls and/or chips the blade, etc.), if not some measure of significant S.D.C. damage. Likewise, leaving the sword, or other metal tools and equipment, in the rain or soaking in water may cause the blade to rust (and any moving parts to stick together). Meanwhile any cloth, wood, rubber, and other "soft" parts like wooden handles, may be tarnished, mold over, or warp, and deteriorate much more quickly than the metal parts. Cleaning and replacement parts may both be necessary.

Heroes Unlimited™, The Palladium Fantasy RPG® and other of Palladium's role-playing games often list the S.D.C. of basic weapons and items.

Quick and easy rules of thumb:

Here are some good, general, "rules of thumb" to use from *Kevin Siembieda* concerning how much S.D.C. weapons and items may have, and damage or function considerations.

Man-Made Weapons: We don't care what kind — sword, spear, pistol, rifle, etc. — typically have an S.D.C. of 75-100 points (the bigger it is, the greater the S.D.C.).

Weapons do not usually take damage unless the item is specifically targeted for attack ("My character is going to try to shoot the sword out of that villain's hand," or "My character wants to destroy the gun so it can't be used again.").

Depending on how the weapon is used or misused, the G.M. may rule that a weapon such as a blade becomes dull/blunted or notched (chipped and dinged), reducing the S.D.C. of the item itself and/or the effectiveness of that weapon (i.e. does 10% to 50% less damage, and/or is unbalanced: -1, -2 or -3 to strike or parry).

Super Advanced Weapons: Depending on the item, material and maker, an "advanced" or "experimental" weapon may have *more* (2D6x100+80) S.D.C. or *less* (1D4x10+12) points of S.D.C. (it's more fragile). Likewise, experimental items may have other "bugs" — flaws, problems and weaknesses.

Magic Weapons and Items: Magical weapons and objects will have at least 200 S.D.C. (especially weapons), but may have much more or even be indestructible or self-healing (S.D.C. lost in combat is magically restored at a rate of 2D6+10 points per 12 or 24 hours or faster). Some magic items may be cursed, and opponents who can sense magic may sense the approach or presence of a character wielding a powerful magic item.

Electronics, Communications & Computer Equipment:

These high-tech items are more fragile because of the comparatively delicate internal components, chips, wires and such that make them work. Manhandle them and they will break. Figure the typical computer has 50 S.D.C., a monitor or small television: 15, a lap top: 30, a computer notebook/palm pilot: 15, a hand-held calculator: 10, a cell phone: 15 or 20, a walkie talkie: 25, a field radio: 35-50, a digital camera: 15, a standard 35 mm

camera: 20, a pocket watch: 10, wristwatch: 5, binoculars: 10-20, and similar for similar items. Again, they only take damage if specifically attacked/struck or if dropped, thrown, submerged underwater, used as a bludgeon, etc. Furthermore, some items like wristwatches, pocket watches, cell phones, and walkie-talkies are made to be "impact resistant," meaning they take little (10% of normal) or no damage from getting jostled around and even dropped from 4-5 feet high.

Determining if an item "breaks" from an accidental drop, fall, kick, crash, etc., roll percentile dice. A roll of **01-50%** means no damage, not even a little scuff or scrape. **51-75%** means it is worse for the wear and has suffered 1D4 points of damage, but is still working (unless S.D.C. is below zero). **76-90%** means it has taken 2D6 damage and if not broken (i.e. S.D.C. is at zero or below), may have other problems (at the G.M.'s discretion; jams once in a while, balance or calibration is a bit off, plug is loose and has to be jiggled just right to make it work, fritzes out or program stalls or crashes from time to time, etc.). **91-00%** means it is *broken* and does not work (not applicable to simple weapons, they take 4D6 damage). Roll percentile dice again. 01-50% means it can be easily and inexpensively fixed. 51-00% means it will cost as much as the item is worth to fix it, possibly (1D4x100%) more. Better to toss it away and buy a new one. Sorry.

Do equipment, weapons, robots, and machines get a saving throw?

No. Unless otherwise stated, no piece of equipment, weapon, vehicle, non-intelligent robot, etc., gets a saving throw, it is just not applicable.

On the other hand, says Kevin Siembieda, if an item has some special significance, i.e. it is the only computer chip, component, relic, etc., available to save the day, yeah, he might give it a saving throw or roll to see if it survives using the Chance of Breaking percentages presented at the end of the previous question, or by rolling 1D20.

Trick of the Trade: For quick, random rolls, Kevin Siembieda likes to roll a D20. In situations where he feels a 50/50 chance is possible, a roll of 1-10 is negative/bad/failure, while a roll of 11-20 is good/positive/success. If the odds are worse than 50/50, Kevin uses the D20 result as a gauge – the higher the roll (15-20) the better, with the roll of a "20" being the best or luckiest possible outcome (the impossible catch, strike, save, etc.). Conversely, the roll of a "one" is the worst possible outcome ("Holy cow, not only did your character miss catching the item, but he tripped, knocked over the table, sent everything on it flying and slid at the feet of his opponent." If the character was wielding a weapon, he missed with it, fumbled and then dropped it; requiring him to use up one melee action/attack to recover it or draw a new weapon.). Kevin likes random rolls because it helps to keep him unbiased as the G.M. and allows for "luck" or fate to play a hand in the outcome. Even if the outcome seems like a one in a million chance (especially with a resulting roll of twenty on the roll of a D20), he deems it as "fate" and allows it to occur. Additionally, it keeps events and outcomes interesting and uncertain even for the G.M. until the roll of the die declares it.

As for robots, dumb machines get no special bonuses, however, robots with an artificial intelligence (A.I.) or human con-

troller/pilot or intelligence get the bonuses that are applicable from the pilot/controller or with that particular robot's programming and physical capabilities (which may be no bonuses at all, to a formidable range of bonuses).

What factors adversely affect weapons and armor? What penalties should be applied in these cases?

As noted previously, it depends on the situation; i.e., whether the attacker is specifically trying to damage the weapon or item, as well as the environment.

The time frame for the degradation of equipment depends on the environment. Water, heat and humidity are the enemy of most weapons, both ancient and modern, causing tarnish, rust, rot, and general deterioration. Damp jungles are among the worst conditions, where it can be mere weeks for leather goods to mildew and rot, and for metal items only a few weeks or months to begin to rust. Arid, dry conditions, like a desert, are among the best for preserving weapons, although the heat and blowing sand may scuff and pit items.

Luckily those who take care of their weapons will, in most cases, be able to keep them in good condition. For *men at arms* characters in any world setting, regular maintenance and care should be considered part of the character's normal routine. Magic items tend not to rust or suffer damage as quickly or easily, but still, some form of maintenance may be required.

Weapon Conditions for used **modern weapons**, a good table by Bill Coffin, can be found on page 127 of the **Rifts® Game Master Guide**. For your convenience and enjoyment, we reprint it here:

The following table presents likely random problems from weapons left to the elements. The G.M. can easily adopt these rules to include M.D. energy weapons as well. A successful roll on the *Recognize Weapon Quality* skill will reveal any of these faults without having to find out the hard way (i.e. trying to use it).

Used (or abused) Weapon Condition Table (roll percentile dice):

01-02%: Excellent! Like new, +1 to strike and gets top dollar in trade.

03-10%: Excellent condition, although it shows signs of use, the weapon has been well maintained, and gets good value in trade.

11-50%: Used and worn, but a fine weapon. No penalties. Good fair trade value.

51-60%: Mild Corrosion. Looks poor and the trigger is stiff (-1 to strike); gets mid- to low-range value in trade. When shooting it, if a 1-6 is rolled to strike, the weapon jams and must be stripped and parts shaken to unjam. The problem will never go away until thoroughly cleaned. Gets a mere 20% of its value in trade.

61-70%: Heavy with corrosion. Looks terrible and the trigger is stiff (-3 to strike, -2 on initiative/quick draw); gets bottom dollar in trade (12 +1D6%), maybe less! When shooting it, a roll of 1-10 to strike means the weapon jams and must be stripped and parts shaken to unjam. The problem will never go away until thoroughly cleaned and the trigger filed and adjusted.

71-80%: Heavy with corrosion and/or damaged. Looks terrible and the trigger is incredibly stiff and tends to stick (-4 to

strike and -3 on initiative/quick draw); gets bottom dollar in trade (10+1D4%), maybe less! When shooting it, a roll of 1-5 means the trigger sticks and keeps shooting whether the gunman wants it to or not! It will fire until its payload is completely expended. To get it to stop, the weapon must be struck violently against the ground, a rock, etc. (striking the gun counts as one melee action). A roll to strike that is a 6-12 means the weapon jams and must be stripped and parts shaken to unjam. The jamming problem can be fixed with a thorough cleaning, but the sticking requires a complete trigger replacement and adjustment.

81-90%: Severely corroded and damaged. The weapon just won't work and gets minimal payment the weapon (5%). It requires some new parts, and machining equipment to clear and repair it for firing again. Once fixed, cleaned and polished, it is as good as new.

91-95%: Severely corroded and damaged, but can fire. However, using the weapon is dangerous. Looks like crap, is -4 to strike and -3 on initiative/quick draw, and gets the lowest payment one might get for a weapon (1 or 2%). When shooting it, a roll of 1-5 means the gun jams and explodes! The shooter takes half damage from the round that he would have fired. The gun can be repaired, but at -30% to the repair skill roll and costs 20% the value of a good, working gun.

96%-00%: A complete loss, even if the weapon looks fairly good at a quick glance, most of it is a mangled piece of scrap or corroded into one solid piece and beyond repair. If fact, just handling it may cause pieces to break and fall off. No value. Junk.

Other Considerations & Modifiers for abuse and damage:

For typical **ancient weapons**, see **The Palladium Fantasy RPG®**, pages 268-272 (and 272-274 for other common items and gear). The expertise of the weapon makers, their race and magical enchantment can alter the quality of the weapon (or armor), sometimes dramatically. See pages 248-252 for magic enchantment, weapons and armor.

Race plays a vital part in the Fantasy RPG. Dwarven and Kobold crafted weapons (Jotan weapons are equal to Kobold quality) are usually *better made* than weapons constructed by humans and other races. These bonuses are in the craftsmanship and sometimes the material used (see pages 273-274).

A metal weapon not looked after will often become rusty, discolored, and dull. This reduces the S.D.C. of the weapon itself and the amount of damage the weapon can inflict (typically 10-50% less), and may also affect its balance and other features, negating bonuses and inflicting penalties. After a certain point, the weapon becomes nothing but a bludgeon prone to breaking. Poor balance results in penalties to strikes and parries.

The following are just some examples of penalties for weapons that are extremely abused and damaged. They can be applied to most weapons. **Note:** A successful roll on the *Recognize Weapon Quality skill* will reveal any faults within a weapon without having to find them out the hard way (i.e. trying to use them).

Bad Workmanship: Like it or not, a character may get a weapon made by a poor craftsman or with second rate materials. Anything may be wrong with this weapon, but general problems include cheap materials and lack of strength (S.D.C. is 1D6x10% less than normal), badly balanced (-1 to strike and

parry), has a poor grip (-1 on initiative), poor performance (inflicts 1D4x10% less damage), and/or inferior range (20-40% less than usual). Unless a character has the *Recognize Weapon Quality skill*, the average Joe can not tell a poorly made weapon from a well crafted one. For example, to the untrained eye, a ceremonial sword may look beautiful and impressive, but is often of inferior workmanship because it is made for show, not real combat – ornamental rather than functional.

Bent: The weapon's blade, handle or barrel (if a firearm) is bent, reducing its accuracy: -1 or -2 (depending on how severe) to strike, and if appropriate, -1 or -2 to parry and disarm.

Chipped, dirty and/or pitted weapons: This weapon can be restored with a careful cleaning and sharpening, but until then it is -1D4 to damage. A loss of S.D.C. is also appropriate if the weapon has obviously suffered damage; typically 3D6% of its S.D.C. is lost.

Cracked, severely dented and/or has chunks missing. Does half its normal damage and has a 01-30% chance of shattering completely with *each* impact (destroying the weapon).

Mold, fungus and warped wood. Weapons made of wood or with wooden handles may suffer from rot, mold, mildew, fungus and warping. In addition to weakening, discoloring and even disfiguring the wood (reduce the weapon's S.D.C. by 1D4x10%), they often affect the wielder's grip too, making the weapon clumsy and less effective: -1 to strike and parry and reduce range by 20% if used as a projectile/thrown. Modern firearms may be stiff: -1 on initiative, -1 to strike, and jams every 5th or 6th time it is fired.

Rotting wooden weapons: Rotten wood needs to be replaced, but until then they will be -1 to strike and parry, inflict half damage, and suffer a loss of half their normal S.D.C. This means they are more likely to break in combat (has a 01-50% chance of shattering if used in a killing blow from a natural 20 or other critical strike). As rot increases the weapon becomes progressively weaker, losing more and more S.D.C. Thoroughly rotten wood (70% or more) is like balsa wood or chipboard, and has a 01-75% chance of shattering every time the weapon strikes.

Rotting leather weapons: Leather weapons like whips are weakened from rot and smell bad. They inflict only 10% of their original, normal damage and pieces fly off with every use/attack, falling apart completely after 2D4 melee actions of use. Likewise, rotted rawhide straps, strips, and belts, as well as *rope*, have only 10% their normal S.D.C. and 1D4x10% of their usual strength; i.e. a rope or leather strap that once had a test strength of 500 lbs (225 kg) will now have a strength of 50-200 lbs (22.5 to 90 kg) and will break/snap and wear out quickly. Likewise, half the usual P.S. required to break the leather or rope is necessary.

Rusty Weapons: This weapon may be able to be cleaned properly and returned to a decent to very good condition, but it will never be the same again. The rusty weapon has lost considerable S.D.C. (-2D4x10%), and depending on the amount of damage is -1 to strike and parry and the damage the weapon inflicts is half the normal amount. Modern firearms are stiff and resistant; -2 on initiative, -3 to strike, and jams every 3rd or 4th time it is fired.

Damaged Body Armor:

Battered & Dented Armor: This is an easy one. The armor is used and has been somewhat damaged in action, but remains intact and usable. Damage: S.D.C. can be reduced to any number below the standard amount for new armor (good rule of thumb is -1D6x10% S.D.C.). A.R. is NOT affected in any way, same as always.

Metal Armor, Rust and Rot: Damage: Reduce the normal S.D.C. amount by 1D6x10%, and reduce the Armor Rating (A.R.) by 1D6 levels. For example: If the armor normally has an A.R. 16, but a three is rolled for the A.R. penalty, the armor is deteriorated and weak, making the overall A.R. 13 instead of 16. Likewise, connecting straps, belts and clips may be rotted and snap when the armor is put on or when worn in action and becomes loose or parts fall off!

Penalties: Rusty metal armor or rusty joints make the armor squeaky and noisy until it has been properly oiled and cleaned, resulting in a penalty of -10% to prowl. Stiffness of the joints also impairs free and easy movement for the following penalties: -1 on initiative, reduce speed attribute by 10%, and skills such as climbing are -10%.

Leather and other types of Armor: Includes Velcro, padding, ballistic resistant fabrics, and fabrics combined with ceramic, plastic or metal plates, etc. Damage: Reduce the normal S.D.C. amount by 2D4x10%, and reduce the Armor Rating (A.R.) by 1D6 levels. For example: If the armor normally has an A.R. 12, but a four is rolled, the armor is deteriorated and weak, making the overall A.R. 8 instead of 12. Likewise, connecting straps, belts and clips may be rotted and snap when the armor is put on or when worn in action and becomes loose or parts fall off!

Penalties: Leather, padded and any armor made from most materials may be affected by mold, mildew and rot. Leather in particular will be discolored and have a foul smell; the worst are putrid. It is likely (01-80%) that any clothing or padding worn under the armor (as well as the wearer's hair) will absorb this smell and stink even after the armor is removed. The armor requires extensive cleaning and repairs, or should be disposed of.



When an O.C.C. says "weapon of choice," does that mean *anything* literally, or just stuff that particular O.C.C. would have access to?

"Weapon of choice" typically refers to weapons and gear normally available to that particular O.C.C. or character cate-

gory. Heavy weapons, experimental equipment and rare, alien, magical or exotic items are *only* available if that O.C.C. or R.C.C. has them available or if the G.M. makes them available. All weapons and equipment desired by a player character should get the approval of the Game Master before the player assumes the character has one. Not ALL weapons and equipment are available to every character. The availability of *many* will be restricted by geographic location, market availability, monetary factors (i.e. costs more than the character can afford), scarcity/rarity, O.C.C. and physical limitations of the character and other considerations. **Note:** If a Game Master does not want a particular weapon to be selected or available (for any reason), then it is NOT available. End of story.

How long will food take to go rotten?

It all depends on the type of food, the environment and what type of storage (if any). Generally, fresh fruit like apples, pears, peaches and oranges will last 4-7 days without going bad. Half that time if exposed to extreme heat (90 degrees Fahrenheit or hotter). 14-21 days if refrigerated.

Nuts, grains, dry noodles and other dry goods can last for up to a year or two if kept *dry*.

Fresh Meats spoil within 1-2 days left out in the open or loosely wrapped. Can go bad in 6-12 hours in heat, but can last 4-6 days refrigerated.

Fresh Bread and buns go stale (gets dry and hard as a rock) within 3-6 hours unless wrapped up or put in a storage container, in which case it can last 4-6 days before going stale or getting moldy. Rolls, and muffins go bad in half the time. Crackers can last 4-12 months if kept dry.

Frozen Foods of almost any sort will last for as long as they are frozen, although meats and other perishables may develop an odd taste or have less flavor than fresh food. Likewise, fruits and vegetables are likely to be soft, discolored, shriveled and taste less flavorful after being frozen.

Preserved Food, on the other hand, can last weeks, months, or even years before going bad. Food is often preserved by drying, smoking or salting. Canning food can only be done in a factory, or the old fashioned way by hand, and will last a minimum of six months, often 1-6 years!

Note: Bugs (weevils, various types of moth larvae, maggots, etc.) can also infest meats, fruits and dry goods if not carefully wrapped, bagged and stored.

If the characters are forced to travel without proper footwear, what sort of penalties should be imposed?

It all depends on the type of character and the environment. Loose gravel, sand, mud, marshlands, mountains, a thick tangle of underbrush, dense trees, hard rock or pavement, and so on, will all affect one's rate of travel and the condition of one's feet. Most will reduce speed by 20-60% depending on the exact conditions and the preparedness of the characters. And even characters with all the proper equipment and footwear may still be impaired and slowed down by 10-60%.

Walking barefoot or in the wrong kind of footwear can hurt one's feet and reduce the character's speed and effectiveness. For example, walking over gravel or any rough and rugged ter-

rain with rocks, sticks, barbed plants, etc., in bare feet or high-heeled shoes will hurt the feet of humans and reduce their speed by at least half (if not by three quarters or more), and cause the character to slip and fall (loses initiative, one or two melee actions and takes 1D4 damage from each fall). Likewise, dress shoes in that situation will have similar problems and are equally inappropriate for climbing, acrobatics and gymnastics (-20% skill penalty). On the other hand, characters with animal-like padded feet or hooves will fair much better than humans in most wilderness situations.

In snow the chance of frostbite is increased severely, while on hot surfaces (deserts, roads and concrete during summer) the feet can literally burn, disrupting concentration and causing the character to hot foot it (keep the feet moving). Stony conditions may cause small cuts. Without proper "footwear" the feet will also suffer 1D4 points of damage per day. Sore and injured feet can cause penalties of -1 on initiative, -1 to dodge, -1D4x10% to speed attribute, and -5% to skill performance. And may be accumulative per each day or every few days of travel due to pain and discomfort.

Note: The *Rifts*® *Adventure Guide*™ will have rules, tables, modifiers and notes on travel, travel conditions, and environments applicable to *Rifts* Earth and non-*Rifts*® game settings. You might want to take a look at it.

How much damage should a character take if a horse stands on their foot or their foot gets run over by a wagon wheel? And what about a car tire?

The following is a good range to go with.

Horse: 1D6 damage.

Cart or small wagon: 1D6 damage.

Large, heavy or covered wagon: 2D6 damage.

Car: 3D6 damage (double if especially large and heavy, like a truck).

Generally, such damage would be restricted to S.D.C. damage, but it may also break 1D4 of the character's toes or the foot, in which case medical attention to reset the bones and a plaster cast will be necessary. During the recovery time (2D4+6 weeks), the character is -1D4 to dodge, the speed attribute is reduced 1D6x10%, and the character loses one melee action/attack per round.

Is it possible for there to be a "Half-Vampire" in any way, or with a Vampire of Human origin to mate with a Human and produce offspring?

No. The normal rules for genetics apply, so in most cases different species can NOT interbreed with each other, and the "undead" can not mate and have offspring with the "living" or their fellow undead. Since Vampires are dead, they can not mate with anyone to produce offspring.

Magical experimentation and Bio-Wizardry as well as such beings as the Gene-Splicers, *may* be able to create living creatures that *resemble* undead vampires who can mate and bear offspring, but such strange beings are NOT true, supernatural "undead" Vampires. Very rare.

Do M.D.C. beings' corpses turn S.D.C. after they die?

As the body decomposes the M.D.C. value drops to S.D.C. and then to rotten and S.D.C. bone. They do not turn S.D.C. immediately, however, and decay takes twice as long as an S.D.C. body. Proper "treatment" 48 hours after death can preserve M.D.C. animal hides, chitin and bone the same as one might do with animal fur/hides, bones and teeth.

About Invisibility?

Several races and classes have the natural ability to turn themselves invisible. It is never clarified whether this invisibility is of the simple or superior variety. Our group has a member that can see infrared and heat. If the natural invisibility is simple, he could see them. If it is superior he would not be able to. Please clarify regarding these races and classes.

Typically, the invisibility granted is equivalent to the *Invisibility Simple* spell, unless otherwise stated.

Are there any rules on general illnesses and diseases?

Some books like *The Palladium Fantasy RPG*®: *Yin-Sloth Jungles*™ sourcebook do have various diseases and illnesses detailed with appropriate penalties. Generally a *saving throw* will be required against diseases, which is the same as vs poisons (14 for lethal and 16 for non-lethal). A successful save means the character either escapes infection and stays healthy (this is particularly true when rolling to save vs deadly disease), or the damage, duration and penalties from the illness are *reduced by half*.

Examples of general illnesses include:

A Common Fever: -10% on all skills, -2 initiative, -2 to strike, parry and dodge. This can last 1D4 days. Double (even triple) the penalties and duration for *high fevers*.

Food Poisoning and the typical Flu : Reduce speed by 30% or 50% depending on the severity, skill performance is -20% or 40%, -2 to initiative, -1 or -2 to strike, parry, dodge and all other combat bonuses, and -1 or 2 attacks per melee round. Food poisoning can last for 1D4x10 hours, the flu 1D6+2 days.

Serious disease is more debilitating and may be deadly, causing the character to dehydrate, vomit, bleed, go into convulsions and lapse into a coma – and possibly die without proper treatment or phenomenal luck. Surviving a coma may have penalties of 10-30% even with treatment. Characters who remain active are likely to see speed drop by 50-80%, skill performance suffers a penalty of -50% to -90%, initiative -5 to none at all, combat bonuses reduced by half to none at all, and attacks/actions per melee round reduced by half to down to ONE per melee round. Can last for 1D4+2 days to 1D4+1 weeks.

Note: Generally, it is no fun to play a coma victim or seriously ill and debilitated character, so disease for player characters usually plays a small role (if any) in most games. Likewise, debilitating and chronic diseases like cancer, polio, alzheimers, and many, many others are not addressed.

How can I make a plain situation more dramatic?

It really depends on the situation, your imagination and flexibility. Simple tips can be just invoking the right mood, injecting

a surprise turn of events or humor, using props, descriptions, or even theme music during the game. Remember, as Game Master, YOU direct and control most of the elements of the adventure "story." Do NOT lock yourself into your story and plans. If things are going slow or getting bogged down – change it! Skip the travel time from point a to point b ("The night – or next few days – pass by uneventfully. There no problems and you arrive at your destination without any encounters." Now, the action picks up in the city, town, or whatever the destination is.). Or introduce some new Non-Player Character to cause some trouble, excitement or fun, or direct the characters forward into trouble, danger or adventure. One of my (Siembieda) favorite ploys is to interject some silly thief, vagabond or other lowlife to cheat, trick or con the group out of some money or information. The NPC's (usually unwanted) association with the group inevitably causes trouble (a brawl, conflict with the local authorities, theft, and a zillion other possibilities). Of course, the scoundrel also has some valuable info or clue for the player group or will inadvertently help lead them to their goal or into an adventure. Spies, bushwhackers, bounty hunters, bullies, stool pigeons, and just plain suspicious looking characters can be used to similar effect. Similarly, interjecting a minor confrontation or encounter with a wild animal, Faerie, thief, trap, or even a friendly traveler, farmer, trapper, bum or fair maiden can spice things up.

A battle on the side of mountain may be played out as a normal battle, but placing it at the edge of a cliff, where one misstep could send the characters plunging several hundred feet to their death, adds to the drama. You can always place a sacrificial NPC in danger to make the situation more urgent and deadly to heighten the drama, or introduce some time element (must do "X" before it is too late). Surprise turns of events (good, bad, humorous or dramatic) add to the excitement too.

Feel free to use the cliff-hanger at the critical movement for a particular character, go on to someone else and ask them what they are doing or take a short break before coming back to the situation.

Additionally, there are many good articles out there on the internet, *The Rifter*®, *The Rifts*® *Adventure Guide*, and in various other gaming sourcebooks which can help you out with tips and advice for Game Mastering. If you play Rifts®, *The Rifts Adventure Guide* will be a real helpful companion book chock full of ideas, tables, suggestions and help applicable to any game world (basic storytelling applies to any setting).

Meanwhile, think about your story and what you enjoy in movies, television, novels, comic books and games you have played in. Use them as examples and inspiration and draw on how they use pacing, suspense, humor, coincidence, foreshadowing (that bully or friendly guy encountered earlier turns out to be a villain they must face later, or the local lawman, or their freelance employer, or rival, etc.). There are all kinds of things one can do to spice up one's adventure. Too much to go into in detail here. Maybe in a future issue.

Defining the Rifts® -10 to dodge bullets rule

No bonuses on an unmodified die roll, and -10 to dodge bullets and energy blasts.

Wow, what a hullabaloo this rule in the *Rifts*® *Game Master Guide* has caused (see page 41 of that book for details). I find this amusing considering the number of gamers who talk about "realism" in gaming.

First of all, if you *hate* the rule and it ruins the enjoyment of your game, do NOT use it. Or change it to your satisfaction. No this is not a cop-out answer and I don't know why this suggestion seems to freak some people out. There are tons of rules in every role-playing game ever published that are ignored or altered by the Game Master. These modifications are known as "house rules" and are okay. If you really want to play by the "official" rules then get over it and consider the following.

Here's why the -10 to dodge rule works. The average character in *Rifts*® is not superhuman. A Ley Line Walker, Techno-Wizard, Mind Mage, Operator, City Rat, Wilderness Scout, Scholar and even the typical military grunt and power armor pilot can NOT dodge bullets and energy blasts (lasers and other energy beams traveling at nearly the speed of light for Petes sake).

Guns kill. They are the great equalizer because any idiot can use one and probably kill somebody with it. That's why when a lone gunman enters a crowded bank, and says "stick 'em up," people cower, raise their hands and do as the gunman says. They do not run or attack, and they certainly don't start *dodging!* Why? Because they'll get themselves shot, that's why! I think movies and television give gamers a strange idea about guns and dodging bullets and lasers. Even in movies, however, the *average guy* is mowed down by gunfire, only the main hero is likely to be able to run and dodge a hail of gunfire, and depending on how well the director does his job, we viewers may groan or laugh at the ridiculousness or outrageous luck of the situation. For example, I love many *John Woo* movies, but man oh man are a lot of the gunfights crazy and impossible. And even here, the "hero" of a Woo film will gun down dozens (if not hun-



dreds!) of the bad guys, until he has to face his arch-nemesis – selective deadly gunfire for dramatic effect. Heck, I defy any of you to dodge a well shot rubber band. If the shooter is skilled at all or you are in close range, you will get tagged at least half of the time, and that ain't no bullet or energy beam! The rubber band is fired at a comparative "snail's speed." So ... um ... get real.

That having been said, let me try to *define* the -10 rule.

1. Don't forget that a roll of 1-4 automatically misses even a stationary target. Moreover, the rules state that only a roll to strike that is *12 or higher* (12-20) hits a *moving target*. A roll of 1-11 misses! A roll of 12-20 is needed to hit and other penalties may reduce the odds to hit even more. Hitting a small or moving target is more difficult, for example (see #2).

2. Small targets are -3 or -4 to strike even with a carefully aimed, "Called Shot." That penalty also applies to burst attacks and shooting wild. That means the shooter must roll a 15 or 16 or higher to hit!

Shooting Wild modifier: Shooting wild includes shooting while running, riding a horse, or from a moving vehicle or an unstable/awkward position. Whenever "Shooting Wild," the shooter fires WITHOUT benefit of bonuses, requiring an unmodified die roll on a 1D20.

If the target is small or partially *obscured* by other people, obstacles, ground cover, smoke, etc., the shooter is -4 to strike, so he must roll a 16 or higher to hit! That sounds pretty fair to me.

At the G.M.'s discretion, that penalty could be increased to -6, but only if the target is *barely visible* (protected by dense cover) and only a tiny part of him can be seen for a second at a time.

3. Unmodified dodge (straight roll of the dice) at -10 to dodge at close range (within 400 feet/122 m) works and makes sense, especially if the target is out in the open, or the two characters are *facing-off* gunslinger (or John Woo) style. Stop and think about it for a minute. We are talking **Rifts®** and advanced weapons, with computer and/or laser targeting, other special optics, and 9 out of 10 weapons are energy blasters. If a character is in the cross hairs of a sniper's sight or close-range, he *is* likely to get shot. Not killed, necessarily, but definitely shot. That's the reality. And if the shooter is standing still and making an *aimed* or *Called Shot*, he enjoys bonuses to hit as per his Weapon Proficiency (W.P.) skill. That's just the way modern weapons and combat work. Characters can not go prancing around *dodging* energy blasts and bullets. Accept it. Guns are not as elegant, personal (close-up and one-on-one) or dramatic as melee weapons like swords, knives, maces, etc. That is why guns replaced sharp sticks, clubs and blades. Heck, even this "no bonus, -10 to dodge" rule is NOT particularly realistic compared to real life.

4. **Those who can dodge.** The rules already state that exceptional characters such as the *Juicer*, *Samurai* and *Ninja* CAN try to dodge bullets and energy blasts. This can be extended to include the *Crazy*, *Cyber-Knights*, *Cyborgs* with a speed attribute of 120 or greater, and any O.C.C. or R.C.C. that states the character gets an *Automatic Dodge*. In this case, the character is not so much dodging the blast itself, but anticipating it and moving accordingly.

The way I play this is to have the shooter and the dodger roll initiative. If the shooter wins the initiative roll, he fires before the defender/dodger can react. I then have the shooter roll to strike. Any roll above 10 at close range or at a (relatively) stationary target strikes; 12 hits if shooting at a moving target. Full damage is done to the intended target. Don't forget about the *roll vs punch, fall or impact* which can be used to reduce damage from projectiles and explosives by half. Energy blasts do full damage.

If the defender/dodger rolls initiative higher than the shooter, he anticipates the attack and is able to start moving a split second before the shot is fired. I then have both the shooter and the dodger roll again on a D20; high roll wins. If that is the dodger, then the gunfire misses him and the shooter wastes an attack. If the dodger's roll is below that of the shooter, he fails to dodge and is shot and takes full damage. In this case, only a roll of 1-4 will miss.

Note: For dramatic purposes, I *sometimes* use the same rules to see if a spell caster or psychic can raise a force field or energy armor or similar barrier in place in time to block the gunshot, especially if the character is trying to save an innocent person rather than himself. This rule can also be used for the O.C.C.s noted above, to see if a character can dive and knock the intended target out of harm's way. However, the diving hero is likely to get shot in his place. After all, the character is trying to "save" somebody else and his focus and action is devoted to that purpose, making it impossible for "him" (or her) to dodge the attack. I usually reward such heroics by inflicting half the normal damage.

5. As always, the G.M. should use common sense and think about the environment and situation. There are often (not always) *mitigating circumstances* to consider. For example, if the shooter is shooting "blind" he is -10 to strike. If there is a lot of ground cover, the shooter must roll a 12 or higher to hit his intended target, and is -4 to strike if he himself is moving while shooting or if the target is especially small (needs a 16 or higher to hit on an unmodified die roll).

Likewise, in environments where there are plenty of obstacles for the target to hide behind, I would allow the character (even unexceptional ones) the chance to dodge (probably diving) behind some kind of protective barrier. This applies *only* if the target knows he is about to be shot at, and the dodge attempted uses up *one melee action* whether it is successful or not. As always, the high roll wins. Defender/dodger wins ties.

Role-playing games are fanciful *simulations* of the real (or not so real) world. Like it or not, this rule makes sense and works. Whether you use it is up to you.

– Kevin Siembieda, December, 2001

Last Street

A Locale for Beyond the Supernatural



By Todd Yoho

Lucius awoke and switched on the Brunswick as he fumbled with his leather house slippers. The room was quickly filled with the Ray Miller Orchestra's hit "Anything you Say," followed by a news update for September 5th, 1928, brought to the good people of Chicago by The Brunswick-Balke-Collender Co., reminding people to play billiards for healthful recreation. Lucius quickly dressed, putting on his cream sweater and khaki pants, topping off his ensemble with the red-jeweled ring he came home with the previous night. Being the type who never had to comb his mousy brown hair, he simply ran his fingers through it and it fell into place as if commanded by a comb. As he paused to listen to the radio, Alex, his roommate, opened the creaking wooden door and walked in, his boots resounding off of the hardwood floor. Alex, dressed in his traditional khaki pants and leather jacket over a pressed white shirt, tossed his books onto his bed and lounged lazily in his desk chair.

"How was Earth Science, Alex?" Lucius yawned, thinking to himself how lucky he was not to have a class this semester until 10am.

Alex sighed, "I've got Professor Straight again. If I even hear one lecture this year on Tyrannosaur teeth I'm... I'm... I'm going to kick someone out a window!"

Lucius laughed slightly, not knowing if Alex was kidding or not. By the sour look on Alex's face, he might not have been. "Oh, here." Lucius shoved his newly found red-jeweled ring into Alex's face. "Do you know what kind of stone this is?"

Alex examined the ring; a red stone, cabochon cut, with a brilliant white cross splitting the stone into four equal sectors, about 3 carats, set in a plain band of silver. Alex was stunned. "This is a star ruby, very rare, and very expensive. The setting is hardly the kind I would imagine anyone would use for a gem of this quality. Where did you get it?"

Lucius gave a non-committal answer, "I found it."

Alex retorted with, "Typical. You'd better get to class. It's only the second week of classes and if you're late to Professor Coulson's lab again he'll skin you."

Lucius simply smirked and casually picked up his stack of books. Alex watched Lucius stroll out of the room, but grinned when he heard Lucius' pace quicken as soon as he was out of sight.

* * *

Alex returned to his and Lucius' dorm room after his evening Astronomy class to find Lucius dressed to leave. "Where are you going?" Alex asked.

"I've got to go and purchase a book for Professor Cecil's literature class. The campus store is out of it, but Drew told me of a store near here that might have a used copy. By the way, Drew said that he wants his rain-slicker back. He has a date with Olivia Friday night and he does not want to get soaking wet."

"So where is this book store you have to go to?"

"Someplace called Milton, Marlow, and... who is the other guy? Oh, I remember, Shakespeare. It is over on Last Street, just a few blocks from here. You want to come with me?"

Alex dropped his pen, and the ink reservoir ruptured, bleeding ink in a pool onto the age worn hardwood floor. "Last Street?" Alex croaked, "I heard people end up missing there."

Lucius laughed "And chemistry Professor Severian can turn wood into aluminum. Come on, I've got my flashlight. It'll be fine. Have I ever lied to you before?"

It was Alex's turn to laugh, "Do you want an honest answer to that? All right, let me get my scarf and I'll go with you. Someone has to keep you out of trouble."

* * *

Blurb from The Chicago Tribune, Section D, page 10, September 8th, 1928: "Two University of Chicago students, Alexander Miles and Lucius Zimmerman, have been declared missing. The only clues to their disappearance are a broken flashlight and a ruby ring found at the corner of First and Last Streets. Anyone with information should contact Detective Dan Scully at the 13th Precinct."

Welcome to Last Street

Last Street is a location that can be the springboard for a new campaign, or can be inserted into an existing one with relative ease. It can provide a resource for characters in their exploits with things both natural and supernatural. But keep in mind that Last Street is an oddity. It is a community that knows, fears and respects the supernatural. Last Street as presented is set in Chicago during 1928, but with a few minor alterations it can be adapted to fit any city and time period that the G.M. wishes to use. It is home to a wide variety of characters, each with their own specialties and agendas. Some of them have come together to help understand and combat the dark forces that lurk just beyond the line that separates natural from supernatural. Others have come only to make a profit. While yet others are there to take advantage of the supernatural forces that swirl around Last

Street. So, with that in mind, venture down the cobblestone paved, gaslight lit lane that is Last Street. Oh, and don't forget to bring your flashlight, just in case.

A Glance At Last Street

Last Street is infamous to those who live nearby and to the students at the University of Chicago. It is found on the oldest existing maps of the city, when it was the last street before leaving into the wilderness. Even when the city was planned out and the current road system was built, the name Last Street was maintained. It runs east to west and is located one-half mile (0.8 km) north of the University of Chicago, near the intersection of First Street and East Pennington Street. It is a short, narrow, dead end street not meant for vehicular traffic. It is paved with smooth cobblestones that range from pale tan stones to solid black stones that sparkle under the right lighting conditions. There are no records of where the stones came from to pave the street, but many of them are types not found in the local stone quarries. The street is lit by rows of head high, green-burning gaslights installed on both sides of the street. There are no official records of who installed the lights, or exactly when they were installed, but they were present in the first pictures taken of Last Street, in 1862 during the Civil War. There is an urban legend that states that if the gaslights ever go out, the street will burn to the ground soon after.

The street ends against an alley between two abandoned brick buildings, and is closed off by a sturdy wooden fence. Last Street has on its north side, numbered 1-10, a series of lavish Victorian Style houses, all built in 1889 after the previous row of houses were destroyed in a horrendous fire. Oddly enough, the houses that predate the 1889 structures were built after the street burned to the ground in 1863. There is also evidence that the street burned to the ground in 1824 as well. On the south side of Last Street, numbered 11-20, is a row of businesses housed in a hodgepodge of styles of buildings. Some are structures that have been standing since 1863, while others are as new as 1919.

One thing that is abundant on Last Street is vacant buildings. Of the ten residences on the north side of the street, seven are up for sale, at well below market value, at any given time. Of the ten office and business buildings on the south side, around half of the available space is taken at any one time. Anyone wishing to purchase or rent real estate on Last Street should contact the offices of Richard DeSpain. His family has owned and handled Last Street since the fire of 1863.

Another interesting fact about Last Street is the incidences of missing persons in the area. Since 1889, 6 people have gone missing and the cases remain unsolved. In 1902, 2 reporters from the Chicago Tribune investigating the history of Last Street vanished. In 1915, 2 students from London were reported missing. Finally, 2 students from the University have been reported missing during the first week of September of 1928.

Notable Places and Notable Faces

The University of Chicago Center for the Study of the Arcane

"Investigating the Past and the Foreseeable Future."

Founded in 1891, the University of Chicago has been a forerunner of research in a wide variety of fields. In the 1920's, the University began to study the science of the supernatural by establishing the extremely small and little-remembered Center for the Study of the Arcane. The Center only receives partial funding from the University, and operates much like a private organization. The Center for the Study of the Arcane works in association with the Departments of History, Languages & Literature, Art, and Biological Sciences under the direct supervision of Professor Enoch Higgins, though not all of the other departments' staff are comfortable being associated with a research project that deals in superstition and the occult. Prof. Higgins is assisted by a Graduate Student named Ellie McCall, and there are several other graduate and undergraduate students enrolled in the Center's parapsychology program. They maintain an office in the basement of the football stadium, among dusty boxes of uncatalogued archaeological artifacts. Part of their funding comes from identifying and cataloguing these artifacts. Occasionally unusual and arcane items are found in the boxes, much to the delight of Prof. Higgins and his students. The Center's students are regulars on Last Street, be they buying books or field supplies, or seeking answers to questions that cannot be found anywhere else.

Professor Enoch Higgins

Professor Enoch Higgins was born to a poor farming family in the rural western half of Virginia in 1846. He was a very bright child with an extreme love for astronomy and numbers. He labored away as a farmer until the Civil War started, when he enlisted in the Confederate Army. His mathematical genius was soon recognized and he was assigned to a battery of artillery. He served with distinction during the war, and remains proud of his military service for the State of Virginia. After the war, he attended the University of North Carolina under the sponsorship of his battery commander, Col. Lazarian. As a student, he studied Mathematics and Astronomy. While still a student at the university, Enoch formulated the hypothesis that some ancient monuments and structures might have astronomical significance. He dedicated his life to studying archaeology and astronomy, becoming the first serious proponent of the discipline of Archaeoastronomy. He currently heads the Center for the Study of the Arcane at the University of Chicago, and teaches courses in Astronomy, Physics, and Calculus.

Alignment: Principled.

Hit Points: 44. **S.D.C.:** 11.

Attributes: I.Q. 23, M.E. 15, M.A. 14, P.S. 8, P.P. 10, P.E. 15, P.B. 11, Spd 7.

P.P.E.: 2

Age: 82

Height: 5 feet, 4 inches (1.63 m) tall. **Weight:** 110 lbs (49.5 kg).

Appearance: Professor Higgins is a short, thin, frail looking man with a long face and gray hair. He only appears to be frail, however. Underneath the elderly exterior there still beats the heart of a Civil War veteran and a man dedicated to his studies. He wears a butternut colored, wide-brimmed hat that he says he wore through the war, and is particularly fond of his old, dusty, brown jacket.

Disposition: Prof. Higgins is a man of many words and is easily excited by new discoveries. He respects intelligence and precision in others, and is easily put off by rash actions. He still speaks with the accent and occasional dialectal lapse into rural Virginian, especially when excited, but is usually fond of long, extravagant sentences.

Experience Level: 9th level Genius: Human Calculator.

Combat: 2 attacks per melee (no Hand to Hand skill).

Bonuses: +9% to all skills (already applied).

Education Level: PhD.

Skills of Note: Exceptional Mathematics (98%), Remember Numbers (98%), Physics (98%), Astronomy (98%), Archaeology (98%), History (98%), All Lore Skills (98%) W.P. Black Powder.

Weapons and Equipment: Access to the libraries and facilities at U. Chicago, a small faculty apartment on campus, and an 1862 Springfield musket with bayonet that he can still use with deadly accuracy.

Ellie McCall

Ellie McCall is the daughter of Reginald and Sophia McCall, wealthy socialites from New York City. Ellie, however, was shipped away to boarding school at the first opportunity. She grew up in schools across the country, her education coming from the best schools her parents' money could buy. She received her BS from Duke University and her MS, one of the first women to do so, in Astronomy from U. Chicago. She is pursuing her PhD in Archaeoastronomy under the guidance of Professor Higgins, and is fascinated by the fact that there exists a realm to study beyond the known laws of nature.

Alignment: Principled.

Hit Points: 24. S.D.C.: 16.

Attributes: I.Q. 14, M.E. 12, M.A. 14, P.S. 13, P.P. 14, P.E. 15, P.B. 16, Spd 20.

P.P.E.: 13

Age: 28

Height: 5 feet, 4 inches (1.63 m). **Weight:** 120 lbs (54 kg).

Appearance: Ellie has shoulder length brown hair, and a round face with deep brown eyes. She dresses very meticulously and is easily upset if a single hair is out of place. Ellie is very fit and runs 5 miles (8 km) every morning. She favors wearing slacks and a button down man's shirt, which draws numerous comments behind her back about dressing inappropriately. She knows but does not care, believing in the right clothes for the right job. When she does dress for the occasion, she is radiant, but few have ever seen her in anything except a shirt and pants.

Disposition: Ellie is loud, boisterous, and hardly a lady unless she wants to be. She has been down in the trenches in the male dominated sciences and has worked hard to be "one of the guys." She loves teaching Professor Higgins' astronomy labs, but gets frustrated easily with lazy students.

Experience Level: 4th level Normal Human.



Combat: Hand to Hand: Basic: 5 attacks per melee.

Bonuses: +2 to roll with impact, +2 to parry, +2 to dodge, +2 to save vs possession, +2 to save vs psionics.

Education Level: Masters Degree (has 3 semesters left to complete her PhD).

Skills of Note: Physics (80%), Astronomy (90%), Lore: Geomancy and Ley Lines (70%), Photography (90%), History (55%), Running, W.P. Revolver.

Weapons and Equipment: Access to the libraries and facilities at U. Chicago, lives in a small apartment near campus, and carries a .38 revolver in an ankle holster when she feels it might be necessary.

The Last Full Measure Detective Agency

"Specializing in matters where the police can not help."

The Last Full Measure is a detective agency that specializes in dealing with the supernatural. It is a small operation owned and operated by Richard O'Shea, a former bodyguard to the Astor family. The Astor family hired him as a house servant

when he was eighteen years old, and he eventually worked his way up to become a bodyguard. The Astor family has long been rumored to practice magic, and in fact the family boasts several Arcanists and psychics. As a bodyguard to the Astor family, he was exposed to elements of the supernatural and the occult, and on occasion was called upon to defend members of the family from rival occultists and the creatures they would send. He resigned from the Astors' service to become self-employed and open the agency after his friend, Jack Simpson, told him there was ample business in the area for a man with his talents. Rick, however, maintains close ties with the Astor family, sometimes taking them on as special clients. The agency handles missing persons, protection, protection training, surveillance and special services upon request. O'Shea usually has 3 or 4 employees of various P.C.C.s on his staff at any time. The office is located at 11 Last Street.

The Agency

Built using the Organizations format found in *Ninjas and Superspies™*, with some G.M. tweaking. A Crime Buster Agency (100 points).

- A. Outfits #1: None.
- B. Equipment #2: Cheap Gear.
- C. Weapons #3: Armed Agents.
- D. Vehicles #3: Fleet Vehicles (limited to one truck and one car).
- E. Communications #1: None.
- F. Offices and Hideouts #3: National (the main office in Chicago, an apartment in NYC, an apartment in Washington D.C., an apartment in San Diego and a cabin in Montana, all purchased by Rick O'Shea years ago while working for the Astor family).
- G. Military Power #1: None.
- H. Sponsor #6: Agent Sponsored.
- I. Budget #2: Nickels and Dimes.
- J. Administrative Control #2: Loose Laws (limited to Chicago, where Rick O'Shea has connections with the Chicago P.D.).
- K. Internal Security #2: Lax (prospective employees are screened with See Aura and Detect Evil before they are hired, however).
- L. External Infiltration: #3: Information Source (a Detective in the Chicago P.D.).
- M. Credentials #3: Faceless.
- N. Salary #3: Freelance.

The Last Full Measure Detective Agency Total points spent: 107.

Rick O'Shea

Alignment: Scrupulous.

Hit Points: 42. **S.D.C.:** 45.

Attributes: I.Q. 12, M.E. 19, M.A. 12, P.S. 17, P.P. 18, P.E. 15, P.B. 13, Spd 14.

P.P.E.: 14 (4 left to purchase additional psychic abilities).

I.S.P.: 66

Age: 38

Height: 6 feet (1.82 m) **Weight:** 180 lbs (81 kg).

Appearance: Rick has short black hair, brown eyes and an athletic build. He usually wears brown denim pants, a tan shirt and a black, padded jacket over top. He also wears a dingy, faded red kerchief around his neck, a good luck charm.

Disposition: He is usually quiet and observant, preferring to size up a situation by blending into the background and then

act swiftly when necessary. In social situations he is fond of bad puns. More than one conversation has ended over one of his groaners.

Experience Level: 6th level Latent Psychic.

Psionics: Sixth Sense, Total Recall, Resist Hunger, Mind Block, Presence Sense, Alter Aura, See Aura.

Combat: Hand to Hand: Expert, Boxing, 6 attacks per melee.

Bonuses: +4 to strike, +5 to parry/dodge, +2 to roll with impact, +2 damage, +2 to save vs psionics, +1 to save vs magic, +1 to save vs Horror Factor, +1 to save vs possession.

Education Level: On the Job Training.

Skills of Note: Intelligence (72%), Climbing (98%), Detect Ambush (75%), Disguise (75%), Prowl (96%), Lore: Demons and Monsters (70%), W.P. Rifle, W.P. Automatic Pistol, W.P. Revolver, W.P. Knife, W.P. Blunt.

Weapons and Equipment: Rick owns a beat up REO brand "Speedwagon" truck and maintains an apartment above the office. He usually carries a .45 1911 automatic pistol, in a holster built into his jacket liner, and 2 Bowie knives, and wears a padded jacket (A.R. 8, 15 S.D.C.). When he knows he is going into a rough situation he carries "The Jaguar," his 16-gauge shotgun custom made by Jack Simpson. Statistics for The Jaguar can be found below in the New Equipment section.

Milton, Marlow and Shakespeare

Fine Booksellers

Milton, Marlow and Shakespeare is a bookshop that specializes in old and rare books. Within the dusty bookcases and in stacks that reach the ceiling are copies of rare, lost, forgotten and unwanted books from around the world. Cramped, small, and poorly lit, the store is a hot spot for graduate students from the University, searching for extremely hard to find information that the campus library just cannot provide. There can even be found the occasional magic ritual scroll, however the owner, Isaac Muller, never guarantees the scroll's authenticity. The store is constantly getting shipments from book buyers from places like London, Paris, Moscow, Rome and even the occasional papyrus parchment delivered from someplace called B.F. Egypt. Isaac is a retired librarian from the Library of Congress who specializes in old documents. He realizes the importance of maintaining knowledge through preserving and distributing books. Isaac has 2 assistants, both to help with cataloging. The store is located at 12 Last Street.

Isaac Muller

Alignment: Scrupulous.

Hit Points: 30. **S.D.C.:** 9.

Attributes: I.Q. 13, M.E. 18, M.A. 9, P.S. 13, P.P. 13, P.E. 13, P.B. 8, Spd 10.

P.P.E.: 8

I.S.P.: 102

Age: 56

Height: 5 feet, 9 inches (1.75 m). **Weight:** 130 lbs (58.5 kg).

Appearance: Isaac is of average height, of average build, and speaks in a monotone, average voice. His hair is still lush and thick, though silvery in color. He wears a pair of thin wire frame glasses that are coated with a layer of dust. He is usually found with a book in one hand and his pipe in the other.

Disposition: Isaac likes it quiet. He will shush people in his

store as though it were a library. He is very slow and deliberate in his actions, and will hurry for no one. He is also very particular about the order of his bookstore. It is organized and catalogued in a series of notebooks, also organized and catalogued. He knows exactly where every single book in his inventory is, and woe to anyone who disturbs his books.

Experience Level: 5th level Psychic Sensitive.

Psionics: Meditation, Mind Block, Speed Read, Total Recall, Suggestion.

Combat: 2 attacks per melee (no Hand to Hand skill).

Bonuses: +3 to save vs Horror Factor, +3 to save vs possession, +1 to save vs magic, +3 to save vs mind-altering drugs, +2 to save vs psionics.

Education Level: Bachelors Degree in languages.

Skills of Note: Latin, Ancient Greek, German, French, Old English, Middle English, Japanese, Chinese, Spanish, Hebrew, Arabic (all at 95%), History (65%), Research (98%).

Weapons and Equipment: He keeps a double-barreled shotgun under the counter for protection, and maintains an apartment above his shop. A small selection of available books can be found below in the New Equipment section.

Things Forgotten

Storehouse for Antiques, Antiquities and Oddities

Things Forgotten is a store that specializes in what some would call knickknacks. Run by a disagreeable old man named Alfred Karnak, Things Forgotten is part pawn shop, part jewelry store, part thrift store, part fine art gallery, and part clearing house for just plain weird stuff. Alfred sells objects he finds in estate sales and auctions, and from merchants overseas. He and Isaac Muller usually combine shipments to save on the shipping costs. Within the walls of Things Forgotten are objects that purport to bring good luck, protect from demons, make women swoon, and project from the effect of any number of magic spells. It is up to the G.M. to decide exactly which items may or may not be genuine arcane devices. Some of the notable pieces in the store include a suit of German Plate Mail from the 14th century with what could be lightning bolts on the breastplate. There is a large black obelisk with writing in what appear to be Egyptian Hieroglyphs, but with animals not corresponding to any on earth or from mythology, and a strange form of crescent like symbols that do not correspond to any known languages. There is also a perfectly square 10 foot by 10 foot (3x3 m) slab of pink granite propped up against the wall near the desk that came from the heart of Russia, or so the tag says. There are swords behind the counter, all in various states of preservation, and a glass case filled with soapstone statues taken from the Kama Sutra. The tag labels them as love totems. It is important to note that there is also a storeroom in the back filled with items as weird and wondrous as those at the front of the shop, if only there was room to display them. Plus, with Alfred receiving new shipments, there is always something new to crop up. Alfred does not typically hire assistants; the last one tried to kill him. He tends to take that sort of thing personally. The store is conveniently located at 13 Last Street.

Alfred Karnak

Alignment: Anarchist.

Hit Points: 39. **S.D.C.:** 9.

Attributes: I.Q. 17, M.E. 19, M.A. 13, P.S. 10, P.P. 13, P.E. 14, P.B. 12, Spd 13.

P.P.E.: 53

Age: 64

Height: 5 feet, 6 inches (1.68 m). **Weight:** 145 lbs (65.25 kg).

Appearance: Alfred is a pleasant looking older man who always has a smile on his face. He dresses very warmly even in the summers. He has blue eyes and salt and pepper colored hair.

Disposition: Alfred is always ready to make a sale. He will offer incentives, platitudes and niceties to the customer, but make no mistake; Alfred will always come out on top. On the outside he appears to be an honest merchant, but on the inside he is a crook. He is less interested in power than he is in profits.

Experience Level: 3rd level Arcanist.

Magic: Alfred's individual spells are left to the G.M. to tailor for individual games.

Combat: Hand to Hand: Basic, 4 attacks per melee.

Bonuses: +3% to all skills (already applied), +3 to save vs psionics, +2 to parry, +2 to dodge, +2 to roll with impact, +4 to save vs possession, +4 to save vs magic, +4 to save vs Horror Factor.

Education: Special.

Skills of Note: Latin, Egyptian Hieroglyphs, Sanskrit, Tamali (all at 88%), Art (68%), Anthropology (68%), Archaeology (73%).

Weapons and Equipment: Alfred keeps a .22 revolver under his pillow, but relies on his magic for protection. He has a few magic charms and items, left to G.M. discretion. Alfred lives in a lavish apartment above his store.

Last Rounds

"A place to pick up a shot or two."

Last Rounds is an establishment that sells stock and custom firearms. The owner is a barrel-chested black man named Jack Simpson who is an absolute genius, especially when it comes to firearms. He has dedicated his life to the production and appreciation of firearms and modern combat. Jack can design, tool, build and test a prototype in less than three days. He has already had two pistol designs accepted for testing by the United States War Department. Jack has commissions from the Chicago Police Department and The Department of the Treasury in Chicago as a gunsmith for their firearms. Jack served as a Buffalo Soldier in the Cavalry and was one of Teddy Roosevelt's Rough Riders, serving in the Spanish-American War. He retired from military life after The Great War and established his gun shop in Chicago. He moved it to Last Street in 1924 for the cheaper rent. He has noticed that his sales have gone up due to the particular clientele that frequent Last Street. Jack also supplements his income by selling bootleg liquor from Last Street. He does not operate a Speak Easy, but supplies several near the University. He has been known to keep a bottle on hand for regular customers. Jack usually has one apprentice on staff at any given time. He is also a very good friend of Rick O'Shea; the circumstances surrounding the origin of their friendship still remains a mystery. Last Rounds is found at 14 Last Street.

Jack Simpson

Alignment: Unprincipled.

Hit Points: 28. **S.D.C.:** 30.

Attributes: I.Q. 25, M.E. 13, M.A. 15, P.S. 26, P.P. 15, P.E. 15, P.B. 13, Spd 14.



P.P.E.: 3

Age: 48

Height: 6 feet, 4 inches (1.93 m). **Weight:** 210 lbs (94.5 kg).

Appearance: Jack is a huge black man who is losing his hair.

He has enormous hands and thick, powerful fingers, but is capable of doing the most delicate work. He is usually very well dressed when he is not working at his workbench.

Disposition: As a former military man, Jack can be coarse and vulgar in the right company, but is usually very well spoken and professional. He has no time for foolery and smiles when he goes into combat. He will sell anything to anyone and gladly takes custom jobs, preferring not to ask what the weapon is for.

Experience Level: 5th level Weapons Expert.

Combat: Hand to Hand: Basic, Boxing, 6 attacks per melee.

Bonuses: +11% to all skills (already applied), +5 to parry and dodge, +5 to roll with impact, +11 to damage, +1 to strike.

Education: Military Training.

Skills of Note: Make/Modify Weapons (98%), Recognize Weapon Quality (65%), Boxing, Athletics, Body Building, W.P. Rifle, W.P. Heavy, W.P. Revolver, W.P. Automatic Pistol, W.P. Knife, Demolitions (83%), Demolitions Disposal (83%).

Favorite Weapon: Browning .30 BAR (+2 to strike with this weapon in addition to other bonuses).

Weapons and Equipment: Jack has access to every weapon in his inventory, and a few custom models that he has devised. He has BAR that is on display above the counter and will not hesitate to use it if necessary. Jack lives in a Spartan apartment that he keeps above his shop and stores his bootleg al-

cohol in a concealed basement. The entrance is under his workbench in the back.

Land's Outfitters

Purveyors of fine outdoor clothing and equipment

Land's Outfitters is a new addition to Last Street, having opened in October of 1927. The store is owned by Thomas Land and he is assisted by his two sons, Richard, who is 16, and Harold, who is 14; their mother, Jane, died of influenza in 1917. The Lands moved their store from Oklahoma at the invitation of the University, which provides 80% of the store's business. They specialize in field equipment for all disciplines, and can acquire more exotic requests, for the right price of course. They routinely stock camping and other outdoor supplies, explosives, maps of locations around the world, scientific instruments, tools and outdoor clothing. They routinely run specials on clothing. For example, every leather jacket comes with a free fedora on Fridays. Thomas Land also does custom leather working and sells a wide variety of holsters and harnesses for firearms. Land's Outfitters can also sell vehicles and livestock through special order, and provides a telegraph service.

The Land family also harbors a secret. They are not a family at all. Jane is a cover story they use to explain why there is no mother living with the family. Thomas is a former thief, counterfeiter and bank robber. His "sons" are his apprentices and have been working for him for 5 years. He has been hiding as a merchant for the past 3 years, using his business to launder the money he and his two apprentices have stolen over the years. They still maintain a printing press in the back, and occasionally slip in a few counterfeit bills to supplement their monthly income. Land's Outfitters is found at 15 Last Street.

Thomas Land

Alignment: Aberrant.

Hit Points: 34. **S.D.C.:** 14.

Attributes: I.Q. 12, M.E. 10, M.A. 14, P.S. 10, P.P. 11, P.E. 14, P.B. 8, Spd 15.

P.P.E.: 6

Age: 34

Height: 5 feet, 8 inches (1.73 m). **Weight:** 150 lbs (67.5 kg).

Appearance: Thomas is of average height with black hair, and blends into a crowd very well. He has no distinguishing features to set him apart from anyone else, thus people who describe him use the word "forgettable." He commonly dresses in a black turtleneck sweater when at work, but has an enormous wardrobe so that he can wear an outfit and not wear it again for several months.

Disposition: He is a rapid-fire speaker when talking with a customer, but is otherwise a very quiet man. He talks in a hushed voice in private, only saying what is absolutely necessary. He offers no information and evades questions directed toward him. He is fair to his customers and offers genuine deals on merchandise, even to members of law enforcement. He does this so as not to attract attention to himself, and because he respects police officers. He may be a thief, bank robber and a counterfeiter, but he pays his taxes on time and as honestly as he can.

Experience Level: 4th level Normal Human.

Combat: Hand to Hand: Expert, 5 attacks per melee.

Bonuses: +2 to strike, +3 to parry, +3 to dodge, +2 to roll with impact, +2 to save vs possession, +2 to save vs psionics.

Education: On the Job Training.

Skills of Note: Forgery (55%), Palming (55%), Pick Locks (60%), Escape Artist (55%), Juggling (75%), W.P. Knife, W.P. Blunt, W.P. Submachine-gun.

Weapons and Equipment: Thomas always carries several concealed throwing knives on his person at all times, and owns a Thompson Submachine-gun that he keeps locked away in a safe. He also has at his disposal the entire inventory of his store, and he lives in a large, well-furnished house across the street.

Associates: Thomas' apprentices, Richard and Harold, are orphaned brothers that he stumbled upon in Cleveland. They are loyal to Thomas and look upon him as a stepfather. Richard is 2nd level and excels in picking pockets while Harold is 1st level and is a very smooth talker.

The Weekly Shroud

"Piercing the veil and reporting the Truth since 1919."

The Weekly Shroud reports on strange occurrences found in Chicago and across the globe. They scour newspapers from around the world for strange sightings, reports of unusual animals and mysterious happenings that baffle the authorities. The Shroud was originally a campus publication, founded by an Acting major, Groden Lumeley, and Arthur Dobrain, a Journalism major from London. They experienced some initial success, but after only six weeks, they were shut down after the "absurdities" they were reporting on embarrassed the University. Ironically enough, only two years later, the University would establish the Center for the Study of the Arcane. After being shut down, Lumeley opened offices on Last Street and began publishing the paper on his own. Dobrain graduated and returned to London, contributing as a foreign correspondent. They have an icy relationship with the Center on campus, and treat students in the program with little respect. The paper has a wide following among the wealthy and eccentric of Chicago, receiving donations and subscriptions on a regular basis. They even have many subscribers from New York City and San Francisco, fifteen from London and seven from Paris. Regular columns in the Weekly Shroud include Madame Ezmerelda's predictions, Arthur Dobrain's "Foreign Correspondence" and Groden Lumeley's "Supernatural Events in History" column. Groden has numerous freelance reporters working for the Shroud at any one time. The Weekly Shroud publishing office can be found at 16 Last Street.

Built using the Organizations format found in *Ninjas and Superspies*TM. A 50 point Agency.

A. Outfits #1: None.

B. Equipment #2: Cheap Gear (journalistic equipment: cameras, flashes, film, developing, etc.).

C. Weapons #1: None.

D. Vehicles #2: Public Transportation.

E. Communications #2: Basic (a telephone, a telegraph and the US Postal Service).

F. Offices #2: Urban.

G. Military Power #1: None.

H. Sponsorship #3: Private (subscriptions and anonymous donations from wealthy subscribers).

I. Budget #3: Small Potatoes.

J. Administrative Control #1: Rigid Laws.

K. Internal Security #3: Tight.

L. External Infiltration #3: Information Source (mostly copy boys and photographers for other major newspapers in the country).

M. Credentials #3: Faceless.

N. Salary #3: Freelance.

The Weekly Shroud total points spent: 50.

Groden Lumeley

Alignment: Unprincipled.

Hit Points: 22. **S.D.C.:** 10.

Attributes: I.Q. 11, M.E. 12, M.A. 20, P.S. 15, P.P. 10, P.E. 11, P.B. 15, Spd 13.

P.P.E.: 14

Age: 31

Height: 5 feet, 9 inches (1.75 m). **Weight:** 160 lbs (72 kg).

Appearance: Groden is a square jawed, handsome man. He looks every inch like an athletic "moving-picture" hero and has a deep, masculine voice. He wears a white suit with brown loafers, and a tan trench coat with a fedora when he goes out of the office.

Disposition: Groden Lumeley is an actor's actor. He doesn't really have a personality of his own, but rather he plays many roles. He often quotes plays and great books that he has read rather than respond in his own words. The only truth to himself is his dedication to revealing the truth behind unusual occurrences, even if his only evidence is his own speculations.

Experience Level: 3rd level Normal Human.

Combat: 2 attacks per melee. (Has only studied stage combat. Groden cannot handle himself in a real fist fight.)

Bonuses: 60% Trust/Intimidate, +2 to save vs possession, +2 to save vs psionics.

Education: BA Degree in Dramatic Acting.

Skills of Note: Impersonation (63%/43%), Disguise (65%), Prowl (77%), Climbing (81%), Fencing, W.P. Sword, Journalism (67%), Research (75%), Photography (75%).

Weapons and Equipment: He has access to the wealth of information that the Weekly Shroud has in its archives, plus what his sources at other newspapers can provide. He routinely carries a notepad and several pencils, and has on occasion carried a camera with him. He owns a rapier that he borrowed from the Drama department at U. Chicago that he could put to good use if pressed. Groden lives in an artist's colony warehouse near the docks a few blocks away from Last Street.

Associates: Madame Ezmerelda is a 7th level Psychic Sensitive who entertains wealthy customers in Chicago with seances and fortune telling. She also contributes predictions to the Shroud in a weekly column. Arthur Dobrain is a Genius P.C.C. who resides in London and works for the London Times, and writes the occasional article for the Shroud as a Foreign Correspondent.

The Law Offices of Richard DeSpain

Accounting, Real Estate, Insurance, Investing

The DeSpain family has owned Last Street since the street burned to the ground in 1863 and they bought it for an extremely cheap price. Richard DeSpain not only owns and leases

all of the real-estate on Last Street, but he also owns several properties near the University and deals heavily in real-estate ventures. He is also a certified public accountant, handling the taxes for tenants of Last Street for a nominal fee. On top of that, he is an insurance and investment broker specializing in foreign currency. He has contacts with banks across the world, going as far as having a global Teletype installed in his office. His office is a one-stop trip for anyone interested in investing or better managing their funds. His office is located in downtown Chicago in the Financial District.



Richard DeSpain

Alignment: Miscreant.

Hit Points: 29. **S.D.C.:** 7.

Attributes: I.Q. 18, M.E. 18, M.A. 18, P.S. 4, P.P. 6, P.E. 13, P.B. 9, Spd 7.

P.P.E.: 6

Age: 64

Height: 5 feet, 6 inches (1.68 m). **Weight:** 135 lbs (60.75 kg).

Appearance: Richard is small framed, with oversized ears and wispy gray hair. His nose is too long for his face, and he suffers from a slight overbite. He wears nothing except gray suits with white shoes, and carries the same ragged leather briefcase that his grandfather carried. He speaks in a swift, nasal voice that becomes unpleasant after a while.

Disposition: Richard is a very professional workaholic. He likes to get down to business and resolve his cut before a deal is ever signed. He will overcharge on anything he thinks he can get away with. He has been known to embezzle money from

accounts and replace it with money he has embezzled from other accounts. He is shrewd and calculating, never taking a risk that is more than he can handle. Some of his clients know he is shifty, but as long as they continue to make a profit through him, they are content to let him be.

Experience Level: 5th level Normal Human.

Combat: 2 attacks per melee (no Hand to Hand skills).

Bonuses: +4 to save vs psionics, +2 to save vs possession, 50% Trust/Intimidate, +4% to all skills (already added).

Education: Harvard School of Law.

Skills of Note: Interrogation (89%), Psychology (89%), Pick Pockets (79%), Forgery (79%), Basic Math (92%), Advanced Math (84%), W.P. Revolver.

Weapons and Equipment: Richard has an extensive law library and access to world financial information. He carries a .38 revolver in a shoulder holster for protection.

Associates: He has a secretary, Caroline Rochelle, an office staff of 5 assistants and clerks, and 3 dock workers he keeps on retainer in case he needs some muscle for one reason or another.

The Truth About Last Street

The fires that occasionally consume Last Street are no coincidences, and the green gaslight streetlights are the key. Last Street is the focus of a Transitional Place of Power. Every thirteen years, the ebb and flow of magic energy erupts at Last Street, and if left unchecked, rages wildly into a conflagration. The gaslights are Psi-Mechanic devices installed in 1824 to control and consume the raw amount of P.P.E. found at Last Street. They were installed by Mortimer Pitts, a local inventor who received several patents on machinery, but could never sell the prototypes to anyone. Tired of seeing the street burn every 13 years, Mortimer and his apprentices began designing and building the gaslights. He installed a breaker device that would shut the lights off should the flow of energy be too great for them to burn. When the energy level recedes to an acceptable level, the lights automatically kick back on. It was not a perfect solution, and he knew that if the surges overpowered the lights that the street would burn, but it was better than the street burning every 13 years! The lights are indestructible while they are operating, but if they are tripped, or shut off for whatever reason, then they are subject to damage. They have an A.R. of 14 and 130 S.D.C. each. There are twenty of them, ten on either side of the street.

Because Last Street is a Transitional Place of Power, it attracts elements of the supernatural to its cobblestones every thirteen years. Interestingly enough, that is usually when people end up missing around Last Street. Several of the older residents of the area have come to recognize the dangers, and prepare themselves accordingly. Needless to say, every thirteen years it gets fairly lively around Last Street.

The P.P.E. level on Last Street operates on a seven-week cycle. The first three weeks it builds in intensity, the fourth week is the most intense, and the final three weeks it fades into obscurity.

- Week 1: Equal to an Equinox.
- Week 2: Equal to a Lunar Eclipse.
- Week 3: Equal to a Partial Solar Eclipse.
- Week 4: Equal to a Total Solar Eclipse.
- Week 5: Equal to a Partial Solar Eclipse.
- Week 6: Equal to a Lunar Eclipse.
- Week 7: Equal to an Equinox.

The surges last for 12 hours, and always occur between noon and midnight on Wednesday of the week they occur. They also occur one week later every year than they did the year before.

On some occasions, the surges exceed the above chart. When the Week 4 surge exceeds the power of a Total Solar Eclipse, the gaslights go out and the potential energy runs wild, always manifesting itself in a wild series of fires. If left unchecked, these fires would eventually consume the city of Chicago.

New Equipment

“The Jaguar” Pepperbox Shotgun

Developed and constructed by Jack Simpson of Last Rounds.

Country: USA, Custom model, **Caliber:** 16 gauge, **Type:** Rotating quad barrel, **Feed:** 4 chamber breech loader, **Weight:** 5.2 kg (11.46 lbs), **Barrel Length:** 330 mm (12.99 inches), **Cost:** \$120 in 1928 dollars, \$1200 in 2001 dollars, **Damage:** 5D6 slug, 4D6 shot.

The Duffel Bag of Destruction

Given the name by Rick O’Shea and sold at Land’s Outfitters, this duffel bag has pockets, loops and straps for everything a bold adventurer might need in the field. It rolls up into one convenient package with comfortable, padded straps for easy carrying.

Cost: \$4 in 1928 dollars, \$99 in 2001 dollars.

- The bag is designed to hold:
 - 2 pistols with magazines and 1 box of ammunition each.
 - 1 short-barreled long gun with magazines and 1 box of ammunition.
 - 60 loops for shotgun rounds.
 - Pockets for 5 knives.
 - 4 sticks of dynamite.
 - 2 flashlights.
 - A waterproof pocket for maps and compass.
 - 30 feet of coiled rope.
 - 2 spyglasses or 1 pair of binoculars.
 - A pocket for matches and kindling.
 - A machete sheathed on the outside.
 - Ample pockets and straps left over for customizable gear.

Notable books to be found at Milton, Marlow and Shakespeare

Game Masters should feel free to add their own.

Paths to the Ancient Past, (1901) Raymond McCalister.

This book is an account of a mystical journey through the mind to the time of Atlantis. Described within are Atlanteans building pyramids, traveling to other worlds by “side stepping

space and time,” and using lost magical arts. There is also an account of a mental voyage to Ancient Egypt to watch a group of 25 sons and daughters of nobles sacrificed in a great fire. Finally, the book contains a short story about being witness to a Samurai from Japan’s Feudal period defeating 4 turtle demons single handedly.

Lost Destiny, (1899) Michael Polestack.

A typical, uninspired, tracing of Atlantean influence on the known ancient cultures of the world. The second half of the book is dedicated to how the world would be today if Atlantis had not sank beneath the sea. Mostly peace, joy and brotherhood. However, it does talk of flying fortresses, colonies on the moon, and traveling from place to place by entering one pyramid and leaving from another across the world.

The Journal of Stelheim: Knight of the Black Forest, (1001) (1908) Trans. Richard P. Wulf.

A solitary figure from obscure German history. This is a published translation of his actual journal that records his lifelong struggle of guarding a series of fissures in the earth where demons would rise every 2 years. The last entry details his preparations for sacrificing his aged body in a ritual to seal the fissures for a thousand years. He hopes that by the time the thousand years is up, another knight will have read his journal and taken up the crusade of protecting mankind.

Hippocratic Apocrypha, (300 B.C.) (1900) Trans. Professor Geoffrey Ernest Richard Lloyd.

Attributed to Hippocrates himself, this tome deals with healing of a more than “natural” nature. It is an in-depth study and practical applications of psychic healing. There are complex explanations for performing Pagan exorcisms, psychic surgery, recognizing possession, and the gamut of super-natural healing.

Quo Vadis, (55) [In Latin], Venatrix Felixica.

This book is an original, bound in leather, written in Latin, and details the methodology of hunting the supernatural. It covers every monster described in *Beyond the Supernatural™*, instructions on how to enhance weapons with herbs and other things toxic to the supernatural, and on how to steel the mind against the horrors one faces when hunting monsters. The book is mostly written in Latin, however certain parts are written in code, with others being allegorical references to Roman Mythology.

Life in Ancient Egypt, (1923) Sir Edgar Webley of the Royal Historical Society.

A scholarly work dedicated to the everyday labors and lives of the common people of Egypt. It was an instant flop — no one was interested in the lives of everyday Egyptians, only the Pharaohs and Priests. It is a shame, because it has extensive catalogues of common hexes and wards that were placed on items and the household to ward against evil. In the right hands, they could be beneficial, but to layman scholars, they are useless.

The Cities of the Ancient Andes, (1925) Wayne Tippett.

One of the first works to concentrate on cultures of the New World. It contains detailed maps and drawings of Andean cities, and directions to them, including some of the more remote ones. There is also some cultural information; burial customs, basic religious practices, and the like.

Turin Shroud, (1910) Brother Lucius Delvano.

Written in secrecy and smuggled out of Turin, Italy, this book seems to disappear into the hands of Catholic priests when they discover another copy has surfaced. It was written by a monk who was the keeper of the Shroud for 80 years. The book describes that the Shroud is real, and the image on it is the result of Christ's Fiery resurrection, a detail omitted from the Bible. The Shroud is said to contain the power to resurrect the dead, heal the sick, and impart the temporary power of the Wrath of God upon anyone who wraps himself in it for three days.

The Powers of Myth and Legends of the Ancients, (1892) Justin Neville.

A broad overview and survey of the mythology of the ancient civilizations of Europe, the Mediterranean, and even the heart of Africa. It covers the typical stories taught in Mythology classes, and goes on into some obscure ones that may be real, or made up by the author. One notable one concerns the destruction of Mt. Olympus by a Phoenix for a transgression of a Greek Priest, Solon, against an Egyptian God, Nehe.

Vires: Magnus et Minimus, (44 BC) [In Latin] Alexander Cornelius.

A unique manuscript bound in leather and written in an unusual Latin Dialect. It describes a fighting style not known to the Romans, but seems more like the fighting styles of the Orient. Not only does it describe the physical moves, but also philosophy and mental exercises. It is accompanied by drawings of amazing detail.

Ex Lux et Vitrium, (44 BC) [In Latin] Alexander Cornelius.

Another unique manuscript bound in leather and written in an unusual Latin Dialect. It describes, in great detail, the science of optics and how to use focused light as a weapon. There are also vague diagrams on a sphere-shaped bomb made from a crystalline substance. Unfortunately the amount of power that these devices would require makes them all but impossible with technology from the 1920's.

Annals of the Seekers, (? B.C.?) [In Latin, Greek and Arabic] ???

A confusing manuscript to say the least. There are no identifying features to date it; the story itself does not refer to any known historical figure or place. It is written in alternating Latin, Greek and Arabic, sometimes changing language in mid-word. It details the exploits of a band of paranormal hunting warriors and wizards from many different lands, who save the world time and again from an archetypal coalition of villains known as the Four. "Always four there are, no more, no less," it says at one point. It seems to cover the span of several centuries, but the names, places and dates are all highly unusual.

Journal of Michael Sheen, (1200?) [Original in French] Translation by Carlton Hwa (1910).

The translation of the journal of a French wanderer, Michael Sheen. It details his exploits in Europe as he scours the land for information on the Four Who Wait. These four spirits have plagued mankind since time began, and only by gathering knowledge can they be defeated the next time they unite. It ends with him entering the Black Forest in Germany in search of clues to the mysterious Stelheim. A final note says that the journal was left in the care of one Father Colins should Sheen not return from the forest.

The Anderson Papyrus, (2nd Dynasty).

A tattered and worn scroll of Papyrus discovered by the British Egyptologist Thomas Anderson in 1889. Only seen in photographs, how did it end up in a bookstore in Chicago? It describes something called the Phoenix Formula, and the items necessary to perform the ritual, however it does not say what the ritual is supposed to do, or exactly how it is performed. It is more of an ingredients list.

Vedes Light and Dark, (800) [In Tamali] Aryyhaddaba.

An Indian manuscript that tells of a great battle between the forces of Light and the Forces of Darkness that has taken place, is taking place and will take place. It tells that the Forces of Darkness are represented by four archetypal beings dedicated to the destruction or subjugation of humanity. The Forces of Light are always unsuspecting commoners of uncommon valor. What they lack in sheer power they make up for in courage, conviction and dedication. It also warns the Future Forces of Light to beware what they use to light the way through the darkness; sometimes the light of Victory can burn the wielder.

On Dragons and Paths, (700) [In Chinese] Xun Xi.

An original, frayed and tattered, written on rice paper, this work describes the lines of power that cross China. It even extrapolates that by the way they bend, that the earth must be a sphere and the lines are one interconnecting lace of power. Called the Dragon Lace, these can be tapped by those who understand it for power. It describes fluctuations in the Lace, places of power where the Lace connects, and postulates that the lines also exist in the Heavens. The work also describes what are called the Benefactors, Dragons of Fire who protect mankind from those who would use the Dragon Lace for evil.

Earth, Water, Fire, Metal, Wood, (700) [In Chinese] Xun Xi.

A primer for the blossoming student in Chinese elemental theory, it describes the 5 elemental forces and how to harness them by using the Dragon Lace. The book warns that not everyone can harness the Lace, and simply knowing that it is there is not enough. One must be of the Lace, not just touched by it. It warns that knowing the five is not enough, and it alludes to a sixth force, but leaves the student to discover what that is on their own.

Adventure Ideas and Plot Hooks

- One of the player characters inherits a Victorian mansion from a distant relative, and must travel to Chicago to claim ownership and process any paperwork for it. The house just happens to be located at 5 Last Street. The characters must deal with the shifty lawyer Richard DeSpain, and run right into the experience of a rash of disappearances around the area. Before the paperwork can be completed, DeSpain vanishes! A bit of exploring leads to a series of tunnels underneath Last Street, where a Spider Demon has set up shop and is collecting victims for use in a ritual to destroy the street lights, just in time for the next 13 year surge.
- The player characters are new students to the University of Chicago and dare to venture up to Last Street in order to try and save money by purchasing used books at the old bookstore they learned was there. While shopping, they discover

volumes they have never heard of and decide to purchase several of them. Unfortunately for the characters, they purchased a book that begins to draw them together into communal dreams. One night they are fighting the Red Coats in Boston, while another night they are fighting alongside Alexander in Persia. Things really begin to get weird when they start waking up with wounds they received in those collected dreams. The race is on to find a way to end the dreams before someone gets hurt, or worse.

Strength and Honor



The Thropo Revisited

Official Material for Heroes Unlimited

By Wayne Breaux, Jr.

Thropo. The very name is synonymous with strength, cruelty, dominance, and the Atorian Empire. It conjures up images of physical power bundled in fur, and encased in armor emblazoned with the seal of the most infamous Empire known to galactic civilization. Alongside the Photin (see **Revised Aliens Unlimited™** for more info), the Thropo are the best known of the Atorian Empire's allied races. Sharing more than a thousand years of history, these imposing apes have been around since before the closing of the Imperial borders, and helped to pave the way for the success of the expanding Empire. They are one of the most recognized and frightening images of the Imperial war machine. Nearly all of the races that have fallen to the Empire in the last three expansions have done so under the boots of Thropo shock troopers. Other Imperial allies are more vicious than these apes, some are more deadly, and others are more advanced technologically, but it is the Thropo that have managed to retain their place, their reputation, and their value as allies to the Empire when others that seemed more capable have fallen out of favor or been crushed for disloyalty. Few can contest that the Thropo are destined to share the history books with the most significant force ever to touch the Milky Way Galaxy of **Heroes Unlimited™**, but what does it take to get along with the Atorians and earn their trust? What kind of aliens can carry the Imperial banners through the fires of war to the glory of victory and into the annals of history? Let's take a look and see.

As with much of the Imperial business, details on the current state of their allied races are hard to come by, and much of it is outdated or propaganda. The information given in **Aliens Unlimited™** is accurate for Thropo outside the Empire, but for the apes within the borders of Imperial space, it is very outdated. Despite this, the information on the Thropo available to the av-



erage galactic citizen is much more up to date than that of their elusive masters. This is because there are garrisons of Thropo stationed on planets that lie outside the Empire (but close to its borders) which have trade agreements with the Atorians, and because a significant population of Thropo left their home when faced with Atorian domination. By comparison, no Atorians live outside the security of the Empire that can be observed with any ease. These garrisons of Thropo are provided as protection and security to those planets they are stationed on and are available should the would-be allies need them. This kind of duty is common for the Thropo, who are one of the select allies of the Empire allowed outside its borders in great numbers and outfitted with substantial equipment, and helps to enhance their image as the common face of the Empire. In some areas of space, it is be-

lieved that the Thropo *are* the Atorians, since no one there has ever seen Imperial troops other than the mighty apes.

Despite the strength and power of the Thropo, these aliens are far from being just mindless, bashing brutes. That would make them valuable to the Empire, but it would do nothing to ingratiate them with the refined and self evolved Atorians. The Qua-trau are such shock troops, and the Atorians will send them into battle by the millions waving Imperial banners, but they will never give them the rights the Thropo have earned. Intelligence and technology aren't the key either. What sets the Thropo apart and gives them the traits needed to be loyal and trustworthy allies is their honor and skill. The Thropo ways of honor are, in many aspects, parallel to those of the samurai of ancient Japan on Earth. The primary tenant is to serve those they have chosen to follow and to whom they have sworn allegiance, without question and to their utmost until death comes to alter it. For the Thropo, it is considered honorable to serve a worthy master and preserve that master's honor as well as ones own. Doing this with soul-bound dedication makes the Thropo the most reliable and staunch supporters the Empire could ask for.

An age ago, the Thropo culture was different than it is now. Back then and as far past it as any can recount, the strength and size of the female Thropo made them the rulers of their people. Beneath these high rulers, the Gro-choks, or High Women, female warlords known as Hren-dar led armies of male troops. The society had evolved so that the power and strength of the females, especially the leaders, was respected and a source of pride for those below them, thus the males were honored (and enhanced their honor) by serving dutifully. The males had rights and rank above some females, but the majority of men ranked lower than the Thropo women. When the Atorians arrived, little changed at first, other than a shift in authority as the Atorians placed themselves above the highest ranked Gro-choks, becoming Gro-choka, the Highest Women. The majority of the Thropo recognized the power and potential of the Atorians, their strength, and the order they represented. This majority accepted the Atorian rule and the Thropo became willing allies. The few Gro-choks who dissented either had the wisdom to flee or the honor to fight. Whether dying in a doomed final stand or moving to another home, the dissenting Thropo were respected by their now Imperial fellows for remaining loyal to their Gro-choks. To this day, no Thropo will fight another unless they are specifically under orders to do so. The most loyal of FAR Thropo and the most die hard Imperial can meet face to face with no threat of conflict between them because neither side has declared war on the other (circumstances may dictate conflict, but the two sides will not fight simply because of political and cultural loyalties). The Imperial Thropo still view their emigrant cousins as honorable warriors. The fact that they are destined to be on the opposite side of the future conflicts of their Gro-choks is irrelevant. Thropo were warring with Thropo before the Atorians ever arrived, and even then it was a test of honor to them and not a breeding ground of animosity. This camaraderie is somewhat unusual, especially when compared to that of the Photin, who will attack each other on sight when faced with their own kind in service to the Empire's enemies. This and a number of other things causes the Thropo and the Photin not to get along very well, despite their long time together as Atorian allies. Their philosophies are just too alien and opposite to each other (honor and aggression) for more than tolerance.

The Atorian High Warlord, Shivana, took a liking to the apes' skill, military culture, and their impressive honor. Her suggestions, gifts, and orders were used, accepted, and followed time after time. Millions would die at her command, and hundreds of thousands would be allowed to avenge them. As long as the apes felt their lives were not wasted needlessly, they served their new mistress as their honor demanded they do. As warriors, they saw nothing wrong with dying in service to the Atorians as long as they were able to succeed. As the Empire continued to grow and prosper with their assistance, the Thropo knew that they had made the right choice and their loyalty would grow with the Imperial borders. That loyalty was rewarded and they quickly, but not too quickly, became respected allies. As the centuries passed, Atorian genetics helped more and more healthy females to be born, until eventually, entire armies of Thropo women were able to wage war as elite armies (until then, males made up the bulk of the armies with women in command). The Atorians continued to empower the already elevated women if the Thropo, and eventually, the apes would declare their total agreement with the policies and ways of the Empire. Their males lost all rights and became property, and their society became one of women. This would earn them the ultimate reward for their centuries of service: status as Women of the Clan, full citizens of the Empire equal in all ways to those Atorians with no nobility. In effect, they would become another clan within the Empire, the Thropo clan of Atorians. Although lacking representation in the nobility beyond the lowest levels (breaking into the established noble circles within the Empire is difficult, even with the favor of an Imperial Lady), for all intents and purposes, the Thropo women were now Atorians. No greater honor could have been given to the apes, and they have fought and died since then in an effort to live up to the trust extended by the greatest masters they could imagine serving.

Once the Thropo became Atorians, the real changes between them and their galactic counterparts began to take place. Atorian genetics had provided the apes with a massive female population, and not it started to form them slowly, over generations, into mirrors of the Atorians. Their natural strengths would be retained and enhanced, flaws would be ironed out, and most importantly, they would become asexual reproducers like the Atorians, making their males totally unnecessary. In the current time line, the only Thropo males one will find are slaves in the arenas. Just like their masters, the Thropo do not want reminders of their inferior past around them. The Thropo have become the little sisters of the Empire and serve as trusted, but still watched, partners in the domination of the galaxy. Many armies and smaller units of lesser allied races are even put under the command of a Thropo lieutenant or general, who in turn answers to an Atorian commander. Few other Atorian allies are allowed such authority (some of these elevated allies, including the Photin and other new races, will appear in the upcoming **Guide to Imperial Space**). Thropo of the clan have access to Imperial level technologies, which is the standard Atorian technology, but they can also make use of more advanced tech that is normally restricted only to Atorian use. Their ability to manufacture such advanced tech for their own use is still limited, but the Atorians provide them with all they truly need, and compared to those races outside the Empire, the Thropo can manufacture some of the best technology in the galaxy.

The Thropo certainly didn't slip perfectly into their role as Imperial ally, nor was their change to a clan without incident. Many Thropo waged war over joining the Empire, and some houses will still battle each other on sight, for their Gro-choks never declared the wars over, even after the Imperial Thropo allied and their opponents migrated. Likewise, many males protested their total subjugation when the Imperial Thropo made their gesture of loyalty and fully embraced the Imperial ways. A War of Understanding on a mini-scale was fought amongst the Thropo in a vain attempt to derail their destiny. This means that there are still factions within the Thropo, dividing them not only along Imperial and galactic lines, but within and between the two. It was stated earlier that Imperial and galactic Thropo will not attack each other unless they are known to be at war, but it should be clarified that they will be far from best friends. The Imperial Thropo no longer look exactly like their cousins from the rest of the galaxy, and their society is changed. A respectful truce will prevail, but without some kind of common ground, the opposing sides will have little excuse for warmth or friendship.



Face to Face

Thropo aren't giants by any means (six and a half feet/1.98 m maximum), but they are massively built, especially for females. Thick muscles fill their frames with the strength and power they are legendary for, and a fine layer of silky fur covers it all, in an almost deceptive sheen that shines in the sun and shifts in the

wind. Their legs are slightly stocky, but not so much so as those of the apes of Earth, providing stability for the great strength of their arms. The arms themselves are also slightly longer than those of humans, and more heavily muscled. Atorian genetics have seen to it that all the muscles of the Thropo are more dense and capable of increased power without taking away from their mobility or appearance. And speaking of appearance, the facial details of the clan Thropo are more refined than those of the galactic Thropo from which they originated. Subtle Atorian sculpting in the genetic processes will continue to refine their appearance for hundreds of years to come, but the Thropo are unaware of the deliberate changes. Were they to discover it, revolt is unlikely, although some bloodlines within the clan (former houses) may well consider the lack of trust dishonorable and react accordingly. The Thropo have been so closely tied to the Atorians for such a long period of time, that something like this, a cosmetic detail, would not be cause for them to break the bonds formed over centuries. They have thick, but well articulated digits and can wield a heavy sword or operate a computer with equal ease; although hardly any of them will have any need to actually type upon a computer in the Empire. Nearly all of them will have neural impulse translation implants just as the Atorians do, which allow them to operate compatible devices with just a thought as if they were directly plugged into it via a dataplug.

Before the Atorians arrived, the Thropo were civilized, but with Atorian influence, they have become truly cultured. Though still warriors at heart and battle ready to the last woman, the apes have learned a bearing and believe in a destiny they never had before, and it shows. Watching a Thropo, it's easy to see why many of the races they have helped to dominate would think they were actually the Atorians for which the Empire is named. Each one carries herself like a general or cultured warlord, even the lowliest foot soldier. Just as with the Atorians, the Thropo are convinced that they are a great race with a great future and an even greater destiny: to bring order to the entire galaxy. The Thropo see everyone as inferior outsiders who need to learn or be taught their place in the order of things. Anyone who allies to the Empire shows wisdom, while those who oppose it demonstrate their strength, but also their rashness or their lack of wisdom. These apes understand that enemies can become allies, but until that time, everyone they face is considered inferior or uneducated in the ways of reality, and it is the duty of the Thropo to elevate, educate, or eradicate them as the situation demands.

These aliens are ferocious and relentless in combat. Many of their opponents mistake their violent aggression for a mad rage, but although they are capable of losing control and flying into a rage, usually they are not out of control. A Thropo in melee combat is an impressive and unnerving sight, a hulk of rippling muscle and snarling fury lashing out with the best weapons science can design. A whole squad of them wading into an enemy can open surprising holes in defenses through sheer terror, and an army can overwhelm by psychological, as well as physical, assaults. The Horror Factor when facing an attacking Thropo is 12 (14 for a squad and 16 for more than 20 of them), and is lessened only by combat experience (+1 on Horror Factor rolls for each experience levels). This Horror Factor only applies to characters engaged in melee or short range combat (less than 50 feet/15.2 m) with a Thropo. In ranged combat, the Thropo are

just the opposite, which can be equally scary (but no appreciable Horror Factor is involved). Like a master archer, a Thropo with a projectile, energy, or ballistic weapon is calm and focused. To them, melee and ranged combat are two different arts and need to be approached with a totally different mindset. Nattereri have a similar philosophy, and the two races greatly respect each other for it. The armored fish are one of the few races a Thropo would pause to listen to before or during combat, but never when it would risk their lives. Also note that in such a truce, both of these races would protect the enemy from any dishonorable actions as long as it lasts, even if those actions come from allies. The minor truce would end by mutual agreement. No surprise or underhanded attacks (sucker punches, as it were) would be acceptable to signal a return to or beginning of a battle.

A Thropo can lose control during combat and fly into a rage. Each time a Thropo is struck with a Critical Strike (including special attacks that act as Critical Strikes), she must roll a save against a 14. Mental Endurance bonuses apply, as do any save bonuses against insanity. Failure means the Thropo goes into a rage. This rage is different from the frenzy state described under the Crazy Hero section of **Heroes Unlimited™ Second Edition**, in that the ape is still alert and capable of thinking and reacting, but she can not withdraw from combat until the rage passes or the person responsible for it stops fighting. The Thropo must stand her ground or advance, and has to fight to the best of her ability. The rage lasts for 1+1D4 rounds and while it is in effect, the ape gains one attack per melee, +4 to P.S., and +20 Hit Points. Seeing a Thropo enter a rage requires anyone within 50 feet (15.2 m) of her to make a Horror Factor check as detailed above. A further downside to the rage is the toll it takes on the ape. When the rage subsides, the above bonuses become penalties (-1 attack, -4 to P.S., and -20 Hit Points). These penalties are applied to the character's stats, and are not simply a reversion of the rage bonuses. The rage subsides and all abilities return to normal, then the penalties are applied. Penalties last for 1D4 minutes. For example, a Thropo with 5 attacks, 40 P.S., and 45 Hit Points would have 6 attacks, 44 P.S., and 65 Hit Points while raging, but she would drop to 4 attacks, 36 P.S., and 25 Hit Points after the rage passed. A Thropo can die when the rage subsides if she took heavy Hit Point damage prior to its passing. Unknown to the Imperial Thropo, the Atorians can trigger their rages with the proper equipment or the psionic ability of Bio-Manipulation. It is an old failsafe that was never taken out of their genetic coding, and was intended to be used to force revolting Thropo to burn themselves out at the beginning of a battle, thus making them easier to kill for the few minutes it took them to recover. Only high ranking nobles know that this is still possible, and only the highest still have any of the needed equipment on hand, although anyone that knows this secret could easily use any Atorian medical system, portable ones included, to the same effect. The only difference is that the old equipment was designed to trigger a rage in large groups, even armies spread over a mile or so, while a medical unit would only affect one Thropo or a small grouping of them (depending on the medical unit used).

One thing about these apes that is universal and almost universally known (to anyone that knows anything about Thropo, that is), is the affinity they have for bladed weapons. Kisentite quality blades have been passed through Thropo family lines for thousands of years, each blade carrying with it a history and

spirit all its own. Since their alliance with the Atorians, the women of the Empire have used the gift of precision blades as part of their relationship with the apes, and since the Thropo's elevation to clan status, the apes have been enjoying the access to Atorian technologies to craft some of the most impressive blades one can imagine. A favorite among these blade lovers is the Atorian Nano-Blade. Most commonly swords, these weapons are outfitted with a minor combat computer that ever so slightly adjusts the blade length, weight, and cutting edge to maximize each swing. The weapon is perfectly balanced, adjusting its own balance by shifting its nano-structure with each swing, and custom calibrating those adjustments to the wielder's preferences using information from her NITT, and rarely miss their marks unless blocked by an outside force (another weapon, a shield, or the person dodging). In addition to being +2 to parry and +2 to strike, these weapons are considered armor piercing and lower any Armor Ratings by 2 points. The Nano-Blade is also considered a Vibro-weapon for purposes of damage it does and what can damage it. Nano-Blades cost 45 to 60 times the cost of a normal blade weapon and are usually given as gifts. They can be any kind of bladed weapon. Other blade weapons of quality loved by the Thropo (and easier on the wallet), include Kisentite, Vibro-, and energy weapons, both normal and jazzed up with the precision weapon options from the **Aliens Unlimited Galaxy Guide™**, page 147.

Galactic Thropo

The Thropo outside the Empire still structure their society as they did in the old days. The female Gro-choks lead each of the houses. Beneath them, Hren-dar warlords command the armies of the house, which are made up mostly of male Thropo. Their new home world, Gor-Chuft, is a battle ravaged globe irradiated by its former inhabitants as they wiped themselves out with global, nuclear war. The Thropo are at home in the radiation, and have rebuilt the devastated world using seeds and tissue samples of some of the plants and animals of their original home world. The rebuilding was a struggle at first, and it would be hundreds of years before many of the tissue samples could be cloned, because the apes lacked the necessary cloning technologies. Eventually, the displaced Thropo would contact the fledgling FAR (shortly after its inception) and exchange information on their society and what little they knew of the Atorians at the time for the technology needed to finish the rebuilding of their world. They ensured that the trade was even and that they owed no debts to the potential enemies of the Empire, for the Thropo had fled the Atorians to avoid fighting them, and did not wish to be drawn into the same situation again. Vast graveyard monuments to the previous inhabitants of the new home world still dot the landscape, thousands of years after the Thropo relocated and rebuilt. These monuments to futility serve to remind the apes why they fight with honor, and not simply to win.

The Ronin phenomenon is most common among the galactic Thropo, and no clan Thropo has even been known to go Ronin (wether this is because of Imperial conditioning, or the fact that none have ever survived to leave the Empire, can not be verified). In fact, the Imperial Thropo consider all of their cousins that are not clan Thropo to be Ronin, but galactic Thropo apply the distinction to lone individuals. Ronin are those Thropo who, for one reason or another, can not find a place in Thropo society. Ronin are always outcasts. Any Thropo that will not follow

a Gro-chok of some kind is not welcome within the Thropo society. How can one live with honor when they are selfish and refuse to serve another? Many outside Thropo culture respect the honor and willingness to fight for a righteous cause that most Ronin exhibit, but the Thropo themselves can not, when it is overshadowed by an obvious refusal to do the honorable thing. Such rogue behavior is frowned upon and outright ostracized among the Thropo. So while the Ronin may be a hero to many, he will always be an outcast to his own people.

Many members of the FAR council have approached the Thropo outside the Empire in an attempt to convince them to fight the Empire (and their cousins within). Thus far, all such requests have been declined. The Thropo are not willing to go to war with their fellow Thropo, when the ancestors of those same Thropo honorably allowed them to leave when they refused to waste their lives fighting the Empire. The Thropo also feel that the FAR would lose a war with the Empire and to them, it would bring their race dishonor to ally into a suicidal war. Were there a chance that the FAR could win (in the Thropo's estimation), they might, in better conscience, be willing to help, but as things stand, they remain uninvolved. Many Thropo also understand that if they actively oppose the Empire, the Atorians may well visit upon them (in the name of their trusted allies and full citizens of the Empire) the same kind of purge that swept over the Fehran after the War of Understanding, a vengeance that still haunts the descendants of those that escaped the genocide in the form of bounties and assassins. Simply put, the galactic Thropo do not feel that the FAR is a worthy master to follow into a war against an enemy like the Atorian Empire. If this perception ever changes, the exiled Thropo will certainly side with the Federation of Allied Races against the Empire and their evolved cousins.

Galactic Thropo use the statistics presented in **Aliens Unlimited™** to determine Hit Points, S.D.C., and all other abilities.

Imperial Thropo

Alignment: Aberrant for Imperial Thropo. Galactic Thropo can be any alignment, but tend toward Principled, Scrupulous or Aberrant (if evil).

Attributes: Will vary by home world type, as well as power categories and any superhuman ability bonuses. The typical Imperial Thropo has the following base stats: I.Q. 8+2D6, M.E. 6+2D6, M.A. 3D6, P.S. 18+3D6, P.P. 8+2D6, P.E. 12+2D6, P.B. 2D6, Spd 18+2D6. The genetically advanced Thropo within the Empire have had their original traits preserved and enhanced, providing their trademark strength and other abilities even when adapted to a different planetary environment. Also note that these are considered base stats and a roll of 16, 17 or 18 results in the standard bonus die. Attributes of 19 or higher do not gain a bonus die.

Height: 5 feet, 7 inches (1.70 m), + 2D6 inches (0.05-0.30 m).

Weight: 195 + 5D10 lbs (90-110.3 kg; almost all muscle).

P.P.E.: 2D6; never have or use magic.

Hit Points: Standard; P.E. + 1D6 per level. Some power categories can have additional Hit Point bonuses.

S.D.C.: 40+1D4x10, but originating environment, O.C.C.s, physical skills, super abilities and power category bonuses can add additional S.D.C.

Average Life Span: 250 years.

Natural Abilities: Clan Thropo do not give off constant levels of radiation as their galactic counterparts do, thanks to Atorian genetics. They are still immune to radiation, but they do not leak it into the environment. Those Thropo who live exclusively within an irradiated environment (i.e. they come from a radiation planet), will still leak radiation as normal. All other Imperial Thropo will come from differing alien environments, and thus will not soak up radiation to bleed off later. All Imperial Thropo possess the minor super abilities of Radar and Heightened Sense of Hearing. The Atorians have made the genes for these abilities dominant, and they manifest in all Thropo born within the Empire, unlike the galactic Thropo, which only have a chance of developing them (01-40%). All Thropo, not just Imperial ones, can also rage as noted above.

Education: Imperial Thropo are well educated in their clan academies. As soon as a Thropo is old enough to begin schooling, they are sent off to the academies for education and indoctrination. They graduate 15 years later with their minds and bodies honed on tradition, combat, and survival as elite Imperial troopers, commanders, or overseers. Thropo can choose any of the military oriented alien skill programs given in the **Galaxy Guide™** (page 191), or they may use the Military Specialist education level as detailed on page 45 of **Heroes Unlimited™ Second Edition**. The typical alien education tables simply do not cover the extent of the education (and indoctrination; the two are inseparable) that the Imperial citizens undergo.

Galactic Thropo use the standard alien education tables as found in **Aliens Unlimited™** (page 9) and **Heroes Unlimited™** (page 95), or with the G.M.'s permission, they may choose a skill program from the **Galaxy Guide™** (page 191).

Available Power Categories: Bionics (+50% to budget; see below for a sample 'borg), Robotics (+50% to budget), Special Training (except Ancient Masters — only Imperial Lady Chi Naei's clanswomen can be Ancient Masters; increase any budgets by 10 times and replace normal weapon selections with energy weapon selections), Experiments (especially Super Soldiers — see below for an example; no side effects or select one of choice), and Physical Training (typically Endurance and Strength focus combined with the Aggressive and Deadly hand to hand style; Kisentite, energy and Vibro-weapons can be chosen in place of normal weapon selections).

Galactic Thropo are limited as noted in **Aliens Unlimited™** (page 75).

Special Weapons and Armor: All other details are the same as the **Aliens Unlimited** entry for the Thropo (page 74 in **Revised Aliens Unlimited™**).

Thropo Augmentation

Maximizing the natural strength and combat potential of the Thropo, the Atorians have helped to shape them into a formidable fighting force. The most common outlet for that focus is as a Super Soldier, and many of these ape-like allies benefit from the additions of superhuman armor, strength, speed, and other less subtle abilities. The focus of the Thropo Super Soldier program within the Empire is genetic augmentation. The already maximized genetic structure of the ape is jazzed up to superhuman

levels and combined with some super abilities to produce a highly effective, elite soldier. Many of these Super Soldiers perform on the front lines, piloting or accompanying vehicles into battle and dealing with any soldiers on the ground, but most of them will perform duties closer to those of the special forces of Earth, invading enemy territory in small squads and dealing damage in precise, surgical strikes. One Thropo Super Soldier is the equal to five or more regular soldiers (depending on the enemy being faced), and a squad of them can take on a large number of enemies, even as big as a platoon, should their luck hold out. The raw power and strength of these soldiers allows them to carry weapons and equipment normally only available to cyborg and robot units, including field weapons and some man portable heavy weapons.

Super Soldiers who reach 4th level are usually given an oversized Atorian Nano-Blade to maximize their strength in melee combat. This weapon is heavy for a Thropo, even a Super Soldier, and would be a two-handed weapon for most races without Extraordinary Strength (or a normal P.S. of 30+), but the balancing of the Nano-Blade makes it possible for them to wield single-handed. The blade has the same stats as a Vibro- two handed sword, but a Thropo Super Soldier can wield it one-handed, and it only does 3D6+6 damage (instead of the 4D6+3 of the Vibro- two-hander). Every 4 levels, the Thropo Super Soldier is also given an upgraded ranged weapon. Chose one of the character's weapons and each 4 levels, the new version adds +1 to strike, +3 to damage, +5 to E-Clip capacity, and +10% to range. Upon reaching 6th level, the soldier receives a light exoskeleton armor and her choice of three bionic sensor implants. The armor adds +5 to the user's P.S. and adds +1 A.R. and +50 S.D.C. to the standard SIBA armor.

The Thropo Super Soldier can be thought of as the typical Thropo warrior within the Empire. A fair number of these apes are 'borgs (known as "cians" in the Empire) or robot pilots, but the Thropo psyche is more oriented toward personal power, and the genetics involved with the Super Soldier process appeal to more of them more than donning powered armor or replacing their body with artificial systems do. The diversity of the Super Soldier path is also appealing. The Atorians are so advanced in their technologies that they can reliably duplicate any combination of super abilities, genetic enhancements, and artificial accessories. This allows them to build Super Soldiers whose powers are based on a personal ideal or preference, making for a more stable and happier soldier who can perform her job on a higher level than someone drafted into their abilities or who got them accidentally. Training a willing and eager subject is also much easier than one that isn't. On top of it all, comes increased loyalty from the grateful soldier you've just given great power to. Who wouldn't be grateful to the entity that just made them into the god-like being they always wanted to be?

Nearly all Thropo serve with and under the clanswomen of Shivana, the high warlord, and Delmiar, the Imperial defender, although by far, the majority will be under the command of Delmiar, securing and protecting the borders and occupied planets of the Empire from revolts or incursions. Shivana commands a large amount of this race, but with the Empire currently in the "down time" between expansions, their role as active shock troops is limited, and their use as special operatives requires less than full armies of hundreds of thousands. But there are still battles against the enemies of the Empire, both domestic and for-

eign, and the Thropo do see their fair share of action. As the next expansion begins to gear up, it is assured that a new generation of Thropo, millions strong, will be born and raised to wage war, filling out the ranks of Shivana's assault armadas with the most recognized and feared images of the Atorian war machine.

Thropo Super Soldiers

Attributes: Will vary by home world type, as well as other miscellaneous bonuses. The typical Imperial Thropo Super Soldier has the following enhanced stats: I.Q. 10+1D6, M.E. 10+2D4, M.A. 6+2D6, P.S. 40+2D6, P.P. 12+2D4, P.E. 20+1D6, P.B. 9+2D4, Spd 30+2D6. These elevated stats can be traded in for two minor super abilities. The elevated S.D.C. and the Armor Rating can be traded in for another minor super ability. If attributes are traded for super abilities, simply use the Imperial Thropo stats given above to determine attribute ratings and/or S.D.C. The P.S. score includes the enhanced ratings for the Superhuman P.S. super ability noted below.

Height: 6 feet (1.83 m) + 2D4 inches (0.05-0.20 m).

Weight: 220 + 5D10 lbs (101.3-121.5 kg; all muscle).

P.P.E.: 2D6; never have or use magic.

Hit Points: P.E. + 4D6 at first level, plus 1D6+2 per level.

Armor Rating (A.R.): 12 (natural).

S.D.C.: 100 +1D4x10, but O.C.C.s, physical skills, super abilities and power category bonuses can add additional S.D.C.

The Thropo Super Soldier also regenerates 1 Hit Point or S.D.C. every 20 minutes (3 every hour, and 72 each day).

Average Life Span: 275 years, but often die in battle before then.

Natural Abilities: Same as all Imperial Thropo (see above).

Super Abilities: Superhuman Strength (minor) is typical, although higher ranking and more experienced Super Soldiers may have it upgraded to Supernatural P.S. (6th level or above).

Education: Same as all Imperial Thropo (see above).

Available Power Categories: The Atorians consider any augmented soldier a "super soldier," but this specific example is a special combination of genetic augmentation (*Galaxy Guide™*, page 144) and experiment. Due to the highly advanced Atorian technologies and medical knowledge, this kind of combination is possible for the Empire, but could not be reasonably duplicated outside the Imperial borders. Similar super soldiers would be pure Experiments or the actual Super Soldier sub-category. In addition to the listed genetics and super abilities, this soldier would have the Experiment side effect: Breathe Without Air.

Special Weapons: Begins with a Vibro- and a Kisentite melee weapon of choice (both are +2 to damage and +1 to parry). Select two sidearms (one energy and one of choice), one energy rifle, and any one energy weapon of choice for ranged weapons. All ranged weapons have 20% more payload (2 shots extra for every 10 normal), 10% longer range, and do +1 damage for each die of base damage (i.e. +3 bonus for a 3D6 pistol or +6 damage for a 6D6+6 damage rifle, which would do a total of 6D6+12 damage).

Special Armor: Each Super Soldier is issued an Atorian Standard Issue Battle Armor Suit (SIBA). The SIBA is a close fitting armored body suit designed not to hinder the soldier, to provide comfort and environmental protection, and to mini-



Breaux

mize purchase points for an enemy trying to grapple with the wearer. Except for the hip, shoulder, forearm and boot plates, the armor looks nothing like armor, and can be worn under any clothing or other armor if the plates are removed. This aspect adds a psychological weapon to the Atorian's arsenal, as the enemy blasts at the Imperial soldiers who have little or no obvious armor and watch as their beams strike targets who ignore it, or perhaps get back up after a particularly nasty shot knocks them down. The suit has a number of features, including cold and heat insulation, environmental system,

force field generator (over the head in place of a helmet for environmental seal as well as protection; 75 S.D.C. and perfectly clear/transparent), radiation shielding, magnetic boots, and a built in kinetic suit lining. All these features are presented on pages 189 to 192 of **Revised Aliens Unlimited™**. One of the armored gauntlets has a mini-computer built in that would put our personal computers to shame, while the other has a micro-translator and target verification system (detailed in the **Galaxy Guide™**). A compact backpack holds the rest of the soldier's equipment. Special kinetic

weaves in the gloves of the armor cause them to stiffen with impact to roughly the consistency of steel, providing the soldier with convenient, effective melee weapons (damage for punches is 2D6 +P.S. damage bonus; the gauntlets can be used like shields to parry weapons in combat, even energy weapons, but their small size imposes a penalty of -2 to parry with them). The armor itself is as durable as the heaviest composites found outside the Empire, but its size as noted is no heavier or more bulky than an insulated body suit; A.R.: 17, S.D.C.: 200.

Standard Equipment: Water and rations for three weeks, collapsible tent (folds to the size of a laptop computer, and comes with weather proofing and a heating/AC unit the size of a paperback book), multi-optics eye monocle (looks like a reading monocle with a light frame to hold it against the face during exertion; contains all the same optics as the multi-optics helmet on page 343 of *Heroes Unlimited™*), 1D4 land mines (3D6x10 damage, but only set off by pressure from weights of 500 lbs/225 kg or greater), and a compact field kit (first aid materials, wrenches and other tools, small electronics kit, scalpel, flashlight, etc.).

Thropo Full Conversion 'Borg'

Alignment: Within the Empire, the Thropo would all be Aberrant from an outsider's point of view. Their sense of honor is very strong, but they adhere to the rules and beliefs of the Atorian Empire, which are evil to most people that are not Atorian.

Attributes: I.Q. 10+1D6, M.E. 6+2D6, M.A. 3D6, P.S. 40 (Superhuman), P.P. 20, P.E. 30 (but does not fatigue and is immune to any poisons/toxins/drugs that aren't ingested or inhaled), P.B. 9+2D4 (can also be sculpted to a max P.B. of 17), Spd 88.

Speed: Running: typically 60 mph (88 Spd/72 km). Leaping: 15 feet (4.6 m) straight up or 25 feet (7.6 m) across. Double distances with a running start.

Height: 6 to 6.5 feet (1.83 to 1.98 m).

Weight: 300 to 400 lbs (135-180 kg).

P.P.E.: 1D4; bionics destroy nearly all but a spark of psychic energy.

Hit Points: P.E. + 1D6 at first level plus the standard 1D6 per level.

Armor Rating: 12 (robotic).



The full conversion body of the Thropo can be outfitted with additional armor plating. This battlefield armor is detachable and worn just like traditional body armor, but is much heavier and can only be used by cyborgs. It adds +1 to A.R. (13 total) and 250 S.D.C. (To the total S.D.C. for specific locations, add +25 to each location and +100 to the main body). The extra armor plating also adds an Atorian military armor rating of level 2 to the 'borg. This means that the armor will ignore the first ten (10) points of damage from any attack. Weapons that can burst fire subtract the 10 points from their base damage before adding multiples, because if one bullet can't damage the armor, then a bunch of them will each be as ineffective. This means that many weapons will simply do no damage to the armor. For example, a weapon like the Cerator SMG (page 179 of **Aliens Unlimited™**) which does 1D6 damage, wouldn't damage the armor, even though it can burst for up to x12 damage, because its bullets are just too small and simply flatten against or deflect off of the armor. Likewise, a 2D6 weapon will only be able to do 1 or 2 points of damage to this armor.

S.D.C.: Replaced completely by the full bionic conversion. Location numbers below are for use with called shots in **Heroes Unlimited™** or for M.D.C. in **Rifts®**. The total S.D.C. listing is for use in traditional **Heroes Unlimited™** campaigns.

Damage Capacity by location:

Head — 50
Arms (2) — 75 each
Legs (2) — 125 each
Main Body (torso) — 450
Total S.D.C. — 900

Average Life Span: 500 years. The life support systems built into the artificial body can sustain the living tissue for a very long time, but most 'borgs are destroyed long before their organs begin to deteriorate.

Natural Abilities: The full replacement of a Thropo's flesh with artificial systems removes all of their natural, organic based abilities. The remaining organs are still immune to radiation, but with the built in shielding on the bionics, they rarely ever have to worry about exposure. The one true ability that remains is the Thropo's rage. Full conversion 'borgs can still rage as normal, but they are +4 to save, and many of them are provided override systems that can switch the rage off before it goes too far, thus sparing the 'borg from the resulting weakness. These warriors are too expensive to waste when it can be avoided. Note that the override will not work if an Atorian should use the rage trigger.

Education: Same as all Imperial Thropo (see above).

Available Power Categories: Bionics only. It is a full conversion cyborg, after all.

Weapon Systems

1. Particle Beam: Located in one of the 'borg's forearms and firing from the hand is a charged particle weapon similar to a particle beam pistol. The Thropo just points and fires the way someone with super abilities shoots energy. The advanced technology used in the system charges the particles in a containment field around the hand then directs it outward toward the target. The beam's power can be regulated so that it does less than maximum damage (usually in increments of 1D6) or it can be adjusted to do no damage but play havoc with electronics, shorting out electrical systems and sensors. Each time this setting is

used on an electrical system, the system gets a saving throw against a target of 14. If the save is failed, the system shorts out and remains inoperable until repaired. Shielded systems get a +4 to the save, and all robot or cyborg systems as well as the creations of Hardware characters are considered to be shielded by default. All other systems can be shielded for about 1,000 credits or 10% of the item's cost, whichever is greater. If a Hardware character specifically shields his equipment (-5% to creation rolls), it gains an additional +2 to save (+6 total). Note that energy weapons can also be disabled with the particle beam. All Atorian equipment is of course shielded against this kind of thing, gaining +5 to save against it. Hitting immobile targets like electrical transformers, stationary generators, etc., only requires the attacker to hit (strike roll of 5 or better with bonuses), but hitting smaller targets or those moving, including equipment on a character that isn't paralyzed or otherwise immobilized, requires a called shot.

Primary Purpose: Anti-Personnel.

Secondary Purpose: Electronic Counter Measure.

Damage: 6D6+6

Rate of Fire: Single shot only.

Effective Range: 1,000 feet (305 m) for a damaging beam, or 800 feet (244 m) for an electronic scrambling beam.

Payload: 200 blasts. Energy recharges at the rate of 2 shots per minute of charging (120 blasts per hour). Can recharge in-between uses, does not need to recharge all shots in one stretch.

2. Wide Band Laser System: A multi-application system, this weapon/tool is built into the forearm opposite the ion blaster. Capable of functioning as a visible light beam, a laser torch, a heat beam, or a damaging laser of varying power, this system provides a number of uses to the 'borg.

The visible light functions as a varying power light source, and can produce ranges of light from the equivalent of a match to more than 100,000 candlepower of blinding brilliance (victims must save against non-lethal poison if it is turned on directly in their eyes, or they will be blinded for 1D4 melee actions; requires called shot in combat, but is automatic in a surprise situation.

The laser torch is a focused cutting beam designed for controlled damage instead of range or accuracy, which makes it a poor weapon despite the massive damage it can inflict to a direct area. Cutting range is only one foot (0.3 m), and the listed damage is only against totally unmoving targets like walls, doors and parked vehicles. In combat, damage is reduced to 4D6 and a successful melee attack is necessary to inflict damage. The torch can cut at a rate of 4 feet (1.2 m) per melee round, doing the maximum damage listed per foot. Damage can be halved and the cutting speed doubled when working on softer substances than, say, vehicle armor or bunker doors. When the torch has done damage equal to the S.D.C. of the item being cut, a hole of the desired size, based on how long cutting took place, will be opened. So a metal door with 200 S.D.C. that is cut on for three melee rounds, and suffers 200 or more points of damage, would have a 12 foot (3.7 m) long cut in it (roughly a 3x3 foot/1x1 m hole). Cutting twice as fast at half the damage would make a 6 foot/2 m square hole, but only if the reduced damage was enough to deplete the S.D.C. of the door.

The heat beam can be used to thaw ice, warm food, make a cold person comfortable, cause a sunburn, torture frozen world aliens, or any number of other uses. It can warm the immediate area out to a 10 foot (3 m) diameter, increasing the temperature by up to 20 degrees F (11 C), or it can be directed at a 5 foot (1.5 m) diameter area, raising the temperature as much as 40 degrees F (22 C). The heat beam can only do 1 point of damage per minute (2 to frozen world aliens), but it can cause discomfort and will induce great pain in frozen aliens (treat it as an Agony spell if exposed for more than 4 melee rounds). Penalties may also apply from exposure should the temperature fall outside an alien's usual ranges (see the rules for exposure on page 95 of **Heroes Unlimited™**).

The damaging laser is a coherent beam of focused energy identical to similar weapons found across the galaxy, but much more powerful and much more flexible. A single beam can do as much as 4D6+6 damage, but it can also be regulated to any damage setting lower than its maximum damage. The damage adjustment range is total, allowing the weapon to do as little as 1 point of damage or move upward in variable steps such as 1D4, 2D4, 2D6, 4D4, 1D10, 3D6, 1D20, and on and on. As long as the total possible damage is less than the 42 points of damage the full blast can do, any setting is possible. Adjustments are made immediately with a mental trigger from the 'borg. In addition, the beam can fire pulses or bursts. A laser pulse is three grouped beams which do 1D4x10 damage total when they all hit a target, but the pulses can be spread to strike three different targets (attack roll at -2 to hit 2 targets, and -4 to simultaneously hit 3 targets; each may dodge normally), for 3D6+3 damage each. Or the shots can be spread against one target's evasion zones, making dodging more difficult (one beam is aimed at the target while the other two are spaced to either side in case of a dodge; victims are -6 to dodge the spread pulse, which does 4D6+6 damage if it hits). Burst fire is fully automatic weapon fire, and can be used to saturate an area, spray large numbers of targets in a relatively small zone, or bombard a single target with damage. Normal rules for fully automatic weapon bursts and sprays apply. Damage when burst firing is 4D6 per blast, modified by the appropriate multiplier based on the length of the burst used (see page 75 of **Heroes Unlimited™**).

Primary Purpose: Weapon/Assault.

Secondary Purpose: Miscellaneous/Tool.

Damage: Light: None/Blindness.

Cutting Torch: 1D6x10 per attack when cutting (half damage if cutting twice as fast as normal), or 4D6 as a melee weapon.

Heat Beam: 1 or 2 points of damage plus superficial burns.

Damaging Laser: 4D6+6 per full power blast, 1D4x10 per triple pulse, and 4D6 damage when burst firing.

Rate of Fire: Light: Constant. Can be adjusted each melee action.

Cutting Torch: Constant when cutting, doing damage for each of the character's melee attacks. When used as a weapon, attacks are equal to the number of hand to hand attacks of the 'borg.

Heat Beam: Constant. Can be adjusted each melee action.

Damaging Laser: Single blast, triple pulse, or burst fire. Burst fire can either be at the normal automatic weapon rate, or can use the much faster machine-gun rates of fire for more damage, but the latter burns energy very quickly (see description above, payload entry below, and page 76 of **Heroes Unlimited™** for full details).

Effective Range: Light: Varies with beam intensity. A match flame's brightness can only illuminate a small area, while a 50,000 candlepower light will bring daylight to a few hundred feet and can be seen for more than a mile.

Cutting Torch: Character's reaching distance. Beam is no longer than 12 inches (0.3 m).

Heat Beam: Ten foot (3 m) immediate area, or 5 foot (1.5 m) diameter beam up to 40 feet (12.2 m) away.

Damaging Laser: 1,200 feet (365 m) single shot and pulse firing, or 800 feet (244 m) burst firing.

Payload: Light: Practically unlimited.

Cutting Torch: One hour of constant cutting, effectively unlimited.

Heat Beam: One hour at maximum temperatures before recharging for an hour. Energy conservation mode can maintain medium temperatures (half maximums) for four hours before needing an hour recharge. A squad can alternate their charges and maintain temperatures indefinitely.

Damaging Laser: 300 blasts. Recharges at the rate of 2 shots per minute (120 per hour). For determining number of shots used when burst firing, consider a "clip" to be 35 rounds if using the automatic weapon rules, and a "clip" for machine-gun rates of fire would be 100 rounds. Thus using a long burst with machine-gun rates of fire would do x8 damage and burn 20-50 rounds (20+3D10) of the 300, but a long burst using the automatic weapons rate of fire would only do x5 damage and burn 50% of the "clip" (which is considered to be 35 rounds, thus it uses 17 shots).

3. Optional Weapon Systems: Can use any field or heavy weapons that are man portable, and is usually issued at least one of the bionic military weapons (page 111 of **Heroes Unlimited™**). They may also be issued one of the giant robot weapons as a heavy weapon pod (page 208 of **Heroes Unlimited™**).

4. Hand to Hand Combat: The hands/wrists and feet/ankles of the 'borg are weighted and reinforced with an advanced alloy similar to the ones used in the Atorian military armor. When combined with special actuators and muscle systems in the shoulders and hips, these weighted limbs make impressive melee weapons that can readily damage armored structures and vehicles. Getting hit by them is not unlike being on the wrong end of a Kisentite club of considerable size. Attacks with melee weapons gain the normal P.S. damage bonus, while unarmed kicks and punches do the following damages:

Damage: Punch — 3D6+25 (for P.S. damage bonus).

Kick — add 2D6 to normal kick damages, plus 25 for P.S. damage bonus.

5. Special Systems and Bonuses: All listed systems are identical to the systems of the same name given in the bionics or robotics section of **Heroes Unlimited™** unless otherwise noted or described.

Radar Signal Detector

Wide-Band Radio Receiver and Transmitter

Single Voice Synthesizer (usually the Thropo's original voice)

Inaudible Frequency Transmitter (robotics)

Advanced Optic System (robotics)

Advanced Audio System (robotics)

Combat computer (robotics)

Targeting laser: +1 to strike with all weapons.

Micro-Radar (robotics)

Poison/Drug/Toxin/Disease Filters: Fitted on lungs and stomach to protect from damaging foreign substances. Adds +5 to save against poisons/drugs/toxins/diseases.

Self Repair: All Atorian 'borgs are outfitted with at least basic self repair nano-systems. These systems allow the 'borg to repair itself at a rate of 10 S.D.C. per day. Typical reserves allow 25 days of self repair before those reserves must be replenished. The 'borg can go into repair standby and "heal" up to 250 points of damage (less if the repair reserves are low) in 9 hours, but the shut down required means it will take her 1D4 minutes to fully power back up should anything come up that requires her attention.

Magic and Psionic Shielding: The 'borg is laced with a magic resistant mineral at key places, making it difficult to focus

magic against it. The head is likewise shielded from psionic energies to the same effect. +2 to save against each, and specifically +3 against the Energy Disruption spell.

Bonuses: The total bonuses for the full conversion Thropo "cian" ('borg), including attributes (the static ones; rolled attributes may contribute additional bonuses, such as M.E. against psionics), but not including skill selections, is +9 to initiative, +5 to strike with melee weapons, +5 to strike with ranged weapons, +5 to parry, +5 to dodge, +25 damage in melee combat, +10 to save vs magic (includes shielding bonus), +2 to save vs psionics (does not include possible attribute bonuses) +13 to save vs inhaled or ingested poisons/toxins/drugs, and +30% to save vs coma/death.

Palladium Fantasy RPG®

Stilt City

Optional Material for

The Palladium Fantasy RPG®

By Sonny Rice

Stilt City.

"A rose growing out of mud."

I believe that was the Western term for the crown jewel of the Land of the South Winds.

The wooden ferry floated easily on top of the swamp's tranquil waters, as insects of all varieties investigated the raft's occupants by sight and by taste. Hard, fleshy smacks reverberated off the trees, followed by the occasional obscenity, as human hands swatted the hungry, multi-legged nuisances.

Sunlight had great difficulty peering through the tops of the towering trees as the leaves and branches formed a natural canopy above our heads. Single beams of yellow pushed their way through the dark green ceiling and touched the surface of the swamp's waters. As our raft drifted towards our destination, we pierced the sun's fragments as if we were passing through yellow satin curtains dangling from the immense trees that surrounded us.

The monolithic oaks stood proudly as they emerged from the waters. Each tree was easily as wide as a house and taller than ten Nimro Giants standing on each other's shoulders. The dark, musty brown of the trees was highlighted by green moss that tightly clung to the wood's rough exterior like wet clothing.

"Is this all the sunlight this city sees?" I asked the raft's captain.

"I'm afraid so, sir. If you want sunlight, you'll have to find another city."

The captain and his men continued pulling the giant-sized rope that connected the docks behind us to the infamous Stilt City. Though the raft looked rather makeshift, it easily supported my weight along with twelve other men and a few uneasy horses. As I examined the raft, I discovered that it was made from the same wood of the gigantic trees that litter the entire swamp. It was a sturdy wood that skimmed the murky waters with ease.

I wouldn't be surprised if the wood was one of the city's exports.

As I tried to steal a glimpse of the city up ahead, I heard a deep baritone voice behind me.

"Are you going to Stilt City for business or pleasure?"

My heart skipped a beat as I turned and faced a Western soldier. By the way his uniform stood out from the other men standing behind him, I could tell he was a high ranking official in the military.

"Pleasure," I answered without a moment's pause. "I heard Stilt City has the best gambling casino south of the Western Empire. Some friends of mine visited last year and came home winners. I thought I'd try my luck."

The Westerner looked me up and down with his cold, blue eyes. "A gambler, huh? Are all gamblers armed as well as you?"

"Only traveling ones."

The other soldiers paused in their every day conversations and turned to me. They were all wearing the same icy expression as their leader while they watched my nervousness get the better of me. The oppressive heat from the infernal swamp combined with my tense body sent drops of sweat pouring down my

brow. No matter how many times I wiped my forehead, stinging droplets still found their way into my eyes.

I was the center of attention on the raft... and I didn't like it.

"Have you ever been to the Western Empire, friend?" the leader continued his interrogation.

"No, sir."

"Well, the Western Empire has the most gambling casinos in the world. All gamblers know that. If you are a gambling man, why haven't you been to the West?"

"I'd like to... but..."

"But?!?" the Western soldier demanded.

I paused for a moment to collect myself for an answer. I knew what I would say next was crucial to my survival. "...the odds are always stacked against you. Some Western casinos have the games rigged so only their favorite clientele win, while other establishments have contracts with the local thieves' guild. I had some friends that came up winners and got mugged as soon as they stepped out of the building. You can keep your Western Empire casinos. I'm probably safer traveling the Baalgor Wastelands without clothes and dipped in honey!"

My ravings disoriented the other Western bystanders as they looked at each other in disbelief to my comments. One after another, the men looked to their commanding officer.

The officer couldn't contain it any longer as laughter bursted out of his mouth. "You are definitely a gambler, friend. A good one at that."

I smiled along with my Western company, but I wasn't the least bit merry.

The soldiers were questioning me for a reason... and I didn't want to know why!

History of Stilt City

Stilt City is an amalgam of influence. Built in a swamp South-East of the Dzereson River by South Wind muscle and Western Empire magic, the city's basic design was patterned after a Nimro military post. With the threat from Nimro increasing daily, the Western Empire called upon their Southern allies to create an "advantageous striking point" in the case of a war with the Giant kingdom. Within miles of the Dzereson River, the preparations for the city began. Hundreds of swamp trees were cut down and used for wood, while a large cluster of ancient oaks were cut evenly twenty feet above the water level and used as base supports for large portions of the city. Other wooden pillars were carried into the swamp by Earth and Water Elementals at the request of their Western Warlock brothers. Within months, wooden streets metamorphosized into city blocks as the tree foundations easily held against torrential downpours and increased swamp water level. Not even the area's largest predators could budge the massive pillars of the city.

As the town was being built, the South Wind's Ducal Parliament and Emperor Itomas agreed that a garrison of Western soldiers would not only raise suspicion about the close ties between the two human kingdoms, but would alarm Mount Nimro and ruin a very strategic position. From these deliberations it was decided that Stilt City would become a major tourist attraction and gambling haven for all travelers, including the Western military.

Many consider Stilt City a smaller version of the Empire of Sin, as brothels and drug dens are found throughout the town to please its large number of Western visitors.

Current Status

Stilt City holds the largest gambling casino in the known world and has become a major tourist attraction for Westerners, second only to Phi and Lopan. Western spies are sent to the South Winds on a rotating shift to investigate weak points in the Nimro's defenses and observe the Giants' actions and military might. Rumored witnesses have seen Western skiffs sailing up and down the Dzereson River, but nothing has been proven.

Stilt City is a major distribution center for its innovative form of paper currency. Thousands of *ducats* are exchanged everyday in the gambling casino. The advantage of having a major casino in a poor kingdom is that higher ranking currency stays in the lower tiered kingdom's vaults, while the cheaper currency gets distributed among the foreign visitors. The downside to such an arrangement is that counterfeiting can quickly murder the poor kingdom's economy... which is the Land of the South Winds' current dilemma.

The Raven's Claw Thieves' Guild has taken a firm hold on the Winner's Table Casino. Out of every twenty ducats given to gambling winners, one ducat is counterfeit. The true currency that is not being handed out is transferred and exchanged for a more valuable currency and placed in the guild's treasury. With the amount of gamblers and Western soldiers, oblivious to the guild's schemes, who enter the casino, the guild easily launders 5,000 to 10,000 ducats a day.

Stilt City is located in the provincial providence of Duchess Aria Glennin, a member of the elite triad of ducals in the parliament. It was Aria who pitched the idea to Emperor Itomas about creating a Western vacation area so neighbors will not be suspicious of the increasing number of soldiers in the South Winds. Her innovations were rewarded with the largest tourist attraction being placed in her providence, but her reward was not without a price.

Duke Lars Theadin, a very vocal opposer of paper currency, sees himself as a member of the South Wind's ducal triad, even though he was never voted in. The Duke views Duchess Aria's gain as his opportunity. Once he provides proof of Aria's incompetence, the other ducals will have no choice but to remove the duchess shamefully and replace her with a more suitable candidate... Duke Lars Theadin.

Stilt City

Population: 60,000

Humans: 55,000

Dwarves: 1,950

Elves: 1,100

Gnomes: 800

Other: 1,150

Plus 5,000 to 15,000 slaves at any given time. Stilt City residents are forbidden to have slaves. A majority of the ducal parliament have expressed concerns about runaway slaves escaping west to the Nimro Kingdom and alerting the Giants about the large Western presence in the city. Tourists, however, may bring in their own slaves without any infraction. The ducals feel that

escaped foreign slaves have not been in the city long enough to give the kingdom's enemies any vital information.

The city is completely surrounded by swamp water. Any Giant that tries to tread the surface of the waters will feel the bottom disappear beneath their feet. The only conventional means of reaching the city is by raft. There are seven rafts that ferry visitors to and from the city's borders. These rafts are connected from a small port on dry land to Stilt City by an immense galleon rope. The rafts themselves are each manned by four barrel-chested Dwarves, who are paid very well for their physical exertion. If further expediency is requested, the Dwarves are accustomed to large tips.

Once the rafts reach the city, stairs lead from the water to the surface of the streets. These wooden stairs are connected to one of the tree bases of the city. The height of the stairs always varies with the weather and the water depth.

The buildings and streets are comprised completely of wood. Every inch of the city has been coated by a South Wind tree sap that protects the town's integrity from fire. If an oil lamp should crash in the middle of the street, the fire will barely scorch the surface. All flame attacks against the city's coated areas will be the same as if a fire was started on stone. Magical fire, on the other hand, will slowly burn (half damage) the protected areas. Though the fire can be easily contained, magical fire is still outlawed within Stilt City. The punishment for this infraction is "croc swimming," which means the outlaw is immediately tossed into the swamp where the most crocodiles are known to swim.

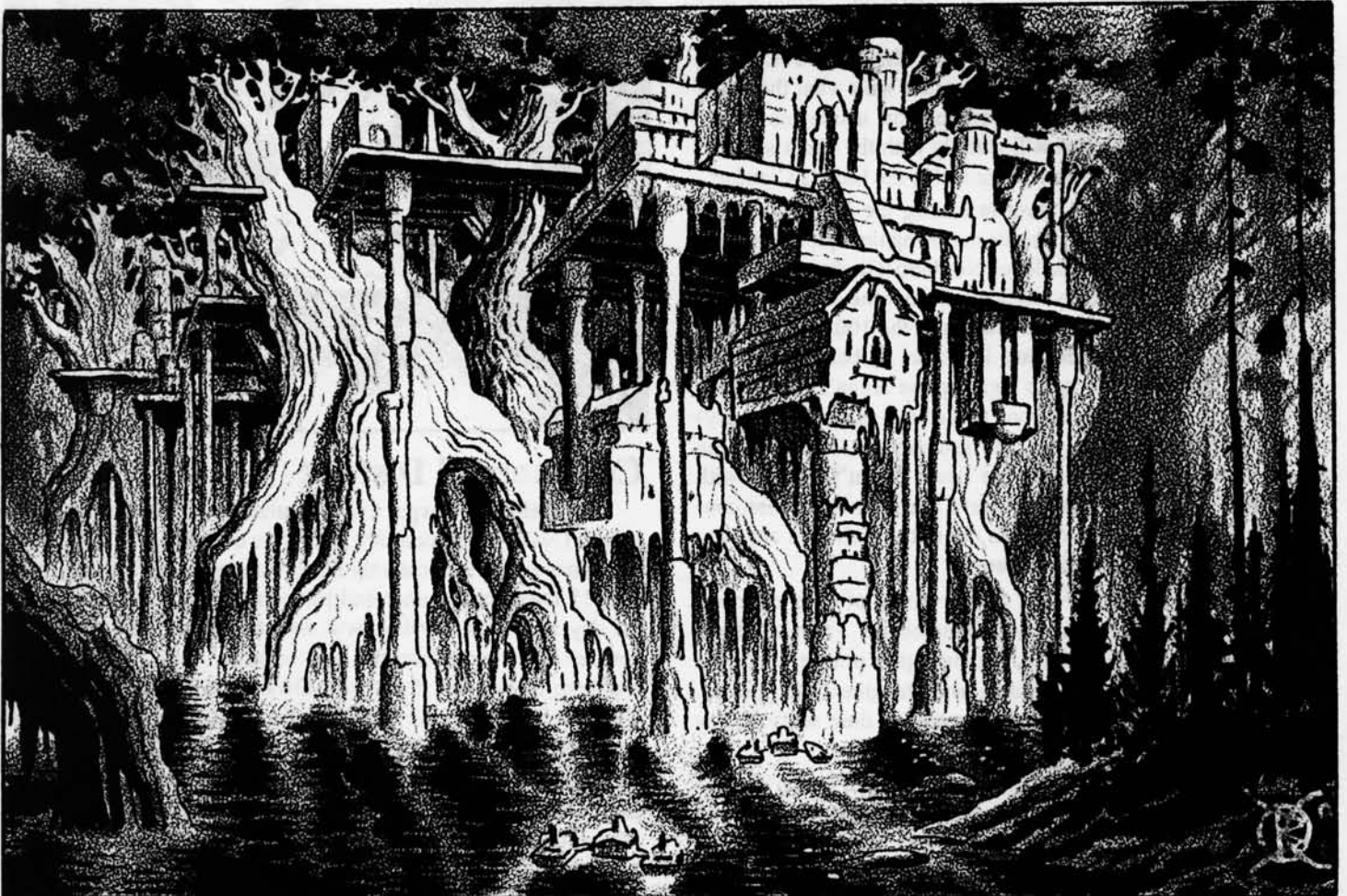
There are several large sections of the city that stand apart from the bulk of it. Each of these districts have their own tree base and several pillars that support the section above the swamp. Beautifully designed arc bridges connect the various districts together and 25 foot (7.6 m) wide bridges stretch from the main section of the city to each specialty district. Five foot (1.5 m) high railings surround each district and line both sides of every single bridge to ensure safety to all travelers. Each section of railing contains 100 S.D.C. Though the wood is sturdy, it can be shattered by precise blows.

Entertainment District (Main Area)

1. Winner's Table Casino. This gigantic structure, which stands proudly in the center of Stilt City, is as large as some city blocks. The building itself has four floors of 24 hour gambling and can easily hold over 20,000 people at once.

A giant stairway leads up to the casino and into the main floor, which is a perfect circle with an arena as its center. Gamblers will be directed to stairways leading to their favorite games by lovely ladies on loan from the city's brothels. The bulk of the "game gamblers" occupy the top three floors while the "sporting gamblers" head straight to the casino's race track and arena. Anything from dog and chariot races to gladiatorial combat can be wagered on down in the "Courage Colosseum."

The casino itself is an artisan's dream. Artwork from all over the world is on display on the top three floors, while large statues of rare monsters and great heroes pose for the masses at the main floor entryway.



The Raven's Claw Thieves' Guild, if a Streetwise roll is made, can be seen on every floor. Some members are working the gambling tables while others are actually being used to spot other thieves. Any gambler entering the casino with foreign coin will most assuredly lose it on the gambling tables.

The city guard, aware of the thieves' guild presence, can be seen peppered throughout the building; however, they are oblivious to the Raven's Claw Guild's activities. The guards are led to believe that the guild members were hired to spot other thieves. Guardsmen and Raven's Claw will work in tandem to take out trouble makers or rogue thieves. Even a large contingent of psychics and Wizards are strewn about the casino in order to keep the playing field level for adventurers with extra abilities. Psionics or magic being used while gambling is a quick way to be thrown out of the casino... after being pummeled by the city guard and thieves' guild.

The Winner's Table Casino is a fair establishment. The only time guild members bend the rules is when winners are too infrequent. They have been known to throw a game or two in order to launder their false paper currency.

2. Lady's Comfort. A large inn transformed into a brothel, that does fantastic business being in close proximity to the casino.

3. The Wingless Sprite Tavern. A high traffic drinking hall where a majority of the out-of-towners frequent.

4. The Cloudy Haze. A large drug den with a full supply of narcotics from every known region. Customers may sample products in the public area, which is lined with multi-colored silk cushions, or they may take their "medicine" inside a personal "Haze Room." These rooms charge by the hour. The Cloudy Haze has an arrangement with the Lady's Comfort brothel. Both business can supply the other with what the client asks for. If a customer wants a companion inside his "Haze Room," the Lady's Comfort will comply with the client's needs. Likewise, drugs are easily attainable inside the Lady's Comfort.

5. The Mud Arena. A favorite among the Westerners and Southies. Any warrior may test his mettle against pit champions Tholgrim Thorinson, an 8th level Northern Gladiator, or Fang Kuei Lei, 7th level Janissary discharged from the Imperial Army for psychotic behavior. Visitors may enter the 100 foot (30.5 m) radius arena themselves or send in slaves to battle the house champions. If nobody is up to fighting the arena's champions, challenges can be made to anyone that comes through the entryway. It is not unusual to see old grudges get settled on the arena's mud floor. Battling to the death doesn't happen with each match, but some pit fighters have been known to lose control during combat. Death matches are not punished in any way as long as they remain inside the arena.

6. Graigel's Theater. For a great evening of entertainment, Graigel's Theater comes highly recommended. From sundown to sunup, actors perform plays, dancing girls prance about the stage, and clowns fill the building with laughter. One performance after another keeps customers glued to their seats as they drink the house's overpriced ale.

7. The Silk Inn. A pricey, four-story inn with lavish decorations. Run by a combination of Elves and Southies, the Silk Inn is the cleanest and quietest hotel within the city. The City Guard has been known to patrol inside the inn during their rounds on the city's streets. Any kind of trouble will not be tolerated, and any security deposit will not be returned.

8. Croc Skin Inn. Even though it is cheap, the Croc Skin Inn is the roughest inn of the entertainment district. Every subsequent room holds delinquents, roughians, or troublemakers too full of energy to sleep late at night. Party members will have great difficulty sleeping in this inn.

9. Amora's Fortunes. Amora is a true fortune teller from the jungles of the South Winds. Her craft, handed down from generation to generation, is well known throughout the city. Amora is an excellent plot piece that can give the party clues to puzzles they can't solve or may warn the group of impending danger.

10. Evening's Pleasures. This brothel is well known for accommodating customers by having females from a large variety of different races. Two immense Southern twin guards make sure nothing gets out of hand.



Commercial District

11. Firehair's Forge. Old "Ramhammer" Firehair is a one legged Dwarven armorsmith. Being the only armorer in the city, Firehair's Forge is constantly busy. Run by Rammhammer himself, 15 Dwarves hammer and pound metal in shifts throughout the day and night. Firehair will do work personally, but it will cost ten times more than the regular price. Also, if people have problems at *Kobolds R Betr*, the Dwarves will work secretly on weapons for double the regular price. Exceptional weapons and armor prices are adjusted accordingly.

12. Aryx and Berggrow's Meadhouse. Aryx, a retired 7th level Dwarven mercenary, and Berggrow, his Northern barbarian partner, have decided to hang up their battle axes and invest into a brewery where you can get "good" mead. Nobody knows Aryx and Berggrow's secret ingredient, but the fermented honey

has triple the alcohol level. Also, if a saving throw vs poison is not made, the drinker will feel very agitated and *will* start a brawl within the bar. The Meadhouse's owners are always prepared for the effects of the house mead by having clubs stashed. Whenever a customer becomes rowdy, Aryx and Bergrow will jump over the bar and club the drunkard into submission. Bar fights happen so often, city guards have ceased entering the establishment, even under the most dire of circumstances. They feel any visitor foolish enough to trust a Dwarf and a barbarian's brew deserves the trouble they receive.

City residents avoid this establishment like a plague.

13. Mahaate's Sculptures. Mahaate is a brilliant Southern artist who creates lifelike statues, busts, and statuettes. Much of his work can be seen throughout the city (Winner's Table Casino, various temples, etc.).

14. Kobolds R Betr. 6 very obnoxious Kobolds run this weapon shop. Any item brought in that is not Kobold-made, even a Dwarven weapon, will be ridiculed with the utmost vulgarity. Each Kobold will take turns insulting the item and its creator. Though the Kobolds will not insult the customers, they will accuse every human of "chewing Oponi weed."

15. Foreign Leathers. This store is filled with leather goods and fine leathers from the Eastern Territory, Western Empire and the Northern Wilderness. They also have enough raw materials to make custom items.

16. Stables.

17. General Needs. A general store run by a very charismatic Southern woman, well known for talking customers into leaving with things they don't need.

18. Herbs and Spice Shop. A well stocked store run by a first rate herbologist with an obsession with personal cleanliness. The Herbs and Spice Shop is also a front for the Raven's Claw Thieves' Guild counterfeiting operation. The closed door behind the store's counter leads to a warehouse of spices. Guildmembers work diligently by mixing the components needed for the currency's ink and using a crude form of a printing press. Once the false currency is created, guildmembers place the counterfeit currency inside large spice bags. If found and opened, characters will only see spice unless they sieve the spice with bare hands. The paper currency makes up the core of the spice bags.

These spice bags are put on a wagon and delivered to the rear of Winner's Table Casino. The reasoning behind the large abundance of spice bags is because it is used for food and drink inside the casino. The spice bags are placed inside a storage room, where the counterfeit bills are removed and taken to the casino for distribution.

The herbologist is quite aware of the operation, but knows what Kraigen does to anyone who spills the information to unwanted ears. He is deathly afraid of Kraigen, and his cleanliness insanity will increase ten-fold whenever anyone inquires about the guild, the spice bags, or Kraigen.

19. The Passout Inn. A low priced inn catering to heavy drinkers and gamblers down on their luck. The smell in the inn takes some time to get used to.

Industrial District

20. Zeel's Carpentry and Woodworking. Zeel is a Gnome with a mastery in carpentry. When homes need additions or small repairs done, Zeel is the "man" for the job. During busy times, Zeel will call upon his family members to help out with business.

21. Water Purifier. Len Krae Ling, a 9th level Western Water Warlock, is in charge of the city's water sanitation. Len, not affiliated with the Western soldiers, will leave her studies every so often to purify the swamps' waters underneath the city; where large amounts of waste build up after a day or two. She is paid very well for her work and keeps to herself within the city.

22. The Flying Crocodile Tavern. A quiet and low cost tavern which is popular among the workers of the Sawmill and other employees of the Industrial District.

23. Sawmill. Owned and overseen by Bargo Vicik, Stilt City's richest noble.

24. Fire Watchers. Three 6th level Warlocks (Air, Fire, and Water) can always be found in this tower during "quiet" periods. They are very quick to act when magical fire is being displayed.

Temple District

25. Temple to Sebek. A small but distinguished temple with a large, open crocodile mouth edifice in front. Worshipers walk into the mouth and climb the stairs that are chiselled out of the structure's tongue. Sebek worshipers arouse great suspicion within the city, but are tolerated because of the total lack of proof of any wrongdoings.

26. Temple to Michla-Da. A tiny following of mischievous worshipers who take great joy in pulling pranks on any citizen. Main targets for their mischief are Western soldiers and any Ippotomi worshipers.

27. Temple to Ippotomi. A popular church within the city and well known for their healing abilities, in exchange for a small donation, and great patience for all travelers.

Residential District

A majority of the city's permanent residents live in this section. The middle class live to the north while the poorer houses reside south. This area lies south of the Entertainment District. Notable residents include:

- **Salor Barkskin** is a 5th level Druid who feels the city is built from the corpses of his brothers, the trees. Salor spends most of his time berating the Sawmill for the further degradation of his brethren.
- **Monaneus** was a member of the Steel Serpents Thieves' Guild before the Raven's Claw guild eradicated all competition. He is one of the few people that can spot counterfeit currency, and will throw it to the streets after picking a stranger's pocket.
- **Orion Cullin's** real name is unknown. The Western spy spends most of his free time in the Entertainment District, listening to the public and keeping a watchful eye on the suspicious. He reports to the high ranking Janissary currently in the city.
- **Xianna Xe** is a retired, 7th level female Bounty Hunter. She enjoys the company of other Southies such as herself, and

holds nothing but contempt for the Western soldiers. Xianna can always be found with a drink in her hand at Aryx and Berggrow's Meadhouse. Her favorite pastime is helping the owners bounce disruptive Western soldiers.

Western District

To the untrained eye, this district looks to be filled with inns. But any party member making a Military Etiquette roll can clearly see that these buildings are soldier barracks. There are 5,000 Western soldiers "vacationing" here at all times. 900 of these soldiers are Imperial Janissaries.

During the troops' rotation, only 500 soldiers are allowed to wander the city at one time. This strategy disguises the Westerners' true numbers within the city.

Any strangers, or non-military Westerners, will immediately be turned back from the Western District.

28. Soldier Barracks.

29. Janissary Barracks.

30. Officer Quarters.

31. Stables.

32. Blacksmith. The Western blacksmithy is hidden within the large buildings and kept out of earshot of the city's general population.

Notable Western Soldiers who are stationed at the city on a long term basis include:

- **Hathor Vainen**, whose sole responsibility is to keep the soldiers out of trouble. Whenever Western soldiers are caught in a bar brawl or something with high property damage, Hathor uses his high Mental Affinity to smooth things over with the local authorities. Hathor can always be found in the Entertainment District.
- **Tsun the Grey** is a 9th level Janissary. While Hathor's job is to verbally keep Westerners out of trouble, Tsun's means are purely physical. Tsun is nicknamed "the Grey" because of his demeanor. This high ranking Janissary is not at all social or friendly towards his comrades (or anyone else). Western soldiers know that when Tsun enters a tavern, the men had better be on their best behavior. All soldiers who publicly display drunken behavior answer to Tsun. If any soldiers are in mortal danger during one of their drunken brawls, Tsun will step in to end the combat quickly with no casualties... unless one of the combatants tries to kill Tsun for interjecting.
- **Captain Jangi Priam** is a good natured officer with a war story about every kingdom in the realm. Captain Jangi is the outpost's orientation officer. Every new recruit that comes to the city must listen to Captain Jangi's longwinded presentation about the history of Stilt City, and the responsibilities of each soldier while "vacationing." Captain Jangi is one of the few officers who will drink with low ranking soldiers. The war veteran will sit and talk with anyone who is willing to listen to his outrageous stories. Somehow, Captain Jangi always ends up on the city detail, where he plays a vacationer extremely well by drinking heavily. Captain Jangi and Tsun the Grey have very conflicting views on a soldier's code of conduct within the city.

Ducal District

Only the city's rich citizens, South Wind nobles, and visiting Duchesses and Dukes have residences here. It is in this district where a majority of the ducal parliament have winter homes.

33. Lars Theadin's Temporary Residence.

34. Aria Glennin's Temporary Residence.

35. Nestor Helgeth is the mayor of Stilt City, and is well known for his haughty celebrations and banquets. Though outsiders see him in a place of power, Nestor has very limited control over the day to day operations of the city. He knows that the Westerners play an important role to the city, but he was never informed of the reason. Nestor's sole purpose is to make sure the city runs smoothly while ducal representatives are not in the city.

36. Bargo Vicik is the noble who oversees the city's wood supply. It is Bargo's decision to cut down neighboring trees for repairs or import wood from outside the area. This extremely rich noble knows every major wood exporter in the realm. Even if a major magical fire broke out in the city, Bargo has enough backstock to repair all damages done. After a long day of work, he can be found at the Winner's Table Casino.

City Guard District

37. Town Guardhouse.

38. City Jailhouse.

39. Municipal Building.

40. Training Grounds.

Major Non-Player Characters

Duke Lars Theadin

Duke Lars Theadin is the epitome of a politician. While he informs the public of what they want to hear, the duke secretly plans on ways to further his position in the realm. Theadin is a middle-aged, balding South Wind native. He uses his riches and power to increase his influence within the ducal parliament.

Duke Theadin has been a member of the South Wind's ducal parliament for half his life. He inherited his fortune from his father, who in turn inherited power from his parents. The Theadin family name has been one of prestige and commands respect. Duke Lars Theadin is the only member of the Theadin bloodline who has not been a member of the ducal parliament's elite triad. A long line of Theadins created the very laws that the Land of the South Winds follows today. Lars feels it is his legacy to sit among the triad; whether they know it or not.

When paper currency was brought up, Lars contested against the innovative "ducat." He felt that paper money was preposterous and it would only flaunt the human kingdom's poor financial state. Duke Lars was the only member of the parliament who voted against the ducat.

Furious, Lars plotted against his fellow members of the parliament. After learning the ingredients to the currency's ink, which only parliament members know, Lars fashioned templates and designed a way to counterfeit the ducat. He knew that if



enough of the false currency flooded the kingdom's streets, it would shatter the economy... with Duke Lars Theadin announcing to everyone, "I told you so."

Once the plans of Stilt City were being laid out, Lars saw his opportunity. He contacted one of his personal thugs, Doran Swan, and hired him to create a thieves' guild. With the large financial backings of the duke, Swan gathered a crew of experts and immediately took a foothold in Stilt City once it was built.

After Duke Lars trained Swan how to replicate the South Wind's ducat, the counterfeiting commenced on a regular basis. Lars slowly stepped out of the picture and relied on his sniveling Goblin, Sneeth, to issue orders when need be.

In order to keep Swan honest and make sure nobody learns of the ties between the Raven's Claw guild and Duke Lars Theadin, the duke sent in one of his court assassins, Irador Kraigen, to join the thieves. Nobody is aware of Kraigen's involvement with Lars.

Once enough false currency is distributed or the Raven's Claw gets caught, Duke Lars will "cut" all ties from him to the counterfeiting operation and step forward to begin the kingdom's "healing process."

Duke Lars Theadin

8th Level Nobleman

Alignment: Miscreant.

Attributes: I.Q.: 15, M.E.: 11, M.A.: 14, P.S.: 9, P.P.: 16, P.E.: 12, P.B.: 12, Spd: 14.

Hit Points: 32, S.D.C.: 25.

Attacks Per Melee: Five.

Bonuses: +2 damage, +2 to roll with punch/fall/impact, +2 to pull punch, +3 to parry and dodge, +2 to strike.

Other Combat Info: Critical Strike on 19 or 20.

Weapons: Lars always carries a jewel encrusted rapier (+2 to parry and +1 to strike) at his side, and has two identical daggers envenomed with Scorpion's Blood poison hidden in his boots.

Magic Items: Cloak of Armor (A.R. 14, S.D.C. 150) and a medallion which gives the wearer a +1 to save vs psionics bonus.

Other Equipment: Being a duke of high standing, Lars Theadin is capable of acquiring any weapon or item he needs. If the duke considers the item too high in price, he will order court assassins or third party thieves to snatch the item for his person. Duke Lars will also have one half ounce of Mellina (Bliss) powder concealed within his tunic.

Skills of Note: Lars has the standard skills for Nobles, along with W.P. Sword, W.P. Knife, and Use and Recognize Poisons.

Duchess Aria Glennin

Duchess Aria Glennin is a stunning middle-aged woman. She uses her good looks to beguile men, and her intelligence to influence women. Not only is Aria a member of the ducal triad, but she is one of the few members of the parliament who actually puts the Land of the South Winds and her duchy before her personal gains.



Duchess Aria sees the future of the Western Empire's relationship with the South Winds as a very prosperous one. She adores Emperor Itomas and hopes to be a leader with as great an influence as he has.

Now that she is working with the Western Empire personally and gaining a large amount of money from the Winner's Table Casino, Aria is finally accomplishing all of her dreams with only one minor setback: she doesn't trust her fellow parliament members. She knows there are others conspiring against her, but she is not sure who. Duchess Aria has spies watching all of her fellow ducals. The person who worries her the most is Duke Lars, who has been spending a large amount of time in Stilt City away from his own duchy. Aria's concerns have recently increased when her spy never returned from the Winner's Table Casino.

Duchess Aria Glennin

9th Level Noblewoman

Alignment: Scrupulous.

Attributes: I.Q.: 16, M.E.: 13, M.A.: 14, P.S.: 10, P.P.: 10, P.E.: 13, P.B.: 17, Spd: 15.

Hit Points: 38, S.D.C.: 19.

Attacks Per Melee: Six.

Bonuses: +2 damage, +2 to roll with punch/fall/impact, +2 to pull punch, +2 to parry and dodge, +1 to strike.

Other Combat Info: Critical Strike on 19 or 20, Body Throw/Flip.

Weapons: Aside from her magical weapon, Aria's only weapon is her ivory handled dagger which rests in her belt.

Magic Items: Duchess Aria's main magical item is a short sword enchanted with Blinding Flash (three times a day). The other magical items on her person are potions or charms which increase her influencing abilities.

Other Equipment: Like Duke Lars Theadin, Aria is a highly respected and wealthy individual. Duchess Aria is quite capable of getting her hands on any item or weapon she needs.

Skills of Note: Standard for a Noble; plus, Aria has knows all human languages of the realm.

Guildmaster Doran Swan

Doran Swan is a thief of the first order. His quick hands combined with his raw determination have sent him shooting up the ladder in the underworld. The slick, obsidian-haired Swan worked regularly for Duke Lars Theadin because of Swan's code of client secrecy. Every time Lars saw something he liked, he hired Swan to steal it for him.

When Lars approached Swan about creating a guild, the thief looked at the position as another paid job. Swan brought on family members, friends, and ex-partners to build the core of the organization. From this core, the others went out and brought in their companions and created the guild within two months.

Once Stilt City was built, thieves from all over the area converged for territory. Swan's guild and a guild known as the Steel Serpents wiped out all competition. At the end of the thief war, Swan's close knit group reigned supreme. Swan named the group the Raven's Claw, after one of his favorite tattoos that line his sleek form.

When the Winner's Table Casino opened, Swan approached Duchess Aria about being hired on to spot other thieves in the casino. From the prodding of Duke Lars Theadin, Aria agreed to

pay for the guild's "protection." After the deal, thievery became non-existent inside the casino.

Only four people know about Duke Lars involvement with the guild's counterfeiting operation: the duke himself and his Goblin henchman, Doran Swan and Kraigen. As long as the counterfeit money continues to flow into the public, Swan will remain in charge.

Doran Swan

10th Level Thief

Alignment: Aberrant.

Attributes: I.Q.: 11, M.E.: 16, M.A.: 12, P.S.: 14, P.P.: 18, P.E.: 15, P.B.: 9, Spd: 12.

Hit Points: 47, S.D.C.: 29.

Attacks Per Melee: Six.

Bonuses: +2 damage, +4 to roll with punch/fall/impact, +4 to pull punch, +4 to parry and dodge, +3 to strike.

Other Combat Info: Critical Strike on 19 or 20, Body Throw/Flip.

Weapons: Swan is never without his twin long swords. The Raven's Claw guildmaster also has four daggers hidden on his person. Two of the daggers have Numbstrike poison inside their scabbards.

Magic Items: Swan owns a magical set of noiseless, full chain mail armor (A.R. 14, S.D.C. 44). He also has a short sword (+3 to parry). This short sword has the "Teleport to Wielder" enchantment placed on it. Swan leaves the blade in a safe place and uses it when he becomes weaponless.

Other Equipment: Swan carries his lock picks and tools as a force of habit.

Skills of Note: Doran Swan has every major Rogue/Thief and Espionage skill. The guildmaster has also been known to use the following skills: Sign Language, Boxing, W.P. Paired Weapons, Recognize Weapon Quality, and Literacy (Southern and Western).

Irador Kraigen

Kraigen is a paranoid, no-nonsense killer. His lack of emotion and impeccable skill make him a deadly adversary. Most people remember a bald albino, but Kraigen keeps his dark cloaks close to his form in order to hide his face from potential witnesses.

Kraigen was an up-and-coming assassin in Duke Lars' court. With fifteen successful "missions" under his belt, he quickly attracted the attention of the duke himself. Duke Lars was so impressed, he brought Kraigen on as a personal bodyguard in order to see his skills up close. Not only did the court assassin impress the duke, he also became a confidant for the duke's plans.

It was Kraigen's idea to infiltrate the Raven's Claw guild and murder potential problems. Since he remained masked as the duke's bodyguard and assassin, nobody is able to connect the two individuals.

Kraigen's orders are simple. His first order is to kill anyone who learns of the counterfeiting operation that is not a member of the Raven's Claw guild. Second, kill any Raven's Claw guild members that learn of the duke's relationship with Swan. Third, when ordered, cut all links to Duke Lars.



Sneeth

Sneeth is a vile, little "Yes Man" who Duke Lars sends on errands. Sneeth is the sole source of communication from Duke Lars Theadin to the Raven's Claw guildmaster, Doran Swan. Duke Lars prefers using the hairy green-skin because of his uncanny ability to remain hidden when traveling Stilt City to deliver messages.

All of Sneeth's messages are simple and easy for him to remember, such as, "Watch out for a Westerner with a scar across his eye." or "Increase your production." Duke Lars would never trust Sneeth with vital information. However, a clever party could tail Sneeth and make the connection between the duke and the Raven's Claw guild. This discovery will bring Kraigen to the forefront and he will try to dispose of the party after he has murdered Sneeth.

Sneeth

3rd Level Goblin Peasant

Alignment: Miscreant.

Attributes: I.Q.: 5, M.E.: 7, M.A.: 7, P.S.: 9, P.P.: 14, P.E.: 10, P.B.: 5, Spd: 16.

Hit Points: 14, S.D.C.: 12.

Attacks Per Melee: Four.

Bonuses: +2 to roll with punch/fall/impact, +2 to pull punch, and +2 to parry and dodge.

Other Combat Info: Kick attacks: Karate style kick does 2D4 or Snap Kick 1D6 damage.

Weapons: Sneeth's only weapon is a small knife. Since Sneeth never enters combat, he doesn't carry weapons.

Magic Items: A Ring of Prowling, which gives the wearer +20% to their Prowl skill.

Other Equipment: None. Sneeth receives food, clothes, and gold from Duke Lars Theadin. Sneeth is not allowed to carry equipment or any item of importance because of his race.

Skills of Note: Escape Artist, Pick Locks, Pick Pockets, Palming, and Prowl.

The Average Stilt City Guard

Hit Points: Average 12 to 20, S.D.C.: Average 18.

Attributes: All are average.

P.P.E: Average 9.

Appearance: All city guards wear black studded leather armor along with green sashes. Helmets are rarely worn because of the tremendous amount of heat in the swamp. Both male and female Southerners are able to join the city guard.

Disposition: Most city guards are friendly towards outsiders, considering outsiders are the majority inside Stilt City. The city guard, however, treat any monster race with the same prejudices as their Southern brothers. The majority of monster races that are in the Land of the South Winds are slaves, so "free" green-skins are not treated with a lot of respect. City guards will not actively harass monster races, but they will not help them either. Elves and Dwarves are treated with respect.

Experience Level: 1st to 3rd level Soldiers are the average for the city guard. 4th to 6th level are reserved for Captains and Sergeants.

Magic: None.

Psionics: None.

Combat: Four attacks per melee round.

Irador Kraigen

6th Level Assassin

Alignment: Anarchist.

Attributes: I.Q.: 10, M.E.: 18, M.A.: 7, P.S.: 16, P.P.: 15, P.E.: 19, P.B.: 8, Spd: 12.

Hit Points: 30, S.D.C.: 32.

Attacks Per Melee: Seven.

Bonuses: +3 to roll with punch/impact/fall, +3 to pull punch, +4 to damage and disarm, +3 to parry and dodge and +2 to strike.

Other Combat Info: Body Flip/Throw.

Weapons: Kraigen always carries his Dwarven made falchion (+4 to damage). This is his favorite backstab weapon. Kraigen also carries a bolo, three concealed daggers, and a crossbow with 20 bolts.

Armor: Studded Leather Armor (A.R. 13, S.D.C. 38).

Magic Items: Kraigen wears a Ring of Invisibility (10 minutes, three times a day). He never uses the ring during combat; only when assassinating victims.

Other Equipment: Kraigen prefers using masks during assassination attempts. The assassin has several form-fitting, black masks inside one of his sacks.

Skills of Note: Prowl, Sniper, Intelligence, Boxing, Detect Ambush, Palming, and Streetwise are the bulk of Kraigen's skills.

Bonuses: The average soldier will have Hand to Hand: Basic. Higher ranked soldiers will have learned Hand to Hand: Expert.

Damage: By weapon type.

Skills of Note: Military Etiquette and W.P. Sword.

Weapons and Equipment: The standard equipment for guardsman is a long sword, a dagger, one set of studded leather armor, a green sash, and one pair of black leather boots.

The Average Western Soldier

Hit Points: Average 15 to 25, S.D.C.: Average 25.

Attributes: All are average.

P.P.E: Average 9.

Appearance: All Western Soldiers, with the exception of officers, wear full suits of chain mail and have a shield strapped to their back. While visiting Stilt City, new arrivals will sweat profusely. All of the soldiers' uniforms will be spit polished and extremely neat, even when the soldiers are inebriated.

Disposition: If Stilt City is a vacation spot, then the Western Soldiers are not enjoying themselves. The only time a Westerner will be seen smiling or having a good time is when he is winning inside the gambling casino. Even when a small group is frequenting a tavern, they will be all business. Drunken soldiers, however, will be extremely aggressive.

Experience Level: 1st to 3rd level Soldiers are the average for Western Soldiers with the rank of Private. Corporals are 3rd level, Sergeants are 4th, Lieutenants are 5th and 6th, while Captains are 7th and 8th. There will be one Major (8th or 9th level) in the Western section at all times.

Magic: None.

Psionics: None.

Combat: Four attacks per melee round for Privates. Three or four for ranks of Lieutenant through Major.

Bonuses: +1 to save vs Horror Factor at levels 2, 4, 6, and 8; plus +2 initiative and +1 to strike in addition to the Hand to Hand: Basic skill. Higher ranked soldiers will have learned Hand to Hand: Expert.

Damage: By weapon type.

Skills of Note: Military Etiquette, Climb/Scale Walls, Running, Forced March, Body Building and Weightlifting, W.P. Knife or W.P. Sword, W.P. Spear or Pole Arm and W.P. Shield.

Weapons and Equipment: Long sword, dagger, and medium-sized shield. Also, some soldiers will be carrying a backpack along with several personal belongings. All low ranking soldiers are issued full chain mail while officers wear double mail or scale mail.

The Average Raven's Claw Guild Member

Hit Points: Average 10 to 18, S.D.C.: Average 16.

Attributes: All are average, with a higher than average Physical Prowess.

P.P.E: Average 9.

Appearance: Thieves are varied in appearance, but all are of Southern descent. The best way to distinguish a Raven's Claw guild member is by a tattoo on the right side of their neck of a bloody bird claw. Some members cover their tattoo, while others prominently display their position in life.

Disposition: For a thieves' guild, The Raven's Claw are actually pleasant members of Stilt City's society. A majority of

the income their guild makes is from counterfeiting the South Wind's paper currency. The Raven's Claw also get a hefty sum from Duchess Aria for "protection" and guarding the Winner's Table Casino from other thieves. An occasional guild member will also work the Entertainment District to sharpen their pickpocket skills. The only time the party will see a vicious guild member is when characters try to steal or cheat inside the city's casino or if the party meets up with Kraigen's loyalists. Otherwise, the Raven's Claw guild members are not troublemakers.

Experience Level: 1st to 3rd level Thieves are the average for the Raven's Claw guild members.

Magic: None.

Psionics: None.

Combat: Four attacks per melee round are the average.

Bonuses: The average Thief will have Hand to Hand: Basic. Higher ranked Thieves will have learned Hand to Hand: Expert or Assassin.

Damage: By weapon type.

Skills of Note: Card Shark, Concealment, Palming, Pick Pockets, Prowl, Streetwise, Forgery and W.P. Knife.

Weapons and Equipment: All Raven's Guild members' weapons and equipment vary for each member. The "thugs" wear heavier armor with large weapons, while the "stealths" wear no armor and carry concealable weapons.

Adventure Ideas and Plot Hooks

Where Do We Begin?

The adventure in Stilt City can begin in many ways.

- The party is hired by Duke Lars Theadin to investigate the Raven's Claw Thieves' Guild at the Winner's Table Casino. Duke Lars tells the party about how Duchess Aria hired the guild to watch over the casino's business and keep thieves out. The Duke feels the guild has their own agenda and wants the party to find out what it is. In reality, the duke has distributed enough counterfeit ducats, and wants the party to help him shut it down and make him look the kingdom's savior.
- The party is hired by Duchess Aria, who is convinced there is a problem with the Winner's Table Casino. She informs the group of her spy that is missing and of the Raven's Claw Thieves' Guild that is working for the casino. She will pay for proof of any conspiracy.
- The adventurers have already made it to Stilt City. Once there, they party notices missing person signs throughout the entire city. A reward is posted for an investigation.
- Shortly after the party enters the city, the crew gets suckered into a brawl with some arrogant Western soldiers. While sitting inside the city's jail, Nestor Helgeth approaches the group and offers to barter for their jail time. He will free the group from their week long sentence inside the cell in exchange for their help in solving the missing persons problem.
- After visiting the city for a time, the party is approached by an older couple who is hiring adventurers to find their son. Their son went to the Winner's Table Casino and never came

back. This couple are going from tavern to tavern asking every group of strangers for help. Their pay is minimal.

Where's the Crime?

The large number of disappearances that have been occurring are because of one man: Kraigen. Irador Kraigen has several thieves' guild members that are loyal to him. Whenever word gets back to the assassin about people asking suspicious questions, or if someone witnesses something they shouldn't have, Kraigen and his men move swiftly and permanently. Kraigen's paranoia has run rampant, as he has thrown innocents over the side of the railings into crocodile waters. Anyone even watching the spice wagon move from the Herbs and Spice Shop to the Winner's Table Casino is subject to his suspicion.

Red Herrings

If the G.M. wants to put more of a mystery into the adventure, or if the party members are experienced gamers, throw some curves to the group. Make the party earn their deductive reasoning experience points.

- If the party is investigating disappearances, bring attention to the Sebek priests and worshipers. Maybe the party witnesses the priests throw a body over the railing into crocodile invested waters. The body could be a deceased worshiper or a willing sacrifice (like many of the Aztec sacrifices). The Sebek priests could also be seen vandalizing Ippotomi's temple. Once a party member makes a Religion Lore roll, Sebek's suspicious nature will get the better of the group.
- The Westerners did it! The Empire of Sin's reputation should be used to its fullest. Have the party witness an altercation between drunken Western soldiers and a local. Within a day, drawings of the local turn up on missing posters. In reality, the local witnessed something he shouldn't have and Kraigen threw him to the crocodiles. Who would believe Westerners to be innocent? Let's just hope the party isn't "brave" enough to enter the Western District.
- A crazy Druid is running rampant in the city's streets. He cries out loud and curses every city member that walks on the "bones of his dead brothers." Is the Druid crazy enough to avenge the death of a tree? Let the party find out for themselves.

People Worth the Time

Like any investigation, the party will have to acquire information from NPCs. 90% of the city is clueless to the criminal activities taking place. Some city folk will bring up the disappearances of residents or tourists, while others might point at the red herrings. Here are some examples of people who may provide vital information for the adventure:

- A greedy Raven's Claw guild member. Pay the fellow enough money and he may tip the party about the counterfeit operation. This slip-up will cost him his life.
- Steel Serpent Thieves' Guild members may still be wandering the city looking for scraps from Raven's Claw's table. Certain members of the rival guild may be vindictive about losing their hold on the city and having their numbers wiped out. They may know about the counterfeiting, but they won't know how or where. When questioned, the thieves will blame any disappearances on the Raven's Claw guild.

- Amora the gypsy doesn't have specific information, but if she does a reading, clues will be revealed in her visions.
- When someone mentions prostitutes, they only think of one thing. What most people forget is that these women are the ears of the streets. They may know about the counterfeiting, but they don't know who is responsible. They know about the disappearances in the city, but they know better than to ask questions about it or talk about it.

Who Wants Some?

This adventure is more of a mystery to be solved rather than an all out slug-fest. If the party is a combat oriented group, then small battles can easily be thrown in. Near the beginning of the adventure, the party can meet up with some drunken Western soldiers or another adventuring party that feel that they can beat any other mercs in the city. A second battle would take place if the party were asking questions anywhere near the Winner's Table Casino. Kraigen has spies littered around the area and will be informed of any "suspicious" characters. Kraigen will immediately dispatch a group of lower level guild members to attack the party and throw them into croc invested waters. A third and final battle would take place after the party has discovered that the duke or the Raven's Claw guild is behind the counterfeiting. The party may end up fighting Kraigen and some of his cronies, or Swan along with his high level thief friends. The battle can depend on what the party discovers and/or the level of the party.

The End?

No matter the outcome of the adventure, The Raven's Claw Thieves' Guild will take the fall because of Duke Lars Theadin's well laid plans. Sneeth and Swan will be murdered either by Kraigen or by another of the duke's court assassins. If Kraigen himself is alive, Duke Lars will have his other assassins throw Kraigen to the crocodiles in order to sever all ties that lead back to the duke. If the party approaches Duchess Aria and informs her of all the doings, she will believe everything the party says, but will be unable to do anything without proof.

Even if the party captures the counterfeiting templates and the ink ingredients, The Raven's Claw guild will still be blamed. Once the duke murders the guildmaster, Sneeth and Kraigen, the only other person who knows about the false currency is Duke Lars Theadin. All guildmembers believe the counterfeiting ring to be solely a guild brainchild. Any guildmembers who learned of the duke's involvement were disposed of by Kraigen.

The only way that the party can expose Duke Lars is to capture Swan and protect him from numerous assassination attempts. After some convincing, he will go to Duchess Aria and explain everything; however, it is highly unlikely Swan will survive.

Depending on which way the party goes, the group may not even learn of Duke Lars' involvement at all. When they expose the counterfeit operation or the disappearance problem, the Raven's Claw guild may be the only criminals the party has learned about. If this is so, Duke Lars will congratulate the party and reward them immensely for helping stop "a travesty to the Land of the South Winds."

Dweomer Mage O.C.C.

Optional Material for The Palladium Fantasy RPG®, Rifts®, and Other Games

By James Calder

In the academy of magical study, there are spell casters and there are spell *crafters*. Wizards, sorcerers, and arcanists fall into the former category while the Dweomer Mage falls into the latter. While sorcerers study the mystic arts to channel potential psychic energy (P.P.E.) and convert it into spectacular effects, it is the Dweomer Mage's calling to study the actual act of channeling magical energy.

The Dweomer Mage is not content in merely converting the ambient P.P.E. into a fire ball or using it to read lost scrolls, the Dweomer Mage is more interested in the flow of P.P.E., and uses this interest to accent, improve, or even stifle magical flow. Imagine a hydroelectric dam, for instance. The sorcerer is the consumer of the electricity, using it to power his appliances and electrical equipment, whereas the Dweomer Mage is the builder of the dam, regulating the flow of water, thereby increasing or decreasing the amount of electric power distributed. That is one of the many areas that Dweomer Mages find themselves studying.

In controlling and harnessing the flow of P.P.E., the Dweomer Mage can hinder or help other spellcasters or magical creatures by increasing, diverting or severing their link to the flow.

Unfortunately, in becoming the master of the flow of magical energy, the Dweomer Mage has become too focused on that flow to realize that they become easily distracted when attempting the more "mundane" of the magical arts, like casting said fire ball. In fact, so haughty is their attitude towards simply P.P.E. channeling and converting, the Dweomer Mage rarely casts those "lesser" spells, and as a result does so with often limited success. Sometimes, the Dweomer Mage gets so caught up in the ecstasy of the channel that they in fact use more energy to cast one of those lesser spells.

Dweomer Mages learn spells much the same way as a Psi-Mystic, in that as they learn to channel and funnel magical energy, their ability to perform Dweomer Mage spells steadily grows. It should be noted that unlike a Psi-Mystic, the Dweomer Mage may learn and purchase mundane magical spells as a regular mage and may learn those spells similar to a Wizard.

Dweomer Mage O.C.C. Abilities, Bonuses, and Penalties

1. Initial Spell Knowledge: At level one, select a total of *four* (4) spells from Dweomer Mage spell levels one and two. These are part of the Dweomer Mage's permanent P.P.E. channeling abilities and cannot be changed. As the Dweomer Mage grows in level and confidence, more P.P.E. channeling abilities will be learned.

2. Additional Spells: At each level of experience after the first, the character may select another Dweomer Mage spell of



any level up to the character's current experience level (i.e. a 3rd level Dweomer Mage could pick any Dweomer Mage spell from levels 1 through 3). Dweomer Mages may also learn regular Wizard spells of any level at any time, provided the character

can find an instructor and pay the price (which may not always be cash). This should be played as a role-playing element. Note that Dweomer Mages are not *true* mages; they just have a natural inclination to practice magic. They are more akin to mystics than mages, and in order for a Dweomer Mage to learn a Wizard spell they must have some magical study (represented by taking the Lore: Magic skill). If they take this skill and pass a skill roll, they will be able to learn the magic spell being taught.

A Dweomer Mage that takes Lore: Magic becomes more scientific minded in their treatment of magical flow and less "mystical" about the experience.

3. Casting Wizard Spells: There is a price to be paid for casting regular Wizard spells. Because Dweomer Mages are often distracted with the flow of the magical energy through them, or they simply have never had the time to master Wizard spells, Dweomer Mages must pay *1D6 additional P.P.E. per spell level* for each Wizard spell cast, to reflect the extra energy required to force the conversion that Dweomer Mages dislike. So, for instance, a Dweomer Mage attempting to cast *Globe of Daylight* (1st level) would require 1 + 1D6 P.P.E. to successfully cast the spell — the P.P.E. cost will be between 2 and 7. The same Dweomer Mage attempting to cast *Summon Fog* (11th level) would require 140 + 11D6 P.P.E. to successfully cast it — the P.P.E. will cost between 151 and 206! This additional cost is determined each time the spell is cast, adding a dramatic random effect, especially if the Dweomer Mage does not have the required P.P.E. to cast the spell in question.

4. See and Use Ley Lines: As per the regular Wizard ability (*Palladium Fantasy RPG®*, page 107).

5. Ley Line Drifting: As per the regular Wizard ability (*Palladium Fantasy RPG®*, page 107), except that since falling into magical energy is the Dweomer Mage's forte, the speed of travel is 20!

6. Ley Line Rejuvenation: As per the regular Wizard ability (*Palladium Fantasy RPG®*, page 107) except that 3D6 Hit Points and 3D6 S.D.C. are magically restored.

7. Special Dweomer Mage O.C.C. Skills & Abilities:

Recognize Enchantment: Just like the Wizard ability to recognize the influence of magic that charms, hypnotizes, or otherwise causes mind control (including trances, domination, compulsion, quest, etc.). Rather than recognizing the magic, the Dweomer Mage is able to recognize the flow of P.P.E. into and out of the target, and recognize the affect as an enchantment. If the source of the enchantment is at a distance from the affected character (such as a spell cast), it is easier to detect as the flow is more pronounced. If the enchantment is from within the person or on the person, closer scrutiny is required to notice the flow change. **Base Skill:** 40%/25% +5% per level of experience. The first percentage represents the former condition, and the second percentage represents the latter.

Recognize Magic: The Dweomer Mage has a small percentage to recognize a magic item by shape, inscription, magic symbols or intuition like the Wizard. However, the Dweomer Mage is trying to recognize the magical flow within or into an object, and does not have the training to recognize magical constructs like a Wizard would. **Base Skill:** 7% +5% per level of experience.

Recognize Spell Casting: A special skill exclusive to the Dweomer Mage, the character is able to recognize the gestures

and the channeling of P.P.E. for the casting of a magic spell (this includes Wizard spells, Necromancy, Druidic magic, etc.), for any spell that the Dweomer Mage knows. For instance, a Dweomer Mage that knows the spell *Superhuman Strength* will be able to recognize another mage casting the same spell, by noticing the distinctive flow of magical energies into the opponent mage. This knowledge can be used to counter the spell being cast, or in the case of instant castings, the knowledge can be used to take preventative measures. **Base Skill:** 15% +6% per level of experience.

8. Magic Bonuses: +1 to save vs magic at levels three, six, nine, twelve and fifteen. +4 to save vs Horror Factor. +1 to Spell Strength at levels two, four, eight, twelve and fifteen. Starts at 12, same as a Wizard.

9. P.P.E.: All practitioners of magic are living batteries of mystic energy. The character draws from this energy to create magic and cast spells. **Permanent P.P.E. Base:** 3D4x10 +20, plus 2x the P.E. attribute number. Add 3D6 P.P.E. per each level of experience, starting at level one. The Dweomer Mage can also draw on P.P.E. from ley lines, nexus points, and other people whenever they are available. *See the Magic section of The Palladium Fantasy RPG® for details.*

Dweomer Mage O.C.C.

Alignment: Any.

Attribute Requirements: I.Q. 10 or higher; a high P.E. is also recommended but not required.

O.C.C. Skills:

Languages: Native Tongue at 98% plus two of choice (+20% each).

One Domestic skill of choice (+35%).

Math: Basic (+20%)

W.P.: Two of choice.

Hand to Hand: Basic

Hand to Hand: Basic can be improved to Expert at the cost of two O.C.C. Related Skills, or Martial Arts (or Assassin if an evil alignment) for the cost of three O.C.C. Related Skills.

O.C.C. Related Skills: Select six other skills at level one, plus select on additional skill at levels three, six, nine and twelve.

All new skills start at level one proficiency.

Communications: Any.

Domestic: Any.

Espionage: None.

Horsemanship: General or Exotic only.

Medical: First Aid only.

Military: None.

Physical: Any, except Acrobatics, Gymnastics and Wrestling.

Rogue: Any.

Science: Any (+10%).

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

Weapon Proficiencies: Any.

Wilderness: Any.

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

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

Armor: Starts with a suit of studded leather (A.R. 13, S.D.C. 38); most prefer light, magic armor, but can wear any type of armor so long as it does not interfere with the flow of magic.

Weapons: Starts with a dagger or knife, and two other weapons of choice. All are basic S.D.C. weapons of fair to good quality. Magic weapons and other equipment must be acquired later. They love magic and exotic weapons and items.

Money: The character starts with 120 in gold, which can be used immediately to purchase more equipment or saved. Additional money will come from payment for special services and booty.

Experience Point Table

1	0 - 2,150
2	2,151 - 4,300
3	4,301 - 8,600
4	8,601 - 17,650
5	17,651 - 25,750
6	25,751 - 35,850
7	35,851 - 51,000
8	51,001 - 71,100
9	71,101 - 95,250
10	95,251 - 133,250
11	133,251 - 183,250
12	183,251 - 228,250
13	228,251 - 287,250
14	287,250 - 337,250
15	337,250 - 395,250

Dweomer Mage Spells

These spells are generally exclusive to the Dweomer Mage. Optionally, Game Masters may allow other spell casters access to these spells at a cost of double the P.P.E.

Alphabetical by Level

Level One

Decipher Magic
False Dweomer
Inflict P.P.E. Curse: Tick
See Magical Aura
Sense Magic
Sense P.P.E.

Level Two

Alter Magical Aura
Inflict P.P.E. Curse: Leak
Infuse with P.P.E.
Mystic Alarm

Level Three

Inflict P.P.E. Curse: Befuddle
Life Source
See Wards
Transfer P.P.E.

Level Four

Inflict P.P.E. Curse: Burn
Invisibility to Magic
Ley Line Transmission
P.P.E. Barrier

Level Five

Inflict P.P.E. Curse: Target Switch
P.P.E. Bolt
Reserve P.P.E.

Level Six

Energize Spell
Enchantment Booster
Fortify Spell
Illusion Booster
Inflict P.P.E. Curse: Spell Switch
Metamorphosis: P.P.E.

Level Seven

Dispel Magic Barriers
Drain P.P.E.
Inflict P.P.E. Curse: P.P.E. Blast
P.P.E. Permanency

Level Eight

Inflict P.P.E. Curse: Agony
Ley Line Blast
Mystic Shield
Negate Magic
Sorcerous Fury

Level Nine

Inflict P.P.E. Curse: P.P.E. Bleed
Metamorphosis: Ley Line
P.P.E. Surge
Wall of P.P.E.

Level Ten

Accumulate P.P.E.
Inflict P.P.E. Curse: Age
Mystic Portal

Level Eleven

Anti-Magic Cloud
Energy Sphere
Inflict P.P.E. Curse: P.P.E. Drain (Minor)

Level Twelve

Extend Ley Line
Inflict P.P.E. Curse: Forget
P.P.E. Overload

Level Thirteen

Inflict P.P.E. Curse: Death
P.P.E. Flood
P.P.E. Void

Level Fifteen

Erase Ley Line
Inflict P.P.E. Curse: P.P.E. Drain (Major)
Metamorphosis: Rift
Open Rift

Level Fourteen

Close Rift
Create Ley Line Storm
Inflict P.P.E. Curse: Doom from a Rift
Make Ley Line
Sever the Flow

Level One



Decipher Magic

Range: Self.

Duration: Two minutes (8 melee rounds) per level of experience.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: Four

Essentially the same as the 1st level Wizard spell of the same name, except that the Dweomer Mage is attempting to read the magic scroll, inscription, text or book that uses magic symbols or runes, to determine how it might affect the flow of magic. The proficiency is 50%. If Lore: Magic is also known, then the proficiency is 85%.

False Dweomer

Range: Touch, or up to 10 feet (3 m).

Duration: 5 minutes per level of experience.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: Two per 1 lb (0.45 kg) of weight.

This spell infuses an object with a false magical signature by allowing it to temporarily draw on ambient magical energy. The object so infused will glow with a soft blue light, and a *Sense Magic* spell will identify the object as magical, but for no apparent reason.

Inflict P.P.E. Curse: Tick

Range: Touch or 10 feet (3 m).

Duration: Until target casts a spell, or 5 minutes per experience level, whichever comes first; effects last only an instant.

Saving Throw: Standard.

P.P.E.: Two

This is the simplest of the devious anti-mage spells grouped as P.P.E. curses. This spell has the effect of causing any spell-casting being to suffer a minor inconvenience after casting a spell or expending P.P.E. The actual effect is up to the caster, and can range from a sneeze to an insatiable itch. This causes the target to lose another attack in addition to the attacks spent casting the spell. The effects take place when the target uses P.P.E. This spell has no effect on the use of psionics.

See Magical Aura

Range: 100 feet (30.5 m).

Duration: One melee round.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: Six

All things, organic and inorganic, have an affect on the flow of magical energy throughout the Megaverse. The magical aura has many distinctions and can be used to see or sense things about the target's place in the magical flow. This spell is essentially a specialized version of *See Aura*. Seeing the magical aura will indicate the following:

- The presence of magic-channeling ability. That is, whether the target has the ability to drain the ambient P.P.E. in the environment. May indicate a spell caster.
- The presence of residual P.P.E. With every use of magic, P.P.E. leaves a kind of stain on the user, so this ability will determine if the target has been used to channel magical energy.
- High or low base P.P.E. When used to view an object, this may identify the object as being enchanted.
- Remaining P.P.E. The Dweomer Mage is able to determine roughly how much P.P.E. has been spent by the target. That is, if a target has a high base P.P.E., and how much of it remains.
- Determine if the access to the flow is natural (inherent, such as a Faerie) or artificial (a spell caster).

Sense Magic

Range: 120 foot (36.6 m) diameter.

Duration: Two minutes (8 melee rounds) per level of experience.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: Four

This spell is the same as the 1st level Wizard spell of the same name.

Sense P.P.E.

Range: 120 foot (36.6 m) diameter.

Duration: One minute (4 melee rounds) per level of experience.

Saving Throw: Standard; ley lines and inanimate objects have no saving throw.

P.P.E.: Three

This spell is the same as the 1st level Wizard spell of the same name.

Level Two

Alter Magical Aura

Range: Self or touch.

Duration: 10 minutes per caster's experience level.

Saving Throw: Standard.

P.P.E.: Four

This spell, like the psychic's *Alter Aura*, allows the Dweomer Mage to change the way others view the target's magical aura. The following aspects of the magical aura may be changed:

- Whether the target can channel P.P.E. or cannot (how free is the access to the ambient P.P.E.).
- Conceal or present the appearance of inherent or learned magical knowledge.
- Raise or lower the base P.P.E.

Inflict P.P.E. Curse: Leak

Range: Touch or 10 feet (3.0 m).

Duration: Until target casts a spell, or 5 minutes per experience level, whichever comes first; effects are instantaneous.

Saving Throw: Standard.

P.P.E.: Five

Leak is another spell in the line of P.P.E. curse infliction spells that are designed to hurt enemy mages. When the target mage attempts to cast a spell, the spell drains 1D4 P.P.E. per level of the curse caster, in addition to the normal spell cost. For example, a mage affected by this P.P.E. curse, cast on him by a 4th level mage, attempting to cast a Fireball will spend 10 P.P.E. plus 4-16 additional P.P.E. to cast the spell. This extra P.P.E. does not enhance the spell in anyway. Also, the mage affected cannot have his P.P.E. reduced below zero. The effects take place when the target uses P.P.E. This spell has no effect on the use of psionics.

Mystic Alarm

Range: 12 feet (3.6 m); one object.

Duration: One year per level of experience.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: Five

Similar to the 2nd level Wizard spell of the same name. Instead of creating invisible ward-like symbols on the object, the Dweomer Mage flows magical energy *through* the item to be protected. If the item is disturbed, the flow is disturbed and a silent alarm will buzz in the Dweomer Mage's head, alerting him to the intrusion. Once the alarm has been triggered, it is gone, and this spell must be recast to work again.

Infuse with P.P.E.

Range: Touch or 10 feet (3 m).

Duration: Instantaneous.

Saving Throw: Standard.

P.P.E.: Five + P.P.E. amount to be stored.

This spell will infuse an object with P.P.E.; this effectively makes that object a P.P.E. battery. There are no special protections on the object, and any being capable of using the P.P.E. within the object can and may do so. The spell cost reflects the energy needed to allow the object to take in the P.P.E.



With this spell, any singular object may be used to store magical energy, from as small as a stone to as big as a house. Living beings cannot be the target of the spell, but any object on their body may be targeted.

This energy storage is not perfect, however, and the object affected will slowly "leak" until P.P.E. levels even out with the surrounding environment. In game terms, the object loses its stored P.P.E. at a rate of 1D6 every six hours (4-24 P.P.E. per day).

Level Three

Inflict P.P.E. Curse: Befuddle

Range: 20 feet (6.1 m).

Duration: Until target casts a spell, or 5 minutes per experience level, whichever comes first; effects are instantaneous.

Saving Throw: Standard.

P.P.E.: Eight

The victim of this P.P.E. curse suffers the exact effects of a *Befuddle* spell. The effects take place when the target uses P.P.E. This spell has no effect on the use of psionics.

Life Source

Range: Self.

Duration: Instant.

Saving Throw: Not applicable.

P.P.E.: Special: Two P.P.E., plus Hit Points or S.D.C.

This spell is identical to the one presented in *Rifts® Federation of Magic™*, page 132.

See Wards

Range: 60 feet (18.3 m); line of vision.

Duration: Four minutes per level of the spell caster.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: Eight

This spell is identical to the 3rd level spell of the same name.

Transfer P.P.E.

Range: Touch.

Duration: Instant transferal.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: Ten

This spell allows the Dweomer Mage to transfer any amount of his P.P.E. to another individual. Because the Dweomer Mage is powerful in the arts of channeling, any amount may be transferred. The target need not be a mage, but if the P.P.E. is not to be wasted, it should be. Rumors abound around the Megaverse of ancient Dweomer Mages using this ability to create mystics and new Dweomer Mages, by infusing unborn children with vast amounts of P.P.E.

Level Four



Inflict P.P.E. Curse: Burn

Range: 20 feet (6.1 m).

Duration: Until target casts a spell, or 5 minutes per experience level, whichever comes first; effects are instantaneous.

Saving Throw: Standard.

Damage: See below.

P.P.E.: Ten

The victim of this P.P.E. curse finds the very act of spell casting painful. For every 4 points of P.P.E. spent in the casting of a spell or activation of a magical device, it causes one point of damage, rounded up. For example, a victim of the curse casting a *Fireball* spell would himself suffer 2 points of damage. A victim attempting to cast *Remove Curse* would suffer 35 points of damage. The effects take place when the target uses P.P.E. This spell has no effect on the use of psionics.

Invisibility to Magic

Range: Self.

Duration: Three minutes per level of experience.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: Fifteen

This spell causes the caster to become completely invisible to magical scrying and/or divination. Spells like *See Aura*, *See Magical Aura*, *Sense Magic*, and *Sense P.P.E.* will have no effect on the caster. Casting a spell or otherwise using P.P.E. while invisible to magic will negate the effects, as will a *Negate Magic* spell.

Ley Line Transmission

Range: Limited only by the length of the ley line.

Duration: Instant.

Saving Throw: A psionic Mind Block will block and destroy the message.

P.P.E.: Thirty

This spell is identical to the 4th level Wizard spell *Ley Line Transmission*.

P.P.E. Barrier

Range: Cast up to 30 feet (9.1 m) away and up to a radius of 10 feet (3 m) + 5 feet (1.5 m) per level of experience.

Duration: Five minutes round per level of experience.

Saving Throw: Special.

P.P.E.: Twenty

This is an anti-magic barrier, albeit a weak one. This barrier will actually drain P.P.E. from spells cast through it, often causing the spells to fail. The barrier negates a number of P.P.E. equal to the caster's level of experience. If this leaves the spell with fewer points of P.P.E. than are required to cast it, the spell has no effect, and the P.P.E. is wasted. For example, a Wizard targets a level four Dweomer Mage surrounded by a P.P.E. Barrier, with a spell that costs 25 P.P.E. As the spell passes through the barrier, the spell power is reduced by 4 and the subsequent P.P.E. charge of the spell is reduced to 21. This is lower than the spell's cost, therefore it fails.

This is easily countered by adding an extra amount of P.P.E. to the spell. In the example above, adding four or more extra P.P.E. to the spell would bypass the effects of the P.P.E. Barrier. However, unless an opposing mage is aware of the P.P.E. Barrier or realizes what is happening, he is unlikely to think of this tactic.

On the down side, the drain also affects spells cast through the barrier from the inside, but at least the Dweomer Mage (and perhaps his allies) knows to spend the extra P.P.E. when casting such spells.

Of course, casting *Dispel Magic Barriers* or *Negate Magic*, which are both immune to this spell's effects, will cancel the P.P.E. Barrier.

Level Five

Inflict P.P.E. Curse: Target Switch

Range: 20 feet (6.1 m).

Duration: Until target casts a spell, or 5 minutes per experience level, whichever comes first; effects are instantaneous.

Saving Throw: Standard.

P.P.E.: Fifteen

The mage suffering the curse of Target Switch finds that the target he had envisioned in the casting of a spell has changed. For area effect spells, the target area of the spell moves 1D10 feet (0.3-3 m) per level of the curse caster, in a random direction. Roll 1D6 to determine the direction; 1 = up, 2 = down, 3 = north, 4 = south, 5 = west, 6 = east. Ranged and targeted spells will hit a different target within the affected spell's range (G.M.s should pick the target randomly and include the cursed mage). Spells that have a range of "touch" will affect the caster 50% of the time, and are otherwise unaffected. The effects take place when the target uses P.P.E. This spell has no effect on the use of psionics.

P.P.E. Bolt

Range: 100 feet (30.5 m) +5 feet (1.5 m) per level of experience.

Damage: 1D4 per P.P.E. expenditure.

Duration: Instantaneous.

Saving Throw: Dodge.

P.P.E.: Five or more; see below.

The Dweomer Mage is able to channel magical energy into a directed bolt of force. The P.P.E. Bolt is +4 to strike and does 1D4 points of damage for every 5 points of P.P.E. spent, to a maximum of 5 P.P.E. per level of the caster. So a fourth level Dweomer Mage could funnel a maximum of 20 points of P.P.E., for a P.P.E. Bolt causing 4D4 points of damage, and a tenth level Mage could strike with a P.P.E. Bolt causing 10D4 points of damage, at a cost of 50 P.P.E.

The spell channels a stream of P.P.E. straight through the target. It also has the effect of temporarily draining the victim of its own ambient Potential Psychic Energy. For each die of damage, reduce the target's P.P.E. by 1. So, if a mage is struck by a 6D4 P.P.E. Bolt, reduce his or her P.P.E. by 6. The victim will recover this P.P.E. as normal. If a mage is struck with a P.P.E. Bolt in the middle of casting, the spell being cast is lost and the P.P.E. wasted. This spell only works on living creatures that potentially possess P.P.E. and thus has no effect on inanimate objects, most plants, and robots.

Reserve P.P.E.

Range: Self.

Duration: Permanent, until released.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: Ten

With this spell, the Dweomer Mage is able to remove any amount of P.P.E. from his permanent base and store it outside his body, in a sort of dimensional pocket. Think of it as saving P.P.E. for a rainy day. This "externally" stored P.P.E. is safe and cannot be targeted, nor drained by any means except by the Dweomer Mage that placed it there. This stored P.P.E. cannot be divined nor can it be detected in any way. This P.P.E. is safe from prying eyes.

In order to tap into this stored energy, the Dweomer Mage must expend one melee action to access this P.P.E. reserve, and may take as much or as little as required. Closing the link takes another melee action. The mage may reserve as much or as little as necessary for his needs.

Please also note that this stored P.P.E. is not gone. That means the Dweomer Mage *will not* recoup the P.P.E. stored by this spell with rest, meditation or any other means.

Level Six

Energize Spell

Range: Touch or 10 feet (3 m) away.

Duration: Special.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: Twelve + full P.P.E. amount of the original spell.

This spell is identical to the one presented in *Rifts® Federation of Magic™*, page 139.

Enchantment Booster

Range: As per enchantment; area effect.

Duration: Double that of the original enchantment.

Saving Throw: Not applicable.

P.P.E.: Fifteen

This spell is identical to the spell, *Illusion Booster*, only it is applicable to enchantments. An enchantment is a spell that enhances another creature or object, such as *Superhuman Endurance* or *Fool's Gold*. Game Masters may use their discretion about exactly what an enchantment is, but most illusions and curses are not enchantments.

Fortify Spell

Range: Touch or 10 feet (3 m) away.

Duration: Special.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: Twelve + full P.P.E. amount of the original spell.

This spell is similar to *Energize Spell*, only this will double the damage of a spell being cast. This has no effect on the range or duration, only the damage. This spell has no effect on spells that do not cause damage. Only one such fortification may be done. For instance, a *Circle of Flame* normally does 6D6 points of damage to those who try to pass through it. With a *Fortify Spell*, this would be doubled to 12D6 points of damage.

Alternatively, this spell may also be used to fortify defensive spells that defend against damage, such as walls or armor spells. This spell will double the amount of defensive S.D.C. As before, only one such fortification may be done per spell.

Illusion Booster

Range: As per illusion; area effect.

Duration: Double that of the original illusion.

Saving Throw: Not applicable.

P.P.E.: Fifteen

This spell is identical to the one presented in *Rifts® Federation of Magic™*, page 140.

Inflict P.P.E. Curse: Spell Switch

Range: 20 feet (6.1 m).

Duration: Until target casts a spell, or 5 minutes per experience level, whichever comes first; effects are instantaneous.

Saving Throw: Standard.

P.P.E.: Twenty

Perhaps one of the more devious of the Inflict P.P.E. Curse spells; this causes the target spell caster to cast another spell in his repertoire. The alternate spell cast is of a P.P.E. cost less than or equal to the intended spell. If there is no such spell, the curse has no effect. The target of the spell remains unchanged, but could benefit from a miscast *Fire Bolt* that turns into *Climb*. The effects take place when the target uses P.P.E. This spell has no effect on the use of psionics.

Metamorphosis: P.P.E.

Range: Self.

Duration: 1D6 hours per level of experience of the spell caster, or until the P.P.E. is exhausted.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: Twenty-Five

With this spell, the Dweomer Mage is able to transform himself into a living battery of P.P.E. energy. This spell transforms the mage into a shimmering blue sphere of magical energy — a magical battery of power. Available to everyone except the transformed mage is a battery of 200 P.P.E. to be used in the casting of other magic. The caster may willingly give or hold back any of this magical energy as per the rules of obtaining magical energy from people, however the Dweomer Mage, once transformed, loses the mage's invulnerability to losing their P.P.E. While in this form, the subject is impervious to psychic, physical and most magical attacks. A *Negate Magic* spell will not dispel the sphere, but a *Sense P.P.E.* spell will definitely point towards the character.

Level Seven

Dispel Magic Barriers

Range: 100 feet (30.5 m).

Duration: Instant.

Saving Throw: Standard.

P.P.E.: Twenty

This spell is identical to the 7th level Wizard spell of the same name.

Drain P.P.E.

Range: 10 feet (3 m) per level of experience.

Damage: None.

Duration: Instantaneous.

Saving Throw: Special.

P.P.E.: Special.

Like all spellcasters, Dweomer Mages have the ability to drain P.P.E. from artifacts and people naturally. However, in some cases, the Dweomer Mage must draw P.P.E. from those who may be unwilling, or trained to withstand the drain. The Dweomer Mage's ability to do this comes from their deep understanding about the flow of P.P.E. In some cases, the P.P.E. is literally ripped from the target and can cause some damage. The effects of this spell are as follows (and are based on the "Other Sources of P.P.E." in the magic section):

- **Draining P.P.E. without one's knowledge:** If using this spell instead of the natural ability, the target of the spell suffers a -4 penalty to save vs magic to prevent the drain of P.P.E. As

well, the mage may drain up to 75% of the victim's P.P.E. in this fashion. Due to the cost of this draining, it is likely best not used on those targets with low base P.P.E. **P.P.E. Cost:** 10. **Damage:** None.

- **Draining P.P.E. from an unwilling subject is possible:** The target of the spell is given a +4 to save vs magic if the target knows the Dweomer Mage is attempting to drain them of P.P.E. Opponents during combat are considered unwilling for purposes of this spell. As much as 50% may be drained from unwilling victims. **P.P.E. Cost:** 20. **Damage:** 1 point of damage per 10 points of P.P.E. drained is done to the unwilling victim.
- **Draining P.P.E. with a person's knowledge and consent:** The drain is automatically successful and the Dweomer Mage may drain *all* of the target's P.P.E. **P.P.E. Cost:** 5. **Damage:** 2 points, but only if reduced to 0 P.P.E.; otherwise no damage.
- **Draining P.P.E. from another practitioner of magic is possible:** The bane of all Wizards is the Dweomer Mage who can drain P.P.E. from them. Wizards and practitioners of magic (including magical creatures) are allowed a saving throw vs magic at +8. If the save fails, the Dweomer Mage can literally rip 25% of the base P.P.E. from the target. **P.P.E. Cost:** 40. **Damage:** 2 points of damage per 10 points of P.P.E. drained.



Inflict P.P.E. Curse: P.P.E. Blast

Range: 20 feet (6.1 m).

Damage: See below.

Duration: Until target casts a spell, or 5 minutes per experience level, whichever comes first; effects are instantaneous.

Saving Throw: Standard.

P.P.E.: Twenty-Five

The victim of this P.P.E. Curse is not only a danger to himself, but to those standing around. Like the Burn curse, the P.P.E. Blast causes damage when the victim attempts to channel P.P.E. into a spell or a magical item. For every 4 points of P.P.E. spent, it causes 1 point of damage to the curse target and to those within 10 feet (3 m) of him. For every 8 points of P.P.E. spent, 1 point of damage is done to those between 10 and 20 feet (3-6.1 m) from the victim of the curse. All damage is rounded up. The effects take place when the target uses P.P.E. This spell has no effect on the use of psionics.

P.P.E. Permanency

Adapted from *Rifts® South America 2*.

Range: As per the spell being made permanent.

Duration: Permanent.

Saving Throw: Not applicable.

P.P.E.: One tenth of the normal cost of the spell being made permanent (rounded up), subtracted from the Dweomer Mage's permanent P.P.E. base.

This spell allows the flow of P.P.E. that powers the Dweomer Mage's magic to be permanent. This spell only works on a Dweomer Mage spell. For instance, to make *Inflict P.P.E. Curse: Agony* permanent, it will cost 3 P.P.E. from the Dweomer Mage's permanent base. This is representative of the fact that it is the caster's own P.P.E. fueling the spell.

The spell can still be canceled with a Negate Magic spell, though it saves as though it were a ritual (17 or higher needed to negate it, see *Negate Magic*). The duration of the spell simply will not expire on its own.

Level Eight

Inflict P.P.E. Curse: Agony

Range: 20 feet (6.1 m).

Duration: Until target casts a spell, or 5 minutes per experience level, whichever comes first; effects last as per the *Agony* spell.

Saving Throw: Standard.

P.P.E.: Thirty

The victim of this curse suffers the exact effects of the *Agony* spell when he expends P.P.E. to channel into the creation of a spell or the activation of a magical item. The effects take place when the target uses P.P.E. This spell has no effect on the use of psionics.

Ley Line Blast

Range: 300 feet (91.4 m).

Damage: 3D6 plus 1D6 per level of the caster.

Duration: Instantaneous.

Saving Throw: Dodge of 16 or higher.

P.P.E.: Thirty

This spell may only be cast within a mile (1.6 km) of a ley line or within two miles (3.2 km) of a nexus point. With this spell, an arcing, crackling blue energy blast leaves the nearby nexus or line and strikes the target. It should be noted that the ley line energy bolt has no effect on inanimate objects.

Mystic Shield

Range: Self or others up to 60 feet (18.3 m) away.

Duration: One minute (4 melees) per level of experience or until it is destroyed.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: Ten

This spell is identical to the 8th level Wizard spell of the same name, with the exception that the energy that surrounds the target is actually P.P.E. and so the color is a bright blue.

Negate Magic

Range: Touch or 60 feet (18.3 m).

Duration: Instant.

Saving Throw: Special (ritual magic has a greater chance of success).

P.P.E.: Thirty

This spell is identical to the 8th level Wizard spell of the same name.

Sorcerous Fury

Range: Self.

Damage: 2D4 x 10 M.D. or by spell.

Duration: One minute per level of experience.

Saving Throw: Not applicable.

P.P.E.: Seventy

This spell is identical to the one presented in *Rifts® Federation of Magic™*, page 145.

Level Nine

Inflict P.P.E. Curse: P.P.E. Bleed

Range: 20 feet (6.1 m).

Duration: Until target casts a spell, or 5 minutes per experience level, whichever comes first; effects last for one melee round per level.

Saving Throw: Standard.

P.P.E.: Sixty

The victim of the P.P.E. Bleed, like the Leak curse, loses an additional amount of P.P.E. at the time of casting a spell. At the time the cursed casts a spell, the victim loses 1D4 P.P.E. per experience level of the Dweomer Mage, as in the Leak curse, in addition to the cost of the original spell. However, for every melee round after that, the cursed victim loses an additional 1D4 P.P.E. for a number of rounds equal to the curse caster's level of experience. Should the victim try and cast another spell during this time, the P.P.E. Bleed reactivates and the victim loses another allotment of P.P.E. (1D4 per level of the Dweomer Mage). The duration of the extra Bleed does not extend with additional spells. The effects take place when the target uses P.P.E. This spell has no effect on the use of psionics.

Metamorphosis: Ley Line

Range: Self. Another may be transformed only if performed as a ritual.

Duration: 1D6 hours per level of experience of the spell caster.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: Eighty

To the Dweomer Mage, this transformation is the one of the greatest achievements of melding into magical energy. Once

cast, the caster becomes a shimmering blue line of crackling magical energy, 100 feet (30.5 m) in length. While in this form, the subject is impervious to psychic, physical and most magical attacks. Nearby characters, with the exception of the transformed character, experience the same effects as though they were near a ley line, per the standard magical rules (interference with certain psionics, increased spell or psionic strength, etc.).

If a transformed Dweomer Mage links with another ley line, a nexus is formed and the benefits are increased. While connected, there is a 5% per hour chance that a Rift will form.

P.P.E. Surge

Range: 100 feet (30.5 m) +5 feet (1.5 m) per level of experience.

Damage: 1 point of damage per P.P.E. point of the target.

Duration: Instantaneous.

Saving Throw: Standard; +4 to save by mages and magical creatures.

P.P.E.: One Hundred

This insidious spell causes the very P.P.E. contained within a living creature to surge. This spell will cause one point of damage for every P.P.E. point remaining available to the target. For example, a character with 4 P.P.E. will be struck with 4 points of damage, whereas a character with 50 P.P.E. will be struck with 50 points of damage. It should be noted that the damage applies to what the character has available at the time the surge occurs, not what is potentially available. For example, a Wizard is targeted who normally has 140 P.P.E., and after casting a number of spells is down to 3 P.P.E. The power surge will only do 3 points of damage.

Stored or accumulated P.P.E., as per the spells *Reserve P.P.E.* and *Accumulate P.P.E.*, are similarly unaffected. This spell only works on living creatures.



Wall of P.P.E.

Range: 50 feet (15.2 m).

Duration: Five melee rounds per level of experience.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: Eighty

This spell brings into existence a shimmering wall of magical energy. The wall is similar in appearance to a ley line, but has no beneficial effects. It functions as per the spell *P.P.E. Barrier*. In addition, the wall is solid to any physical matter, and has 100 S.D.C. The wall will stop all physical and energy attacks. The wall will not cease to exist when the S.D.C. is exhausted, but will continue to function as a P.P.E. Barrier until the duration has passed. The wall is 20 feet (6.1 m) high, five feet (1.5 m) thick, and 10 feet (3 m) long per level of the Dweomer Mage. A *Dispel Magic Barriers* spell will bring the wall down.

Level Ten

Accumulate P.P.E.

Range: Self.

Duration: Permanent, until released.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: Fifty, plus five from the caster's permanent P.P.E. base.

This spell functions identically as the above noted 5th level Dweomer Mage spell *Reserve P.P.E.*, with one important difference. The Dweomer Mage will replenish that P.P.E. that was stored, through the normal course of rest and inaction. So, for example, a Dweomer Mage with 100 P.P.E. casts *Accumulate P.P.E.* for 50 P.P.E., loses 5 P.P.E. permanently, and stores his remaining 45 P.P.E. Through the normal course of rest and recuperation, he regains the 50 P.P.E. from the casting and the 45 that were stored. Now, the Dweomer Mage has 95 personal P.P.E., and 45 in reserves.

Inflict P.P.E. Curse: Age

Range: 20 feet (6.1 m).

Duration: Until target casts a spell, or 5 minutes per experience level, whichever comes first; effects last the same as the *Age* spell.

Saving Throw: Standard.

P.P.E.: Sixty-Five

The victim of this curse suffers the exact effects of the *Age* spell when he expends P.P.E. to channel into the creation of a spell or the activation of a magical item. The effects take place when the target uses P.P.E. This spell has no effect on the use of psionics.

Mystic Portal

Range: 20 feet (6.1 m).

Size: 10 feet (3 m) by 20 feet (6.1 m) tall portal/opening.

Duration: 4 melees per level of the caster.

P.P.E.: Sixty

This spell is identical to the 10th level Wizard spell of the same name.

Level Eleven

Anti-Magic Cloud

Range: 100 foot (30.5 m) radius per level of the spell caster.

Duration: 20 melees per level of the spell caster.

Saving Throw: Special.

P.P.E.: One Hundred Forty

This spell is identical to the 11th level Wizard spell of the same name.

Energy Sphere

Range: 100 feet (30.5 m).

Duration: Two days per level of experience, or until used up.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: One Hundred Twenty

This spell is identical to the one presented in *Rifts® Federation of Magic™*, page 153.

Inflict P.P.E. Curse: P.P.E. Drain (Minor)

Range: 20 feet (6.1 m).

Duration: Until target casts a spell, or 5 minutes per experience level, whichever comes first; effects last one day per level of experience.

Saving Throw: Standard.

P.P.E.: One Hundred Sixty

The victim of the P.P.E. Drain, like the Leak curse, loses an additional amount of P.P.E. at the time of casting a spell. At the time the cursed casts a spell, the victim temporarily loses *all* of his remaining P.P.E. The victim of this curse will not begin to regenerate P.P.E. normally until a number of days passes equal to the Dweomer Mage's level of experience. The effects take place when the target uses P.P.E. This spell has no effect on the use of psionics.

Level Twelve

Extend Ley Line

Adapted from *Rifts® South America 2*.

Range: Self; but must be next to an existing ley line.

Duration: Permanent.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: Two Hundred per 100 foot (30.5 m) stretch, plus 1D4 P.P.E. from the character's permanent base.

This powerful spell extends the length of a ley line! This is a difficult and draining magical practice, it being the magical equivalent of building a river canal. The new ley line extension is permanent in every respect. However, great care must be taken when extending the ley line, in that natural ley lines are usually in balance with the surrounding environment. Changing that course can have disastrous effects. When successfully completed, there is a 1% chance that either a Rift or a Ley Line Storm (50% chance of either; see *Rifts® Atlantis* or *Rifts® Underseas™* for information about Ley Line Storms). This percentage chance increases depending on the environmental effects on ley line energy at the time and place where the spell is cast: 3% at noon or midnight, 6% during the Vernal or Autumnal Equinox, 10% during the Summer or Winter Solstice, 12% during a lunar eclipse, and 20% during a solar eclipse.

Inflict P.P.E. Curse: Forget

Range: 20 feet (6.1 m).

Duration: Until target casts a spell, or 5 minutes per experience level, whichever comes first; see below.

Saving Throw: Standard.

P.P.E.: Two Hundred Twenty

A curse that is truly the bane of all mages, the Forget curse has the special effect of tearing the spell being cast directly from the mind of the mage. Once the spell is cast, the caster has ripped from their memory the spell they just cast. The victim of may not relearn the spell for 1 month per level of the Dweomer Mage, even if the caster has this spell in a spell book or scroll. This curse has no effect on the casting of the spell, just the memory of the caster. A Remove Curse will remove the inability to learn the spell imposed by this curse, but the spell will still be gone from the mage's memory. The effects take place when the target casts a spell. This spell has no effect on the use of psionics.

P.P.E. Overload

Range: 100 feet (30.5 m) +5 feet (1.5 m) per level of experience.

Duration: Instantaneous.

Saving Throw: Standard; magical items are allowed a +5.

P.P.E.: One P.P.E. per ounce of non-magical material to be affected; 200 P.P.E. plus 5 P.P.E. per ounce of magical material to be affected. (16 ounces per one pound/0.45 kg of weight.)

This spell infuses an object with the P.P.E. casting cost of the spell, causing it to shudder, shake, and explode. Only one item may be targeted in this way, and is allowed a saving throw vs magic. Non-magical items are allowed a standard save vs magic (must roll over 12). Magical items are given a bonus of +5 to save. Rune items cannot be affected by a P.P.E. Overload. This spell has no effect on living creatures. Game Masters should use their own discretion when assessing the damage from such an explosion.

For example, a Dweomer Mage targets a large wagon for P.P.E. Overload. Assuming the car weighs 1,500 lbs (675 kg), then the Dweomer Mage will need to expend (1,500 x 16) 24,000 P.P.E.! However, to destroy one of the wagon's 10 lb (4.5 kg) wheels, would take a mere (10 x 16) 160 P.P.E.

Also note that the explosion is not incendiary in any way, and even blowing up an oil lantern will merely splash the oil over a wide distance.

Level Thirteen

Inflict P.P.E. Curse: Death

Range: 20 feet (6.1 m).

Duration: Until target casts a spell, or 5 minutes per experience level, whichever comes first; effect are instantaneous.

Saving Throw: Standard.

P.P.E.: Two Hundred

The victim of this curse does not expend P.P.E. when casting his next spell, but instead expends an equivalent number of Hit Points! This means certain death for any mage who casts a spell where the P.P.E. far exceeds his Hit Point total. The spell cast in

this way works normally, but leaves the mage in a lot of pain (if even alive). The effects take place when the target uses P.P.E. This spell has no effect on the use of psionics.

P.P.E. Flood

Range: Up to 100 feet (30.5 m) away and up to a radius of 100 feet (30.5 m) +20 feet (6.1 m) per level of experience.

Duration: 1 year per level of experience.

Saving Throw: The area being targeted must roll a 12 or higher to save vs magic.

P.P.E.: Three Hundred

The Dweomer Mage is able to substantially increase the flow of P.P.E. through an area. Mages and spell casters will recover lost P.P.E. at three times the normal rate while in this area.

While in a P.P.E. flooded area, mages and other spell casters enjoy the same benefits as though they were on a ley line. Range, duration, and *damage* of magic spells, wards, and circles are increased by 50%. In addition, a mage may draw 10 P.P.E. points per melee round from the extra ambient energy radiating from the flooded area. If cast on a ley line, the flooded area behaves as though the area is situated near a nexus point. Take note of time of day and any other seasonal activities that influence or increase the flow of P.P.E.

Optionally, this spell may counter a *P.P.E. Void* spell, totally negating both effects.

P.P.E. Void

Range: Up to 100 feet (30.5 m) away and up to a radius of 100 feet (30.5 m) +20 feet (6.1 m) per level of experience.

Duration: 1 year per level of experience.

Saving Throw: The area being targeted must roll a 12 or higher to save vs magic.

P.P.E.: Three Hundred

The Dweomer Mage is able to prohibit the flow of P.P.E. through an area. Mages and spell casters will not be able to recover lost P.P.E. while in this area, nor will they be able to cast any spells that require P.P.E. Other people will notice that items such as magical, rune, or Techno-Wizard devices will not function if they require the input or expenditure of P.P.E. to function.

It is interesting to note that psychics will not be able to develop their psychic powers while in a P.P.E. Void. That is, if creating a psychic character that has lived his whole life within a P.P.E. Void (however unlikely), he will never have gotten the chance to "purchase" his psychic powers. Once outside the area, however, the psychic will suddenly "blossom," and may select his powers. A P.P.E. Void has no affect on the expenditure of I.S.P. This spell cannot be used to destroy a ley line or nexus point, but note that P.P.E. will not flow outward, and in order to gain any benefits, the character must be in or right on the line or nexus. Consider benefits of being "near" the ley line as cancelled. As well, environmental and timing benefits (Equinox, Solstice, eclipse, etc.) are lost while in the void.

Optionally, this spell may counter a *P.P.E. Flood* spell, totally negating both effects.

Level Fourteen

Close Rift

Range: 100 feet (30.5 m).

Duration: Instant results.

Saving Throw: Standard.

P.P.E.: Two Hundred, plus 2 P.P.E. from the character's permanent P.P.E. base!

This spell is identical to the 14th level Wizard spell of the same name.

Create Ley Line Storm

Adapted from *Rifts® South America 2*.

Range: Special.

Duration: Instant results.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: Eight Hundred

This spell may only be cast within a mile (1.6 km) of a ley line or within two miles (3.2 km) of a nexus point. When cast, the Dweomer Mage brings into existence a devastating Ley Line Storm (see *Rifts® Atlantis* or *Rifts® Underseas™* for details) one mile (1.6 km) away from the caster. The Ley Line Storm causes massive damage, twists reality and brings havoc down on the area. The storm lasts for 5 minutes per level of experience. Once started, it is difficult to stop/cancel this magic (5% chance of success per level of experience).

Inflict P.P.E. Curse: Doom from a Rift

Range: 20 feet (6.1 m).

Duration: Until target casts a spell, or 5 minutes per experience level, whichever comes first; see below.

Saving Throw: Standard.

P.P.E.: Four Hundred Fifty

The next time he attempts to cast a spell, the victim instead summons to his or her side a random Entity, as if it has been summoned via a *Summon & Control Entity* spell, except that the victim of this spell has no control over the Entity summoned. The creature summoned will believe it was summoned by the victim of the curse, and may then attempt to determine exactly why, but will usually just attack the curse victim. The danger with this spell is that the caster of the curse also has no control over the being summoned, unless proper precautions are taken. The effects of his spell take place when the target uses P.P.E. This spell has no effect on the use of psionics.

Make Ley Line

Adapted from *Rifts® South America 2*.

Range: Special.

Duration: Instant results.

Saving Throw: Special.

P.P.E.: Three Hundred, plus 1D6 from the caster's permanent base.

In order to create a ley line, the caster must first mark on the ground exactly where the ley line is to form. Once done, the caster concentrates P.P.E. into it and tries to reshape the world's magical fields where the casting is taking place to power this new ley line. The world being reshaped gets a saving throw at +3. If the save is successful, the P.P.E. is still spent, but no ley

line is created. If the save fails, then a new ley line is created. When successfully completed, there is a 2% chance that either a Rift or a Ley Line Storm (50% chance of either; see *Rifts® Atlantis* or *Rifts® Underseas™* for information about Ley Line Storms). This percentage chance increases depending on the environmental effects on ley line energy in the place where the spell is cast: 6% at noon or midnight, 12% during the Vernal or Autumnal Equinox, 20% during the Summer or Winter Solstice, 24% during a lunar eclipse, and 40% during a solar eclipse.

Sever the Flow

Range: Touch or within 10 feet (3 m).

Duration: Permanent.

Saving Throw: Standard.

P.P.E.: One Thousand

The use of magic by Wizards and other sorcerous practitioners of magic is a privilege and not a right, according to the thinking of some Dweomer Mages. If that power is unjustly abused, then it is perhaps time to exact the only fitting punishment one can give another mage: deny them access to P.P.E. The target of this spell can no longer summon P.P.E. to his hands and channel it into a magical spell. He has in fact been cut off from the magical flow. Wizards affected in this way cannot cast spells or use items requiring the expenditure of P.P.E. Their P.P.E. is forever frozen at the level it was at when the *Sever the Flow* was cast upon them. In addition, affected Wizards are no longer able to use their ley line abilities, as they cannot access the ley line energy.

On the bright side, characters affected by *Sever the Flow* cannot be tapped for magical energy ever, even when killed. A *See Aura* will reveal that the character has effectively no P.P.E. to speak of. *Sense P.P.E.* and *Sense Magic* will reveal a dead area where the target is. This condition is permanent and there is no known way to reverse the effect.

It should be noted that it is widely believed that this power is only evocable when the target has truly angered a deity of magic or magical energy. Thus, it is believed that only that deity can reverse the effects of this powerful spell.

Level Fifteen

Erase Ley Line

Range: Ley line must be within 200 feet (61 m).

Duration: Instant results.

Saving Throw: Special.

P.P.E.: Eight Hundred per 100 foot (30.5 m) length, plus 1D4 from the caster's permanent base.

Perhaps one of the more "repugnant" of spells in the Dweomer Mage's repertoire is the ability to actually make a ley line cease to exist. The Dweomer Mage marks the line he or she wishes to erase, and the line is drawn within the planet. The world where the line is being erased is allowed a saving throw at +3. If cast at a nexus point, only one line is affected and the save is at +6. If the save is successful, the line remains intact but the P.P.E. is spent. Otherwise, the line is absorbed into the ground. It should be noted that the line does not get destroyed, but the energy is absorbed by the world's magical fields and the energy pops up somewhere else. This shifting of the world's magical energy has the same chance of causing Rifts or Ley Line Storms as the *Extend Ley Line* spell.

Inflict P.P.E. Curse: P.P.E. Drain (Major)

Range: 20 feet (6.1 m).

Duration: Until target casts a spell, or 5 minutes per experience level, whichever comes first; effects are instantaneous.

Saving Throw: Standard.

P.P.E.: One Thousand Five Hundred

The victim of this P.P.E. Drain is perhaps the unluckiest of all the P.P.E. Curse victims. The next time the cursed casts a spell, the victim loses all of his remaining P.P.E. permanently. The victim of this curse will never again regenerate P.P.E. normally nor be able to naturally accumulate P.P.E., having lost the ability to tap the flow. Victims will have a permanent P.P.E. amount of *zero*. Those spell casters who are able to remain sane may think about a career change, or invest a lot of money in easy to activate magical items. The effects of his spell take place when the target uses P.P.E. This spell has no effect on the use of psionics.

Metamorphosis: Rift

Range: Self. Another may be transformed only if performed as a ritual.

Duration: 1D6 hours per level of experience of the spell caster.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: One Thousand Five Hundred

To the Dweomer Mage, this transformation is the ultimate achievement. Once cast, the caster becomes a shimmering blue sphere of magical energy, crackling with the energy found when more than one ley line converges and opens into a dimensional Rift. While in this form, the subject is impervious to psychic, physical and most magical attacks. Nearby characters, with the exception of the transformed character, experience the same effects as though they were near a ley line nexus per the standard magical rules (interference with certain psionics, increased spell or psionic strength, etc.). The magical transformation also bestows the following abilities:

- The transformed character is a *Dimensional Portal*, as per the spell of the same name. The subject may decide which dimension he is opened to, or may open a random hole to some dimension unheard of.
- The transformed character may cast any Wizard's summoning spell at one quarter the regular cost, rounded up. So, for instance, a transformed character may cast *Summon & Control Entity* for 63 P.P.E.

While the character is invulnerable for the most part, a successful *Close Rift* spell will kill the transformed mage.

Open Rift

Adapted from *Rifts® South America 2*.

Range: Self, but must be close to a ley line nexus point.

Duration: 3D6 minutes, or until closed.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: Two Thousand, plus 1D6 from the caster's permanent base.

This magical spell will open a Rift into another world or dimension. It can lead to a world the Dweomer Mage has visited (88% chance it will be successful), a world he has studied carefully for years (66%), a world he has heard of (40%), or a random place (the Game Master decides what's on the other side of

the Rift). Note that the place on the other side can be any place that the Game Master deems appropriate. It could be the Netherworld (like Hades or Dyval), the Divine Realms (the home of the Gods), one of the Heroic Realms, or a time shift.

The Bandits of Hollow Hill



An Adventure for Rifts®

By Patrick Nowak

Scenario Outline

The adventure takes place in Harvest, a kingdom of about four thousand mixed humans and D-Bees in central Virginia. For several months now, the kingdom has been victim to bandit attacks along the main trade route to the north. As fall approaches, it is vital that the bandits be disposed of, so that this year's harvest can be shipped to the Tech Republic and south to GAW.

What the town can offer for the removal of the bandits amounts to free meals and lodgings, two months of supplies, a few tanks of gasoline, and 10,000 Universal Credits. To sweeten the deal, Golden Age has added to this offer 50,000 credits worth of GAW merchandise (half up front, half upon completion).

Notes from Town

1. **Kevner Tambo**, a human 4th level Deputy, is the commander of the local militia. He and his troops have their hands full protecting the kingdom's central town area. They have no leads as to the identity or composition of the bandits. What they know is that mail and other shipments have ceased passing through from the north.

2. **Marvin Goross** is an enormously fat merchant who handles most of the import/export business out of Harvest. Due to the series of attacks, his finances are heading south. He is also the one handling the hiring of mercenaries.

About a week ago he sent a convoy with a shipment to the Tech Republic and no one's heard from it since. The convoy included three cars, one pickup and a refrigerated truck. It was carrying a load of beef products, textiles, cigarettes, beer and wine. The loss of this convoy is what brought the panic to Harvest.

3. **The Ostrasaurus Express** is willing to give the PCs each a dinosaur mount, provided they agree to take the mail all the way north to the Tech Republic (Washington D.C.). Harry Taylor, the local manager, lost contact with the other offices about three weeks ago.

4. **Drunk Tim** is the town wino. He is a D-Bee Goblin who lives in the alley and earns money through begging and odd jobs to buy booze. Lately, Tim hasn't been around begging so much, and he seems to have greater access to cash. Tim is supplying the bandits with tip-offs of caravan arrivals and departures.

The Killing Zone

Roughly 6 miles (10 km) from the outskirts of Harvest is the remains of the last caravan to go through. It is situated on a sharp curve in the road, and consists of:

- The bodies of five guards, with their mounts (horses and arbolytes), are scattered around the area. They are mostly peppered with laser and bullet holes, with some plasma scoring and claw marks.
- Lying on its side is the refrigerated truck. Inside is a hungry scavenger animal.
- Stuck in the mud is a lightly armored car. It has a working battery, voice-activated locks and ignition, and a secret compartment that holds 5D6x100 credits as well as a small glass bottle that radiates magic; it contains a healing potion. The car door has been torn from its hinges.
- Hidden nearby is a bunker created by an Earth Warlock Mound spell (25 M.D.C.), that has spent 7.62mm brass casings scattered on the ground.
- 6-8 sets of tracks including those of a dog, and something walking on its hands, lead away from the ambush.

Hollow Hill

The Bandits' Lair

Several miles from the ambush site, in the middle of a forested area, is a fair-sized wooded hill. Winding beside the hill is a large stream that holds small fish. There is a cave-like opening in the side of the hill.

Random Roll Bandit

The majority of the bandits are no-name average thugs who come from a vast variety of backgrounds. All are S.D.C. humanoids of diverse species, mainly human but with several D-Bees as well. In addition to the basic stats listed below, roll once on each of the natural abilities, armor and equipment tables.

It is advised that the G.M. randomly determine the number of bandits, as well as their special abilities and equipment, prior to playing. This will save a headache later, especially if the group

includes a psi-sensitive or Psi-Stalker. It also allows the G.M. to customize the bandits to his own campaign and players. Keep in mind that the characters should not be outnumbered by a margin greater than two-to-one in any specific room.

Basic Stats: 2nd level Headhunters, I.Q. 9, M.E. 9, M.A. 9, P.S. 15, P.P. 12, P.E. 10, P.B. 9, Spd 16; 30 S.D.C., 16 Hit Points, 5 P.P.E., 2 attacks, +2 to parry, dodge and roll with impact. Each bandit has 6D6x10 credits in personal treasure.

Special Abilities

01-24% None.

25-30% High Attributes — Increase two attributes to 18+1D6.

31-44% Veteran — add 1D4 levels to experience.

45-54% Psychic — 4D6+10 total I.S.P. and pick two powers.

55-64% Augmented Juicer or Crazy — add two attacks per melee, 4D6+10 to Hit Points, 4D6x10 to S.D.C., and 2D4 to P.S. and P.P. attributes.

65-74% Bionics — bionic limb and weapon plus 1D4 cybernetic implants.

75-84% Palladium Mercenary — add Paired Weapons, two Ancient W.P.s at 1D6+1 level proficiency, and add appropriate weapons to their equipment.

85-88% Resistant to Damage — possibility of heat, cold, energy or all conventional weapons (i.e. needs silver, magic or psionics to hit; add 6D6 to P.P.E.).

89-96% Magic equipment — add a spell from page 250 of the **Rifts RPG®** to armor, or select a magic weapon or add a randomly determined potion to equipment.

97-00% D-Bee with Natural Magic Powers — roll 1D4 times on the table found on page 250 of the **Rifts RPG®**. 2D4x10 P.P.E.

Body Armor: Roll percentiles on the following table to determine armor type. Then, roll a D10; on a roll of 1-4 the armor is in perfect shape, on a roll of 5-0 subtract 2D6 from the M.D.C. total.

01-10% Plastic-Man, 35 M.D.C.

11-20% Huntsman, 40 M.D.C.

21-30% Salvaged, 5D6+20 M.D.C.

31-45% Urban Warrior, 50 M.D.C.

46-55% Crusader, 55 M.D.C.

56-65% Juicer Assassin, 45 M.D.C.

66-75% Bushman, 60 M.D.C.

76-85% Dog Pack, 30 M.D.C.

86-95% CA-2 Dead Boy, 50 M.D.C.

96-00% Gladiator, 70 M.D.C.

Equipment: Roll percentiles on the following table to determine equipment. Use tables in G.M. Shield or choose specific weapons randomly, but ignore any Naruni, Triax or other high-tech designs; replace with Golden Age conventional weapons with ramjet ammunition.

01-10% Energy Rifle, 1D4+1 E-Clips, fragmentation grenade and random item.

11-30% GA conventional assault rifle, SMG or WI MP-23A caseless SMG with 1D4+3 clips of ramjet ammo, inflicts 1D6 M.D. burst. Plus Vibro-Knife and 1D3 fragmentation grenades.



31-45% GL-21 rifle, 1D6 clips, and 1D4+1 fragmentation grenades.

46-60% Energy rifle, 1D4 E-Clips and Vibro-Knife.

61-70% Energy pistol, 1D6+1 fragmentation grenades, 1D4 fire bombs, freeze grenade.

71-80% Vibro-Sword, compound bow, 3D6+10 regular arrows, 3D4 high-explosive arrows and 1D4 magic arrows (5D6+6 M.D.).

81-90% Energy rifle, energy pistol, 1D4 E-Clips each, random item.

91-98% GA conventional assault rifle, 1D6 ramjet clips, energy pistol, 1D4 E-Cips and a random item.

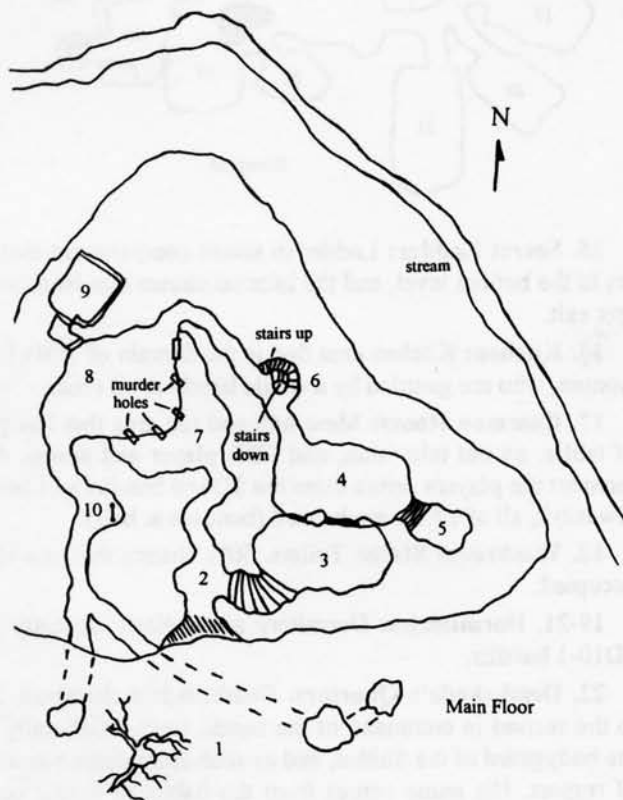
99-00% Magic weapon.

Hollow Hill Key

1. The Entrance: In front of the dark cave opening there is a large, leafless tree and three oddly-shaped dirt mounds. These mounds are bunkers that are connected to the hill by tunnels. Each of the mounds has 25 M.D.C. and can fit two human-sized guards who can fire on intruders. The tree is a permanently animated guardian that attacks anyone who fails to say the password: "Mathias."

Animated Tree: Statistics of note: A.R. 10, 400 S.D.C., P.S. 12 (supernatural), 8 attacks per melee, 4D6 S.D.C. damage on a restrained punch, or 1D4 M.D. for a power punch (counts as two attacks).

2. Entry Alcove: The entryway descends 30 feet (9.1 m) to a dimly lit alcove, from which several other passages branch off. A Circle of Protection is inscribed on the floor of the alcove to keep all supernatural and magic creatures from entering the lair.



3. Greatflame's Quarters: Passage descends into a room with a high arched ceiling that is attached to a storeroom to the north. This is the main "loading dock" area and is home to a Nimro Giant bandit. There are another 1D4+1 bandits in the room and a 50% chance of Kwazyk the Imp being present also. In his room Greatflame has treasure that consists of 3D6x100 credits, a large emerald (worth 1000 cr), and a NA-SW4 mega-bow (regular arrows do +3D6 S.D.C., high-strength arrows 2D6 M.D., 1500 foot/457 m range, and requires a minimum P.S. 35 or 18 Supernatural), 32 regular arrows, 14 M.D. arrows, 3 Panath anti-vampire arrows (+2 to strike & +2D6 damage against vampires), and one Cyclops lightning arrow (1D4x10 M.D. & +200 foot/61 m range).

Greatflame, Nimro Bandit: 3rd lvl Mercenary, I.Q. 12, M.E. 20, M.A. 9, P.S. 19, P.P. 14, P.E. 24, P.B. 21, Spd 11; 1300 S.D.C., 35 Hit Points, Horror Factor of 11, 10 P.P.E.; 40 foot/12.2 m nightvision, impervious to M.D. fire, M.D. energy does half damage, fire breath 4D6 M.D. once per melee, 2 attacks, damage is 3D6+4 S.D.C., 1D6 M.D. and 2D6 M.D. power punch. Bonuses: +2 to strike, +3 to parry/dodge, +2 to roll with impact, +5 to save vs poison & magic; battered dragon-skin armor with 96 M.D.C., club 3D6 M.D. plus punch, and Vibro-Sword 3D6 M.D.; W.P. Sword (+2 strike/parry) and W.P. Blunt (+1 strike/parry).

4. Storeroom: Storeroom, a large room that is filled with various non perishable items stolen from the locals. Among the crates, barrels and boxes there are sacks of grain, kegs of ale and wine, a bin full of coal, lamp oil, rope, raw cotton and fabrics, leather shoes and clothes, etc.

5. Cold Room: Cold room that holds beef quarters, lamb, cheese and other milk products as well as fruits and vegetables.

6. Staircase: Spiral staircase up and down.

7. Death Chamber: Murder holes in an iron wall (100 M.D.C.), through which bandits fire at intruders. There are four slots in the wall and a locked iron door at the far end.

8. Guardhouse: Guard room that has basic furniture and 1D6+3 guards on duty at all times.

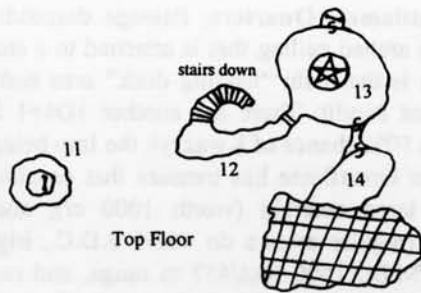
9. Armory: Armory, designed to channel explosions outward if there is an explosion in the room. Holds a crate of 12 GL-21 rifles still packed in grease, 19 assorted S.D.C. firearms, two crates of 24 grenades each, 3D6 spare E-Clips, 11 cans of conventional S.D.C. ammunition, and 6 cans of ramjet ammunition (each can holds 1,000 rounds of ammo).

10. Ladder: Passage leads to the bunkers, and also an iron ladder that goes up to the crow's nest at the top of the hill.

11. Crow's Nest: Crow's nest which affords a 360 degree view of the approach to the Hollow Hill. Guarded by one bandit who is less than observant due to ongoing festivities.

12. Shockstorm Passage: Set into the ceiling in front of this magically sealed door (has 200 M.D.C.) is a Shockstorm Landmine (see *Federation of Magic™*, page 117).

13. Karlidor's Chambers: The Shifter's quarters are a perfectly circular room. Note that a Watchguard has been cast on the door which is magelocked, and the room also has a Maxparry warning mushroom (*Rifts® Conversion Book One*, page 148). In the center is inscribed a Circle of Protection, in which Karlidor sits when summoning or negotiating with supernatural minions. There is a plush chair next to a sitting table, a book



Top Floor

case with 23 books (worth 4D4x10 credits each), desk with writing supplies, computer, PDD player/recorder, chest of drawers with clothing, and a locked safe that holds assorted magical supplies, including nine sealed jars, the first four with Maxpar mushrooms, contents as follows: 1) 21 healing mushrooms, 2) 13 speed mushrooms, 3) 9 dream mushrooms and 4) 4 death mushrooms, 5) 3 faerie wings, 6) dragon eye, 7) 2 wizard's tongues, 8) blood and 9) 12 elf ears, a sealed clay pot that holds 20 doses of Witchbane poison (inflicts 3D6 damage per melee for 2 melees), Magic Divination and Drive away Evil-Spirits fumes, Pixie Dust, potions of Fly, Superhuman Strength and Metamorphosis, and a Faerie Charm (save vs Faerie Magic at +4 and has H.F. of 12 to evil Faerie Folk) and a spell scroll with 2D4 spells on it. The safe is guarded by a Demon Stone Guardian.

Demon Stone Guardian: Spd 14, 80 M.D.C.; 90 foot/27.4 m nightvision, see the invisible, climb 60/55%, has frost breath 4D6 M.D. with a range of 60 feet/18.3 m; 3 attacks, +2 on initiative, +3 to strike, damage is 4D6 M.D. per strike.

Karlador the Craven

6th level Shifter

Alignment: Diabolic.

Quick Stats: I.Q. 17, M.E. 11, M.A. 15, P.S. 13, P.P. 17, P.E. 8, P.B. 8, Spd 12; 38 S.D.C., 38 Hit Points, 184 P.P.E.

Combat: 5 attacks.

Bonuses: +1 to initiative, +2 to strike, +3 to parry/dodge, +2 to roll with impact, critical 19-20, +10 to save vs Horror Factor, +3 to save vs magic, +1 to save vs poison & mind control, save vs psionics is 8, +1 to spell strength.

Psionics: Mind Block (4), Commune with Spirits (6), See Aura (6), See the Invisible (4), Telepathy (4), Remote Viewing (10), Clairvoyance (4), and Object Read (6), 45 I.S.P.

Equipment: Minimal, including only a Vibro-Sword (2D4 M.D.), TW Firebolt pistol, Pixie Dust, and a Healing potion that restores 1D4x10 S.D.C. or Hit Points.

Spells: Sense P.P.E. (3), Sense Magic (4), Turn Dead (6), Trance (10), Chameleon (6), Concealment (6), Shadow Meld (10), Time Slip (20), Call Lightning (15), Constrain Being (20), Summon & Control Canines (50), Summon Lesser Being (425), Negate Magic (30), Protection Circle: Simple (45), Summon Shadow Beast (140), Summon Entity (250), Frostblade (15), Desiccate the Supernatural (50), Deflect (10), Armor Bizarre (15), Blinding Flash (1), Repel Animals (7), Domination (10), Eyes of Thoth (8), Cloud of Smoke (2), Life Drain (25), Tongues (12), Agony (20), Magic Shield (6), Watchguard (10).

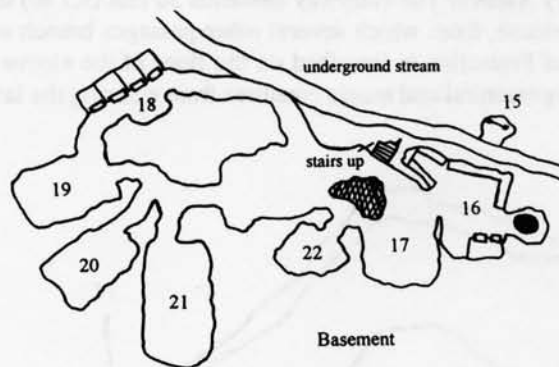
Great Horned Dagger: The most prized possession of Karlador always carried on his person is this greater magic

dagger. It is a curved dagger, carved from the horn of a Great Horned Dragon and dipped in a cauldron of dragon-blood. Inflicts 3D6+6 S.D.C. or M.D., plus does double damage to supernatural creatures, triple damage to good-aligned ones.

Summoner's Jar: This is a black clay jar with a pattern of red demonic figures on its circumference. This is an incredibly powerful magic item that can be used to trap supernatural beings, or to summon a handful of specific beings from their home dimension (1D4 greater or 2D6 lesser; determined at time of creation). Karlador's jar has a capacity of five. It can be used to summon forth a Gargolyte (200 M.D.C.), Lasae (50 M.D.C.), Fenry (150 M.D.C.), Minor Air Elemental (600 M.D.C.) or Grave Ghoul (30 M.D.C.).

14. Secret Tunnel: Connected to the Shifter's quarters by a secret tunnel is the cave of the Vyarnect minion, which is littered with bones. Hidden in the bones is a Dragon's Tooth charm (+6 to save vs dragon magic & psionics, breath weapon does half damage), psychic's crystal (reduce I.S.P. cost of psionics by one third), and 5D6x10 credits in other assorted junk.

Vyarnect: I.Q. 10, M.E. 11, M.A. 7, P.S. 34, P.P. 10, P.E. 24, P.B. 1, Spd 22; 180 M.D.C., H.F. 14, 80 P.P.E.; 500 foot/152 m nightvision, half damage from fire & heat, silver does double damage, climb 95%, prowl 45%; 5 attacks, damage is 6D6 M.D. and 1D6x10 M.D. power punch, bite 3D4 M.D. Bonuses: +3 to initiative, +4 to strike, +2 to parry, +6 to dodge, +10 to save vs poison, +8 to save vs magic. Psionics: Telepathy (4), Levitation, Telekinetic Leap (8) and Bio-Manipulation (10), 44 I.S.P.



Basement

15. Secret Ladder: Ladder in secret compartment that lowers to the bottom level, and the internal stream that leads to a secret exit.

16. Kitchen: Kitchen area that is the domain of 1D4+1 slave women, who are guarded by a single bandit at all times.

17. Common Room: Mess hall and rec area that has plenty of tables, an old television, and PDD player and stereo. At the moment the players arrive there are 2D6+6 bandits and possibly Kwazzyk, all of whom are buzzed (bonuses at half).

18. Washroom Stalls: Toilets. 50% chance that one stall is occupied.

19-21. Dormitories: Dormitory areas. Each currently holds 1D10-1 bandits.

22. Deathshade's Quarters: Deathshade's chambers, home to the second in command of the bandit forces. Officially he is the bodyguard of the Shifter, and as such commands a great deal of respect. His name comes from the habits of eating corpses

and always wearing wrap-around polarized sunglasses, even at night when he can see perfectly. Deathshade has lived on Earth for over ten years, serving as a mercenary for various nefarious forces in the Magic Zone before falling in with the bandits. Treasure includes 3D6x100 credits and a number of discarded weapons recovered from past victims, including a TK Assault Rifle.

Deathshade

3rd level Dybbuk Headhunter

Alignment: Diabolic.

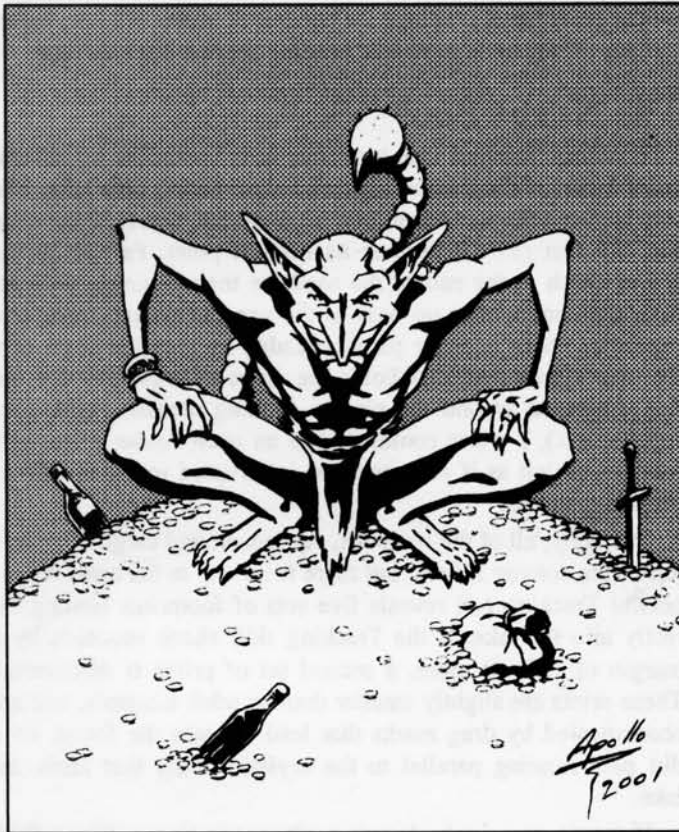
Attributes: I.Q. 10, M.E. 19, M.A. 10, P.S. 23, P.P. 13, P.E. 15, P.B. 6, Spd. 14, M.D.C.: 65, P.P.E. 12, Horror Factor: 14.

Natural Abilities: Track by smell 85%, prowl 50%, swim 50%, nightvision 600 feet (183 m; can see in total darkness), blinded by sunlight (-8 to strike, parry and dodge), sight limited to 30 feet (9.1 m) in artificial light, dig through dirt or clay at 6 feet (1.8 m) per melee, heals 6 times faster than humans, impervious to cold and normal fire, magic cold and fire inflicts half damage. Also possession of recently deceased.

Combat: Six attacks or four in human form.

Bonuses: +1 to parry and dodge, +4 to save vs Horror Factor and magic.

Equipment: Wrap-around polarized sunglasses, C-27 Plasma Ejector, 2 extra E-Clip canisters, WI-C8 Chainsaw with 3 spare E-Clips, 6 pints of blood, and 40 M.D.C. body armor.



Kwazzyk

This tiny demon who stands just 2 feet (0.6 m) tall is the loyal familiar of the Shifter Karldor. The two are linked together magically, and therefore able to see through each other's eyes and other senses. He roves around with the other bandits to

amuse himself and reports on their loyalty to the boss. Most of the bandits like him, and see Kwazzyk as kind of a mascot. If backed into a corner, he will bargain for his life with a secret stash of treasure he's accumulated over the months. His treasure trove consists of 2,100 Universal Credits, a bag of gems that holds 2 diamonds, 5 amethysts and a star sapphire collectively worth 4,300 credits, a laser-gyro hand-held map with routes marked for Psyscape and Stormspire, three bottles of Faerie wine, one of sloe wine, various narcotics including 6 doses of Boin-go, one of Crash and of Juice, Ring of Sense Traps (10 minutes, twice daily), and an eternally sharp sword (1D6+3 M.D.). Kwazzyk will only part with his treasure if his life depends on it; if he can flee, he will, and come back to retrieve it later.

Kwazzyk: Imp familiar, Miscreant, Horror Factor 8, 30 M.D.C., 90 I.S.P., 200 P.P.E., I.Q. 10, M.E. 19, M.A. 12, P.S. 8, P.P. 14, P.E. 15, Spd 38; greater familiar link, all sensitive psi-abilities at 6th level, 3 attacks, +1 to strike and parry, +2 to dodge, +4 to save vs magic, bio-regenerate 3D6 M.D.C./day. Spells: Cloak of Darkness (6), Manipulate Objects (2), Electric Arc (8), Blinding Flash (1), See the Invisible (4), Invisibility: Simple (6), Fear (5), Float in Air (5), Paralysis (5), Carpet of Adhesion (10); bite 1D4 M.D., claws 1 M.D., stinger 1D6+2 M.D. plus 4D6 S.D.C. or M.D. poison.

Sample Random Roll Bandits

Provided below as a guide is an example of some random roll bandits in the Hollow Hill. These seven bandits are found in the Guard Room (area #8). The basic statistics for these characters are the same as those listed above, only the changes are noted.

Bandit #1 wears Urban Warrior armor with 29 M.D.C., and is armed with a C-12 laser rifle, two extra E-Clips and a Vibro-Knife. Has 200 credits in valuables on his person.

Bandit #2 is an augmented Juicer Wannabe jacked-up on designer drugs. P.S. 21, P.P. 18, 200 S.D.C., 39 Hit Points, 4 attacks, +2 to strike, +4 to parry and dodge, +6 damage. Wears CA-2 Deadboy Armor with 35 M.D.C., has a GL-21 rifle with 3 spare clips, and a compu-drug dispenser; 230 credits.

Bandit #3 is a cyborg Headhunter who has a bionic arm (40 M.D.C., P.S. 18, P.P. 16) equipped with retractable Vibro-Claws (2D6 M.D.), and also a universal headjack & ear implant, amplified hearing, a multi-optics eye and cyber armor (A.R. 16, 50 M.D.C.); +6 on initiative, +3 to parry, +4 to dodge, +1 bonus to strike with missile weapons. Equipped with CA-2 Deadboy Armor (has 38 M.D.C.), a GL-21 rifle with 2 extra clips, and 2 fragmentation grenades; 250 credits.

Bandit #4 is a veteran, 6th level Headhunter who has 29 Hit Points, 3 attacks, +1 to strike, +2 to parry, dodge and roll with impact, kick 1D6 S.D.C. and critical on 19-20. He's got Gladiator armor (57 M.D.C.), an M-259 SAW with three spare ammo drums, 2 fragmentation grenades and a Vibro-Sword (2D4 M.D.) for equipment; 230 credits.

Bandit #5 is a minor psychic. He has 22 I.S.P. and the powers of Sixth Sense and See Aura. Wears Juicer Assassin armor (45 M.D.C.), carries an M-16 with 2 extra clips of ramjet ammo, an NG-56 pistol with one spare E-Clip, and an IRMS; 170 credits.

Bandit #6 is an average Headhunter equipped with Bushman armor (60 M.D.C.), an NG-34 plasma ejector with two extra

E-Clips, a TW Spitfire Revolver (damage is 3D6 M.D., 200 foot/61 m range, 6 shot payload and costs 10 P.P.E. or 20 I.S.P. to charge) and a first aid kit; 290 credits.

Bandit #7 is a D-Bee wolfman with magic using abilities. Can cast the spells Eyes of the Wolf and Life Drain. 70 P.P.E. Equipment includes CPA Dog Pack Armor (30 M.D.C.), a compound bow with 22 regular and 11 high-explosive (3D6 M.D.) arrows, as well as Vibro-Claws (2D6 M.D.) attached to the armored gauntlets of the body armor; also 290 credits.

Treasure

If there is too much in the way of weapons, armor and treasure, in the eyes of the G.M., there are several strategies to reduce the amount without simply taking stuff away from the players. First, one can simply take out some of the items from the adventure so that they aren't found in the first place.

Alternately, my preferred method is to have unexpected guests arrive at the Hollow Hill to deal with greedy characters. News spreads quickly of the attack on the bandits who have victimized many groups throughout the area. When the bandits are taken care of, these groups arrive hoping to recover their losses. One group is a Simvan war band mounted on treeswifts with a Rhino-Buffalo war machine and a pack of tame Tiger Stripe Raptors. Next is a group of 2D6x10 Rover warriors and thieves who will join forces with the Simvan and infiltrate. Also the town militia will send forces if the PCs refuse to return recovered goods.

This approach provides more opportunities for roleplaying and adventure. If the players refuse to cooperate with these groups, they will find themselves in the undesirable position of having to defend the Hollow Hill from several hostile forces, who will attack in a united force. However the characters can avoid violence altogether by offering to share the loot equally with all of the groups. Or, they can use a combination of the two, siding with one or two of the groups in return for their help against the others.

Part Two: Welcome to Scenic "Dark Faerie Lake"

In the second part of this adventure, the player characters must recover the remaining vehicles of the convoy from a group of evil supernatural and magical beings. However, this scenario is in fact a separate mini-adventure that can be run independently of Part One if the G.M. desires. As a matter of fact, the G.M. can use Part Two without using any material or the basic storyline of the Hollow Hill segment of the adventure. It can be used instead as a random encounter while travelling through any forested area in the Magic Zone, Tolkeen/Minnesota or even the Black Woods in Germany.

The actual number of opponents in this adventure is low, at just a half-dozen main NPCs. However, every one of these beings has at his command an impressive collection of psionic and magic abilities which, if used to their maximum potential, should give the player characters as much trouble as a Coalition infantry platoon. Incidentally, this mini-adventure also provides an excellent opportunity to introduce player characters from

North America into a sea-faring campaign, based on material from **Rifts® Underseas™** and **Sourcebook 4: The Coalition Navy™**, through the Korallyte Rift Gate located at the bottom of the nexus pool (see below).

Twisted Metal a.k.a. Convoy Ambush Two

Forty miles (64 km) up the road sits the wreckage from a second bandit ambush. A second patrol of bandits, returning from an attack on a Ostrasaurus Express rider heading south from Washington, took the remains of the convoy under fire at this site. Warned by one of Kaldor's minions (the Gargolyte Orno), the ten bandits were ready for the convoy. Unfortunately for them, a hunting party of Simvan warriors arrived at the ambush at the same time as the convoy. The bandits wiped-out the Simvan, but in the confusion two of the three remaining convoy vehicles sped away to the north.

Hours later the forest has reverted to its normal quiet, peaceful state. All that remains of the frantic fire-fight is the twisted, burnt-out remains of an armored jeep. Close by are the bodies of four Simvan warriors and their arbolyte mounts, all flash-fried by plasma and magic fire. Both tire tracks from the convoy and the bandits' foot prints lead to the north. Ten miles (16 km) from the ambush site, the bandit tracks come to a stop, and anyone making a Tracking roll can see that the bandits broke off the chase and headed south towards the Hollow Hill. The tire tracks, on the other hand, continue for another 30 miles (48 km) before pulling off the trade route and heading down a dirt side road.

The Nexus Pool

The long, forested lane-way they took meanders for several miles before ending at the edge of a shimmering blue lake. The lake is over a thousand feet (305 m) long, 500 feet (152 m) wide and 200 feet (61 m) deep at its deepest point. Parked on the gravel beach at the end of the road are the remaining vehicles from the convoy. Set up next to the car and pickup truck is a campsite. There is a fire pit surrounded by rocks in front of a five-man dome tent, that holds the ashes of a several day old fire. Arranged around the pit are cooking utensils (grill, pan, spatula, etc.), a water container and an open cooler filled with food — all left as if someone was interrupted in the middle of preparing a meal.

Strangely, all of the weapons, equipment and cargo of what's left of the convoy is here, but there is no one in the area. A successful Tracking roll reveals five sets of footprints leading directly into the lake. If the Tracking skill check succeeds by a margin of 15% or more, a second set of prints is discovered. These prints are slightly smaller than an adult human's, and are accompanied by drag marks that lead off into the forest, on a dirt path running parallel to the crystal stream that feeds the lake.

If magic or psionic detection (Presence Sense, Sense Evil, Sense Magic or Psi-Stalker natural abilities) is used to try and locate the missing convoy drivers, it reveals that *the lake itself* radiates magical energy, as it is the nexus for a trio of small ley lines. A corollary effect of this is that, in addition to having all the regular attributes of a nexus point, the waters of the lake have themselves gained some magical properties. Anyone who

drinks from, bathes or swims in the lake will find himself magically refreshed and healed. As often as twice daily, the water can be used to restore 5D6 Hit Points and/or S.D.C. and 1D4x10 P.P.E. or I.S.P. energy!

Furthermore, magic and psionic detection will reveal that there are several supernatural evil presences in the vicinity. These are the seven Water Serpents and Shamra (the Psiren) in the lake, and Fink the Psi-Goblin skulking around in the shadows of the campsite.

The Water Serpents

Swimming beneath the placid waters of the nexus pool are seven vicious Water Serpents (for a full description, see pages 110-111 of *Sourcebook 4: Coalition Navy™*). They are the creatures responsible for the disappearance of the convoy drivers and guards. With the help of Shamra, the Water Serpents killed and ate all but one of the merchant crew (the Psi-Goblins captured the last crew member; see below). Using her psionic Empathic Transmission, the Psiren lured them into the nexus pool, where they were torn to pieces by the hungry Water Serpents. This tactic is one that the serpents and Shamra have been using for years.

The relationship between the Psiren and the Water Serpents is best described as one of convenience. They are not friends or allies in the true sense of the words. Moreover, Shamra has no direct influence over the serpents, they are not charmed minions nor are they obedient trained pets; although it must be said that the serpents do fear the Psiren. Instead, they work together because their respective abilities are complimentary and gel perfectly. Shamra and the serpents are content to cooperate so long as their respective interests are maintained. The Water Serpents guard the nexus pool against the encroachment of rival forces when Shamra is away, and the Psiren lures unsuspecting humanoids into the pool for the serpents.

As the guardians of the pool, it is the serpents who watch the beach for prey or invaders. Roughly every hour at least one of them (roll 1D4) surfaces to have a look around. As a result, there is a cumulative 1 in 6 chance that the Water Serpents will detect the player characters for every 10 minutes they are on the beach. When the serpents do scout they are very cautious, and thus will only be noticed if a character makes a successful *Detect Ambush* skill check with a -15% penalty. Should they discover the characters, the Water Serpents will alert Shamra by gathering at the entrance to her underwater cave lair.

Water Serpents: Statistics of Note: Diabolic alignment. I.Q. 8, M.A. 2, M.E. 11, P.S. 23, P.P. 16, P.E. 16, P.B. 4, Spd 76 in water, 38 on land. 6D6+60 M.D.C. each, Horror Factor: 11, 1D6 P.P.E. Natural abilities include 400 foot/122 m nightvision, cold resistance (half damage), bio-regeneration 4D6 M.D.C. daily, swim 98%, climb 70/50%, prowl 50%, track by sight 55%, and track by smell 70%. Combat: 4 attacks per melee, damage is 3D6 M.D. for bite or gore with horns, 2D6 M.D. tail swat or ram or 3D4 M.D. by constriction. Bonuses: +2 on initiative, +3 to strike, +2 to dodge, +3 to entangle, +8 to save vs poisons/toxins/disease and +5 to save vs Horror Factor.

Shamra, The Psiren

Mistress of the Lake

If there is a master of the nexus pool it is Shamra. She is a Psiren, one of the monstrous creations and minions of the *Lord of the Deep* (see pages 41-48 of *Rifts® Underseas™* for the complete descriptions of the Lord of the Deep and his minions). Like all Psiren, Shamra is an evil aquatic predator who is part beautiful woman and part sea creature. From the waist up she



has the body of a normal woman, but has a shark's tail instead of legs. Psiren minions of the Lord of the Deep are transformed into an image of the mermaids from Greek legend. They, like the legendary mermaids, also lure unsuspecting sailors and land-dwellers to their deaths, using the awesome psionic power granted them by their alien master.

Shamra, however, is no average Psiren, for even among her own kind she is an individual possessed of incredible power. The Lord of the Deep has granted her a share of its alien essence, in a manner similar to the pact of Witchery, to reward her cunning, leadership and years of loyal service. She is a kind of Psiren Noble or Baroness, who has slightly more potent psionics, a limited use of magic, increased life span (250 years), and commands a retinue of lesser minions including a pod of normal Psiren, several Demon Sharks, and a Monster Naut'Yll.

Along with her increased status, Shamra has been tasked with more important duties for the Lord of the Deep. Chief among these is to defend a stronghold of Cultists of the Deep that exists on the Tarawa Atoll in the Gilbert Islands. Shamra's group has also been charged with locating the secret bases of the New Navy in the South Pacific. After their bold attack on the Marianas Trench, the Lord of the Deep wishes to diminish the threat posed by the New Navy. The intelligence believes that by destroying the string of bases that supports the fleet, it will remove the *Ticonderoga* as a danger to its expanding power.

The constant search for New Navy bases is draining, and thus Shamra has taken to using the nexus pool as a personal retreat. The Psiren has visited the lake for decades, having discovered a magic Korallyte Gate at a *Dead Pool* (underwater ley line nexus) near the Gilbert Islands, connected to an identical formation in the nexus pool by means of a permanent Rift. (These Korallyte Gates function something like the Devil's Gate, and were created by a renegade Naut'Yll Koral Shaper of great power, whose remains Shamra found nearby.) Unlike the Devil's Gate, this Rift opens when the key, a magic Korallyte bracelet, is used. Shamra recovered the bracelet from the dead Naut'Yll, and thus is the only one who can use the Korallyte Gates.

Whenever she can afford the opportunity to rest, Shamra leaves the Pacific for the healing waters of the nexus pool. At the bottom, hollowed out from the lake bed, the Psiren has a cave where she spends the majority of her time. The Water Serpents act as her scouts and protectors, warning Shamra whenever anyone approaches the lake. If something comes close to the lake, she uses her Empathic Transmission or Hypnotic Suggestion powers to lure it into the lake for the Water Serpents to kill. Or she will use her magical *Conch of Sleep* to incapacitate large groups, allowing the Water Serpents to then feast on the helpless, sleeping victims.

The Psiren's cave is a simple hollow carved from the rock that measures no more than 10 feet (3 m) in height, 20 feet (6.1 m) in width and 40 feet (12.2 m) in length. Strewn in front of the cave are the bones of dozens of victims consumed by the evil Psiren and the serpents. Long weeds conceal the entrance to the cave, which Shamra can animate (as well as the bones of the dead) to protect her cave if pursued underwater. Contained within the cave are the treasures that the Psiren has amassed from victims over the years. Included in this treasure hoard are several Universal Credit cards with a combined total of 142,000

credits, 3D4 assorted energy rifles, 1D6+1 slightly damaged suits of body armor, an intact Juicer Bio-Comp system, the corpse of a partial conversion cyborg with bionic limbs and 1D6+2 salvageable implants, a TW Thunder Maul taken from a Spriggan warrior (inflicts 3D6+2 M.D. plus regular punch damage), and a scroll of Ocean Magic (can be used by "regular" magic practitioners) with the following spells, all at 6th level strength: Armor of Neptune, Communicate with Sea Creature, Impervious to Ocean Depths, Breathe Without Air, Metamorphosis: Fish, Sense Direction Underwater and Senses of the Shark (see pages 63-70 of *Rifts® Underseas™* for Ocean Magic spell descriptions).

Statistical Data of Note

O.C.C. & Level of Experience: Psiren R.C.C.

Alignment: Miscreant.

Attributes: I.Q. 15, M.E. 14, M.A. 8, P.S. 25, P.P. 14, P.E. 24, P.B. 22, Spd 70 in water, 4 on land, M.D.C.: 214, Horror Factor: 14, P.P.E. 146.

Natural Abilities: Does not need to breathe or eat, swim 90%, leap up to 5 feet (1.5 m) in air, 500 foot/152 m nightvision, impervious to cold, survive depths of 1.5 miles (2.4 km).

Vulnerabilities: Bonuses are reduced by half when on land. Takes double damage from Millennium Tree and rune weapons.

Combat: Four physical or psionic attacks per melee.

Bonuses: +2 on initiative, +4 to strike, parry and dodge, +2 to roll with impact, +2 to pull punch, +6 to save vs Horror Factor, +5 to save vs poison and magic, +3 to save vs disease, and 60% chance to charm/impress.

Damage: Bite inflicts 3D6 M.D., tail slap does 1D6 M.D., and claws do 4D6 M.D.

Magic: Can cast all first level Water Elemental spells, plus the following: Air Swim, Animate & Control Dead, Animate Plants, Blind, Grow Tentacles, Impervious to Electricity, Senses of the Shark, and Summon Sharks/Whales (sharks only).

Psionics: Master psychic with a save vs psionics of 10. Powers include Empathic Transmission but limited to love/peacefulness, trust and confusion, but with 15x the range (900 feet/274 m). Also Hypnotic Suggestion, Mind Bolt, Psi-Sword (1d6x10 M.D.), Mind Block, Empathy, Telepathy, Remote Viewing and See the Invisible, at 10th level proficiency. I.S.P.: 120.

Skills of Note: Speaks American, Japanese and Naut'Yll, all at 95% proficiency. Plus Sing 80%, Prowl 70%, Pick Pockets 70%, Demon and Monster Lore 70%, Sea Holistic Medicine 65% and Underwater Navigation 66%.

Equipment: Has more personal possessions than do most Psiren, including dozens of golden bracelets on each wrist worth a total of 3900 credits, a Naut'Yll Energy Trident (inflicts 5D6 M.D. per shot or strike, range of 1000 feet/305 m, payload of 30 blasts or strikes), an Amulet of Shark Metamorphosis (as the Ocean Magic spell for 60 minutes twice per day), and a *Conch of Sleep* — a powerful magic item that can be used twice per day, and when played has the same effect as a Whale-Singer Song of Sleep (see page 59 of *Rifts® Underseas™*).

The Dark Faeries

Following the other set of smaller footprints from the beach takes the characters down a winding, 3000 foot (914 m) pathway that runs parallel to the stream that feeds the lake. This path ends in a sandy clearing, beside a small waterfall that is 20 feet (6.1 m) in height. Concealed behind the falling water is a small opening that is the entrance to the caves of the *Psi-Goblins* Kullat, Fink and Teer, and their Black Faerie companion Irfae.

These three Psi-Goblins and their Black Faerie ally are the terrors of the area. From their cave base, Fink, Kullat and Teer wander the countryside looking for victims. They are horribly cruel sadists who love nothing better than torturing intelligent life forms. And their nastiest tortures are reserved for nicer Faerie Folk, whom the Goblins eat. Only Shamra and her Water Serpent minions are safe from their tender mercies, for the Dark Faeries have a tacit live-and-let-live truce with the Psiren. Many inconclusive battles, in which neither side could gain a clear advantage, led to their current unspoken understanding. Both sides keep to themselves, and do their best to avoid a conflict when the two do meet.

Of the three Psi-Goblins, the smartest and most charismatic is the female **Teer**. She is a natural leader who commands a great deal of respect (at least from evil Faerie Folk). Teer is also ruthless, sadistic and totally unscrupulous, which explains why the others automatically defer to her authority in spite of her gender. It is Teer who plots the Dark Faeries' tactics, and who leads the group in the torture of prisoners. Her favorite methods of torture include crucifixion, skinning captives alive, or staking them to the Death Ants' hill. Teer cares nothing for the other Dark Faeries beyond their usefulness as pawns in her evil plans. In combat she hangs back, using psionics and aimed laser shots, leaving the close-in work to the others. She views Kullat, Fink and Irfae to a lesser extent as cannon fodder, and is willing to risk their lives to secure her goals. Nevertheless Teer is shrewd enough to realize that she needs them and thus will not waste them in pointless situations.

Kullat provides the muscle of this Dark Faerie band. This heavily muscled Goblin plays the role of bloodthirsty savage to the hilt. He is a warrior of some skill, who truly relishes the opportunity to crush his foes in hand to hand combat. In his tactics Kullat is both brutal and direct. When he goes into battle it is with the protective field of an Armor of Ithan spell over his bloodstained body armor, an icy Frostblade in one hand and his magic scimitar *Blaze* in the other. Propelled by a Telekinetic Leap he jumps right next to his opponents and makes reckless paired strikes (simultaneous attacks) without bothering to parry until his Armor of Ithan wears off. Kullat is a loud-mouthed, arrogant braggart who fears no man, yet he is a mindless follower who always defers to the leadership of Teer.

The last of the Psi-Goblins is **Fink**, the younger brother of Kullat. Fink is the opposite of his brother. He is cautious, studious and timid, where Kullat is a reckless maniac. Fighting is not up his alley, even though Fink is a capable fighter. Instead his style is to move around unseen in the shadows and to strike with surprise. What Fink brings to the band are his thieving skills, easily the equal of any pickpocket in the seediest 'Burbs. He is the scout and scavenger for the group, their eyes and ears. While Fink gets along well with his brother, he despises Teer (and the feeling is mutual). Fink is a loner, a smart-aleck and a bit of a

rebel who hates being under the thumb of Teer, but so long as Kullat is loyal to the female he is powerless to alter the situation. If a fight goes against the Dark Faeries, it is Fink who is the first to run or to surrender — to be rid of Teer and Irfae, he might even cooperate with a group of enemies.

To be sure the most hideous of the Dark Faerie band is **Irfae**. Like all Black Faeries, this is a misanthropic predator who seems to despise all forms of life. Irfae tolerates the Psi-Goblins only because he can tolerate the cunning and wickedness of the female Teer. The Black Faerie is smart enough to realize that it will prosper and enjoy more success under the leadership of Teer than he would on his own. He feels absolutely no loyalty towards the males Kullat and Fink, however, and works with them only at Teer's behest.

Basic Psi-Goblin Stats

O.C.C. & Level of Experience: 2nd level Psi-Goblin R.C.C.

Alignment: Miscreant.

Attributes: I.Q. 10, M.E. 14, M.A. 3, P.S. 18, P.P. 18, P.E. 18, P.B. 6, Spd 18, Horror Factor: 11.

Natural Abilities: Double-jointed, 1000 foot/305 m nightvision, swim 55%, climb 80/70%, bio-regenerate 2D6 M.D.C. per hour.

Combat: Three physical or psionic attacks or one by magic.

Bonuses: +3 on initiative, +2 to strike, +3 to disarm, +4 to pull punch, +2 to roll with impact, +6 to save vs Horror Factor, +2 to save vs magic, +3 to save vs poison, pollution and radiation.

Damage: Restrained punch 3D6+3 S.D.C., regular punch or bite 1D6 M.D., claw strike or power punch 2D6 M.D., power claw strike inflicts 3D6 M.D. but counts as two attacks.

Magic: Can cast each of the following spells three times per 24 hour period: Shadow Meld, Armor of Ithan, Fool's Gold, Repel Animals, Energy Bolt, Force Bonds and Frostblade.

Psionics: Major psychics, with the powers of Detect Psionics, Death Trance, See the Invisible, Sense Magic, Sense Evil, Mind Block and Ectoplasm.

Skills of Note: Speak Gobblely and Faerie at 98%, speak American at 65%, Escape Artist 60%, Interrogation 50%, Intelligence 50%, Streetwise 38%, Land Navigation 54%, Wilderness Survival 55%, W.P. Paired Weapons and W.P. Sword (+1 to strike and parry).

Fink — Statistical Data of Note: 4th level, P.P. 24, Spd 30, 19 M.D.C., 50 P.P.E., 44 I.S.P., Alter Aura and Telekinesis, Escape Artist 70%, Pick Locks 50%, Pick Pockets 45%, Prowl 45%, Detect Ambush 50%, Detect Concealment 45%, Cardsharp 40%, W.P. Sword (+2 to strike & parry), W.P. Knife (+2 to parry, +1 to strike & throw), W.P. Crossbow (+2 to strike, rate of 4), W.P. Energy Pistol, +5 to strike, parry and dodge; boots of stealth (+20% to Prowl, -5% to Tracking checks), light crossbow, 12 normal bolts, 6 magic *Firebolt* quarrels (4D6+6 M.D.), Vibro-Sword 2D4 M.D., and a Wilk's 320 laser pistol. Fink carries 6D6x1000 credits worth of gems and precious metals in a small *Enchanted Bag* (see **The Palladium Fantasy RPG® 2nd Ed.** page 258).

Kullat — Statistical Data of Note: P.S. 22, 40 M.D.C., 80 P.P.E., 35 I.S.P., Impervious to Fire and Telekinetic Leap, Detect Ambush 35%, Tracking 30%, Prowl 30%, General Repair/Maintenance 40%, W.P. Blunt (+1 to strike & parry), restrained punch 4D6+7 S.D.C., bite 1D6 M.D., regular

punch 2D6 M.D., claw strike 3D6 M.D., power claw strike 5D6 M.D., Huntsman armor 35 M.D.C., *Blaze* magical scimitar 3D6 M.D. and can spit fireballs three times daily that inflict 3D6+2 M.D., Neural Mace (1D8 S.D.C. plus stun).

Teer — **Statistical Data of Note:** Diabolic, I.Q. 12, M.E. 17, M.A. 5, 29 M.D.C., 50 P.P.E., 80 I.S.P., Telekinetic Acceleration Attack (3D6+4 M.D.) and Deaden Senses, Imitate Voices 40/20%, Sniper, Prowl 30%, Ventriloquism 20%, Demon & Monster Lore 30%, Magic Lore 30%, Literacy 35%, Skin and Prepare Animal Hides 35%, +1 to save vs psionics and insanity, skinning knife 1D6 S.D.C., Wilk's 447 laser rifle, 2 spare E-Clips, magic Ring of Metamorphosis: Human for 30 minutes twice daily, magical scroll with spells of Age, Circle of Flame, Multiple Image, Monster Insect and Giant, all at 8th level proficiency (see page 150 of **Federation of Magic™** for the Giant spell; Monster Insect is adapted from the **Palladium Fantasy RPG® 2nd Ed.**, and its effects are described below). Teer loves gold jewelry, and wears plenty of it around her neck, wrists, fingers and in her ears; the total value of her jewelry is 3D6x1000 credits.

Irfae — Black Faerie

Alignment: Diabolic.

Attributes: I.Q. 8, M.E. 18, M.A. 5, P.S. 18, P.P. 17, P.E. 20, P.B. 2, Spd 8 crawling or 88 flying (60 mph/96 km), M.D.C.: 120 main body, 50 per wing (2), Horror Factor: 16, P.P.E.: 50.

Natural Abilities: Flies, impervious to normal fire and cold, impervious to poison, climb 60%, prowl 50%, track by scent 35%, and recognize human blood scent 50%.

Combat: Four physical attacks or two by magic.

Bonuses: +2 to strike, +3 to parry, +8 to dodge, +3 on initiative, +6 to save vs psionics and magic.

Damage: Bite 1D6 M.D. or tail strike 1D6 M.D. plus 60% likelihood of knocking victim down; lose one melee attack.

Magic: Chameleon, Fuel Flame, Fire Bolt, Blind, Agony and Sleep. Magic is equal in strength to a 14th level mage with a spell strength of +2. Spells can be cast as often as the Faerie wants, but limited in that each spell can be used only once per day on any particular individual.

Psionics: None.

The Dark Faerie Ambush

As the group scavenger, Fink makes a daily trip down to the lake front to sort through the debris left by Shamra's victims. When the characters arrive, he is skulking around the beach in the shadows, hidden by his Shadowmeld ability. He quickly and quietly sneaks away to warn the others and returns with them in fifteen minutes, unless of course he is detected and prevented from doing so. When the Dark Faeries approach, the Psi-Goblins use their Shadowmeld to approach undetected. At the edge of the forest, Irfae casts his Chameleon spell on himself and Teer. If the group is forced to retreat, he also uses it on Kullat and Fink to aid their escape attempt.

Kullat initiates the battle using his Telekinetic Leap to jump right next to the most dangerous looking character. Fink hangs back at the forest edge firing crossbow bolts, before wading into the battle with a Vibro-Sword and Frostblade. Teer and Irfae hang back inside the woods, using their magic and psionics to attack. Irfae uses his Blind and Agony spells to incapacitate en-

emy fighters. If things start to go particularly bad for Kullat and Fink, then Teer will unstrap her laser rifle and open fire on the enemy.

The Dark Faeries always try to take their opponents alive. They try first to weaken their foes in combat and incapacitate them with magic. At this point the Psi-Goblins try to subdue the characters and tie them up using their Forcebond ability. Captives are then dragged off to the Psi-Goblins' cave where they are tied, again with forcebonds, to stakes pounded into the ground next to the Death Ants' hill. The Faeries watch with sick fascination, hooting and hollering all the while, as the D-Bee ants eat their victims alive.

The Dark Faeries' Cave

The home of the Dark Faeries is a small series of caves that are dark and smell of rotting corpses. Inside there is nothing, save for a few piles of blankets used as beds and the remains of their past victims. Outside of the cave is the torture area, where the Psi-Goblins have left a couple of crucifixes standing and have hung skins from past victims from the trees. The sandy area directly in front of the cave is also the lair of a colony of predatory D-Bee ants called Death Ants.

These ants will attack anyone other than the Dark Faeries who enters the area. They can sense the footfalls of anyone who steps on the sand, and emerge from their hill to attack. The ants have more or less been trained to leave the Psi-Goblins alone, after being repeatedly subjected to their Repel Animals ability. As such, the ants don't even take notice of the Psi-Goblins.

Death Ants Statistics: Animalistic predators; P.S. 4 (2D4), P.P. 6 (2D6), P.E. 12 (4D6), Spd 3 (1D6), A.R. 16, S.D.C.: 50 (2D4x10+10), Hit Points: 16 (2D6+10), P.P.E.: 1D4, resistant to fire/heat including plasma and magical fire (half damage), climb 95/80%, swim 70%, land navigation 60%, track by scent 44%, 1 attack per melee, bite inflicts 1 M.D., +1 on initiative, +2 to strike, and +1 to dodge. No magical or psychic abilities.

If the characters chase the Psi-Goblins back to their cave or manage to sneak up on them, Teer uses the Monster Insect spell from her magic scroll on one of the Death Ants. When the spell is used, one of the ants grows approximately to the size of a horse and fights under the command of Teer for the next 40 minutes.

Monster Death Ant: Giant, horse-sized insect created by magical spell (see Teer description above); P.S. 24, P.P. 10, P.E. 20, Spd 58 (40 mph/64 km), M.D.C.: 30, P.P.E.: 3, Horror Factor: 13, resistant to fire/heat including plasma and magical fire (half damage), climb 95/85%, swim 80%, land navigation 80%, track humanoids and animals 80%, 3 attacks per melee, bite inflicts 3D6 M.D., +3 on initiative, +5 to strike, +1 to parry, and +4 to dodge. No magical or psychic abilities.

Further Adventures Through the Korallyte Gate

When the characters have dealt with Shamra and the Psi-Goblins, the only thing left to do is to explore the nexus pool. It only takes about five minutes of searching underwater to locate the magical Korallyte Gate at the bottom of the lake. If

the player characters have also recovered the magic bracelet from Shamra, they can pass through the gate and arrive at the dead pool nexus near the Gilbert Islands. In case the characters want to explore this avenue, there are a number of magical items and spells from the scroll of Shamra to facilitate some underseas adventuring.

The Korallyte Gate on the other side of the Rift is located on a coral reef approximately 20 miles (32 km) from the Tarawa Atoll. It is only about 100 feet (30.5 m) beneath the water — easily within the pressure limits of any environmental body armor. Scattered around the reef are the bodies of dozens of sailors, KreeL-Lok, Naut'Yll and other aquatic D-Bees, devoured over the decades by monsters that emerge from the dead pool at solstices and equinoxes. There is also debris from ships that have crashed into the reef, and even some ancient relics left over from the bloody Tarawa invasion of World War Two. Hidden amongst the debris is a *Tectonic Entity* (or 1D6 Grave Ghouls, if the G.M. prefers) which attacks the characters almost immediately. The Entity forms a body from a mix of bones and ship debris, which gives it 50 M.D.C., plus the 70 M.D.C. of its regular form, and it inflicts 3D6 M.D. in hand to hand attacks. It fights until its physical body is destroyed, and afterwards continues to

use its Telekinesis ability to try and drown anyone not wearing environmental armor.

Once the Tectonic Entity is defeated, it is up to the players and G.M. where to take the adventure from here. If the characters head right for the Gilbert Islands they will run into the forces of Shamra, which include a pod of 9 Psiren, 3 Devil Sharks, 8 Sea Dopplegangers, and a Monster Naut'Yll named Pyraud (309 M.D.C.), who was formally a 6th level Devastator special forces soldier. In addition to these minions of the Lord of the Deep, there is a thriving Cult of the Deep located on the Tarawa Atoll. Everyone living on the island, which has a total population of 5D6x100 humans of Micronesian decent, lives under the domination of Rhoto, a Servant of the Deep, and his 4 acolytes (see pages 41-48 of *Rifts® Underseas™* for complete descriptions of the various minions of the deep).

Besides the forces of Shamra, there are endless possibilities for adventure. The characters can encounter forces from the New Navy, Whale Singers, Tritonia, or even the navy of Japan's New Republic, not to mention evil forces such as the Naut'Yll and Horune pirates. It is really up to the G.M. and the characters to determine how long they wish to campaign underwater before returning to the nexus pool through the Korallyte Gates.

BLOOD MAGIC



Optional material for *Rifts®* and other games

By Nathan Bingham

Below are a few new spells for the Blood Shaman O.C.C. presented in *The Rifter® #2*. Blood Magic is a gruesome, disgusting art, in which the Shaman actually spills his own blood to create magical effects, thus inflicting damage upon himself with every spell. The spell descriptions below may be disturbing to some, so reader discretion is advised.

Level One

Bleeding Eyes

Range: Touch.

Duration: 1 minute per level of experience.

Saving Throw: Standard.

P.P.E.: 6

Damage to Caster: 1D6

The Shaman must physically touch the victim near the eyes. Immediately, the victim starts to bleed profusely from the eyes, causing blindness. No amount of cleaning can help, as this is in fact a magical blindness, identical to the Blind spell in the *Rifts® RPG*, page 172. This spell causes no damage to the victim, and in fact no real blood loss.

Bleeding Tears

Range: 5 feet (1.5 m) per level of experience.

Duration: 2 minutes per level of experience.

Saving Throw: Standard.

P.P.E.: 6

Damage to Caster: 1D6

This is a curse for those who have offended a Shaman or are being picked on by the mage. This spell creates tears of blood that everyone sees except the victim. The eyes look like they were gorged out, and they are constantly weeping. The victim will feel as though his/her eyes are irritated and blood shot, but nothing more. Horror Factor of 16 to those who look at the victim. Most victims don't know why all the people run or panic at their sight.

Level Two

Blood Shot

Range: 150 feet (45.7 m), +20 feet (6.1 m) per level of experience.

Damage: 3D8

Duration: Instant.

Saving Throw: Dodge.

P.P.E.: 7

Damage to Caster: 1D8

This paper cut could kill a foe. By cutting a finger or near the eye (+2 to strike using the eye), the Shaman can send a blood drop soaring with force towards their foe. In S.D.C. worlds, this spell surpasses any Armor Rating and explodes through any protection. In M.D.C. worlds, this spell does double damage (in M.D.C.) to the supernatural and creatures of magic. Against M.D.C. armor, this spell bypasses the armor, causing no damage, and delivering its damage to the person inside the armor (S.D.C. or M.D.C., depending on the nature of the target).

Heartbeat

Range: 6 feet (1.8 m) per level of experience.

Duration: 1 melee per level of experience.

Saving Throw: Standard.

P.P.E.: 5

Damage to Caster: 1D4+1

This spell is a reflection of the Blood Shaman's obsession with fear and insanity. When the spell is cast, the victim begins to hear a heartbeat. Slowly the beat becomes faster and closer.

As it begins to reach a peak, the victim needs to save vs a Horror Factor of 15 or run screaming in any direction. Some just stay and begin waving their weapons about. There is a 01-20% chance of attacking the nearest object/person with full force. Hey, anything to get that beating out of their head.

Level Three

Bleeding Flame

Range: Touch.

Duration: 2 minutes per level of experience.

Saving Throw: Standard.

P.P.E.: 10

Damage to Caster: 2D4+2

This spell enables the caster to do more than just cut and bleed their enemies, but also burn them. During the duration of this spell, for each cut to the victim made by the caster, the victim must save against magic, or the cut catches flame and begins to burn. Simply patting it out will put out the fire, but it will also cost an attack. If left unattended, the fires will ignite any combustibles. The Bleeding Flame increases the caster's normal attack damage, by +1D4 for a stabbing attack, or +1D6 for a slashing attack.



Bleeding Mind

Range: 30 feet (9.1 m).

Duration: 1 minute per level of experience.

Saving Throw: Standard.

P.P.E.: 9

Damage to Caster: 1D6+3

As the Blood Shaman begins his cut him/herself and chant the spell, should the victim fail their roll, the person snagged by this spell will suddenly freeze in their spot and begin bleeding from the ears and eyes. The victim's eyes will begin to flutter as they truthfully answer every question asked by the Shaman, holding nothing back. The questions can be asked by written message, verbal, or telepathic, but the victim can only respond to the caster though words. The caster must see his/her victim in order for the magic to work.

Bleeding Pit

Range: 30 feet (9.1 m) per level of experience.

Duration: 10 melees per level of experience.

Saving Throw: None, just avoid it and watch your footing.

P.P.E.: 10

Damage to Caster: 2D4+2

This spell creates a 100 square foot (9 square meter) area that looks like a pit filled with boiling blood, and smells awful. Those who step into the pit feel the burning warmth of the blood as they begin to sink. After sinking up to their knees, the sinking stops, but it will take them a full melee round to struggle free of the tar-like blood of the pit. Trying to walk through the pit to the other side will take 1D6+4 melee rounds, and will leave one a bloody mess.

Bleeding Tongue

Range: Touch.

Duration: 3 minutes per level of experience.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 12

Damage to Caster: 1D6+3

This is equivalent of the Tongues spell in the *Rifts RPG*®, page 177.

Crimson Vision

Range: 30 feet (9.1 m), plus 10 feet (3 m) per level of experience.

Duration: 2 minutes per level.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 10

Damage to Caster: 2D4+2

This spell enables the caster to see blood coursing through veins, through up to 2 feet (0.6 m) thick surfaces. The only exception is when looking through freezing surfaces, such as the famed Wall of Ice, or if the victim's body doesn't register on thermal vision.

Slash

Range: 4 feet (1.2 m) per level experience.

Damage: 1D4 per attack.

Duration: Two melees.

Saving Throw: Standard, must save for each snap/attack.

P.P.E.: 12

Damage to Caster: 3D6

This spell allows the caster to inflict damage to his target by snapping his fingers. This magic cannot work past power armor, unless Blood Shot has been cast and has created a hole. This spell directly affects those wearing regular armor, doing S.D.C. or M.D.C., depending on the nature of the target. With each snap comes a gut retching tear in the flesh, doing superficial



damage. The caster may make two of these snapping attacks for every attack he would normally have.

Level Four

Bleeding Fists

Range: Self or by touch.

Damage: Varies with P.S.

Duration: One melee per level of experience.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 10 self or 50 to cast on another.

Damage to Caster: 1D6 self, or 3D6 to cast the spell on another.

This is identical to the Fists of Fury spell listed in *Federation of Magic*™.

Bleeding Veins of Insanity

Range: 30 feet (9.1 m), +10 feet (3 m) per level of experience.

Duration: The enchantment of the blade is permanent until used; the effects last one hour per level of experience.

Saving Throw: -2 vs magic.

P.P.E.: 20

Damage to Caster: 3D6+2

The Shaman has the ability to enchant a blade to cause swelling in the veins and arteries, that once in the brain causes a random insanity. Once the victim is struck, the magic is cast and the blade becomes normal again.

There's a bonus to this magic spell. This spell is like a fine wine that ages and grows with intensity. For each year that the blade is kept from use, an additional insanity will be caused by

the blade (inflicted upon the same victim). Shamans all over have saved one or two blades for just this reason.

There's also one more thing that this curse causes, ugly old swollen veins for the length of duration. Physical Beauty drops by six points during this time.



Bloody Horror

Range: 20 feet (6.1 m).

Duration: 1 minute per level.

Saving Throw: Standard.

P.P.E.: 19

Damage to Caster: 2D6+4

This is a twist on the Bloodlust spell, and can be useful on friend or foe, depending on the circumstances. The recipient receives all the benefits and penalties of the Bloodlust spell, but he appears to be completely drenched in blood, and has a Horror Factor of 16.

Bonus and penalties:

Horror Factor: 16

+4 to damage.

+2 to strike.

-6 to save vs insanity to resist striking a fellow ally or family members.

-4 to save vs insanity.

Crimson War Paint

Range: Affects a 10 foot (3 m) radius, plus 5 feet (1.5 m) per level of experience.

Duration: 1 melee round per level of experience.

Saving Throw: None! Participants must all be willing.

P.P.E.: 20

Damage to Caster: 1D8+5

This spell inflicts the effects of Bloodlust, at half strength, upon a large war party. All recipients must be willing, and must apply blood to their faces, like war paint. The bonuses are +1 to strike, and +2 damage, and the participants are immune to Horror Factor. The penalties are also lessened, with a -2 to save vs insanity, -2 to parry and dodge (and no automatic dodge, either), and -10% to skills.

No participant may get out of the spell prematurely. On the bright side, while they *may* attack their allies (-3 to save vs insanity to resist doing so), they will not attack other participants in this spell.

Level Five



Hemo-Goblin

Range: The creature can't travel more than five feet (1.5 m) away from the caster per level of experience; otherwise, a chain magically appears and pulls him back into the radius.

Duration: 4 hours per level of experience.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 30

Damage to Caster: 3D6

This spell summons a vicious little creature eager to suck, lick, and bite to feed its hunger. Every hour that the creature is in our dimension, it must consume at least 3 pints of blood. The creature stands 6 inches (15 cm) tall, weighs half a pound (0.23 kg), and has huge teeth and claws (1D6 bite damage, plus blood loss), a small tail and looks a bit comical, with over exaggerated features. He cannot leave the caster's shoulder without consent. Of course, if the creature isn't fed, that does leave the caster's neck open for a meal. The Hemo-Goblin is smart, and that is why most summon him. With an I.Q. of 30 and a general 80% knowledge on anything not combat related, the creature can give advise on most anything, and will, as long as it is fed.

The Talking Beheaded

Range: Touch.

Duration: 15 seconds per level of experience.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 25

Damage to Caster: 3D8

This spell enables the recently deceased/beheaded (within the last five minutes per level of experience) to speak one last time before going on to a "better place." The speech is very simple. The words are one or two word responses. Once the spell has expired, the corpse will close its eyes and die. This doesn't mean that the person will answer anything truthfully, but it will be answered. (Hey, just because they're dead doesn't mean that they instantly like the caster or that they'll tell the truth. In other words, the previously living still has their personality, and is not likely to cooperate with an enemy.)

Level Six

Blood Curse

Range: Touch.

Duration: 24 hours per level.

Saving Throw: Standard.

P.P.E.: 40

Damage to Caster: 4D12

This spell creates a dot of blood that keeps smearing on the victim as he rubs it. The funny thing is, only the victim will see the blood, and those watching the victim may actually think that he is possessed trying to rub out a blood dot that no one sees. All Blood Shamans will see it, and so will those who see the invisible.

Those touched by this curse suffer -2 to attacks, bonuses and -15% to skills when used. The victim is just that distracted, and is compelled to keep trying to remove the blood. Double to those who freak out at the sight of blood.

Blood Wine

Range: 10 feet (3 m).

Duration: Instant.

Saving Throw: None for the water, standard for the target.

P.P.E.: 40

Damage to Caster: 3D6+4

This sleeping toxin turns ordinary water into a drugged wine. Victims who drink and succumb to the wine will sleep for up to 3D4 days. The spell affects 1D4 gallons of water.

Hemophilia

Range: Touch.

Duration: 24 hours per level of experience.

Saving Throw: Standard.

P.P.E.: 35

Damage to Caster: 6D6

This insidious spell does no damage, but prevents normal healing. For the duration of this spell, the victim will not regenerate lost Hit Points, S.D.C. or M.D.C. Even those with enhanced regenerative powers will be affected.

Magical or psionic healing *may* work, but require a successful save vs magic for each use. If the save fails, the healing has no effect.

Sea of Blood

Range: By touch; affects 10 gallons per level.

Duration: One day per level of experience.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 40

Damage to Caster: 3D6+4

This spell turns ordinary water into blood. It is designed to kill crops and such. Turns drinking water into useless blood (blood type optional). Of course, this is great when you want to feed a vampire but are not too keen on baring your veins. Some helpful Blood Shamans have used this spell to provide blood for transfusions.

Level Seven

Blood Bath

Range: 10 foot (3 m) radius, plus five feet (1.5 m) per level; can be cast up to 100 feet (30.5 m) away.

Duration: Instant.

Saving Throw: Standard.

P.P.E.: 40

Damage to Caster: 4D8+5 per level.

This spell is similar to Vascular Eruption, but affects all people within a target area (each gets to save vs magic). Damage to victims is 4D6 S.D.C./M.D.C., and each must save vs a Horror Factor of 14. Onlookers must save vs a Horror Factor of 12.

Level Eight

Blood Cure

Range: 10 feet (3 m).

Duration: Instant.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 140

Damage to Caster: 8D6+20

With a drop of blood pressed into the forehead, this ritual enables the caster to remove any curse that has been placed on the person, except those that have been placed by a god or someone of Principled alignment. It works the same as the spell Remove Curse.

The one side effect of this spell is a temporary red fingerprint on the forehead, which cannot be removed for 2D4 days. In places where Blood Shamans and their magic are known, this mark is a stigma which tells others the character is in league with the evil Shaman.

One Chance in a Million

Part Three

By Paul Sillanpää

It's not often that I'm wrong about someone, especially someone as... *uncomplicated* as Rocky. But I have to admit that I'd underestimated him. He must have been inside my apartment all along, and for those of you who've never had to hide out in a two room rathole let me tell you, it's something that takes discipline. When I came to I was locked in the trunk of a car, the radio thudding away, my eardrums about to rupture.

It took us about twenty minutes to get to where we were going. I felt around for one of my decks, but when I heard several voices outside, I decided to wait and see before trying to fight my way out. It proved to be a wise choice, for when the trunk was opened I found myself in the parking garage under Jack's place. Rocky and two other men were standing over me and all three had weapons. Rocky didn't say anything, he simply grabbed me by the lapels of my borrowed coat and hauled me out of the trunk. His two companions took their places on either side of me, and frog-marched me towards the door.

This time around Jack's place looked as though it were under siege. Two Marketeers carrying pistols were leaning on a car that had been parked across the entrance ramp to the garage, and another one waited just inside the door, an L-20 pulse rifle across his knees. Rocky hustled me towards the stairs, but just then a distraught looking Jack came hurrying down, the 'borg from the Bazaar and two hulking bodyguards close behind.

"Mr. Kavanagh," Rocky said. "I managed to find him."

Jack shot me a look of pure hatred with those dead eyes of his. For a moment I thought he would have me killed right then and there. "No time," he snapped. "The Market's called an emergency meeting over at Slammer's and I need you with me." He studied me for a moment, then turned to one of his thugs who'd just emerged from another room. "Big Al! Take this guy into the conference room and keep an eye on him. He's got some magic so if he makes a move or says one word, I want you to shoot him!"

With that, Jack pushed past me and stormed out the front door. As he did, Big Al stepped forward with a drawn pistol and led me upstairs into an opulently furnished conference room



dominated by a huge oak table. Shoving me down into one of the seats, he jabbed his pistol barrel hard into the side of my head and snarled. "Keep your hands where I can see them and if you say one word, I'll kill you!"

I was all too happy to comply, and allowed myself to go completely motionless as I took stock of the situation. Believe it or not, things weren't nearly as bad as they seemed. On one hand, I was in the hands of my worst enemy, who would almost certainly kill me as soon as he got the chance. On the other hand, it seemed that my attempt to ferment a gang war had payed off beautifully and said enemy had left me in the care of one of his low ranking men. If that's not an invitation to escape, then I don't know what is.

Big Al, it seemed, was a bit too high strung for guard duty. Less than five minutes after I'd sat down, he was pacing the room. For my part, I remained completely motionless, keeping even my breathing to a minimum. This was partly because I was afraid he might indeed shoot me if I moved, but also to make him bored. There was absolutely nothing to provide a distraction in the room, which meant that soon Big Al would be climbing the walls. And when that happened... I smiled inwardly and felt the various bulges in my vest that represented the half dozen or so decks of cards I always carried with me. Most people think Card Magic is only good for gambling, and a good Trickster Mage will not let somebody survive such an assumption. There are a few tricks which can be *very* lethal if used correctly.

Fifteen minutes into my captivity, Big Al made an attempt at a conversation with me, showing just how little he knew about magic (you *never* give an enemy mage a chance to speak, and if you're smart, you'll gag him immediately and break his fingers so he can't gesture). I kept my answers monosyllabic and soon he was back to his pacing. I had decided to give Big Al five more minutes before making my move, when suddenly I heard a familiar voice out in the hallway. All thoughts of escape were banished from my head, and I instinctively checked my false aura as the door opened to admit another one of Jack's goons, who was leading Samantha into the room.

She looked as though she'd been sleeping in a ditch, and I suspect that's exactly what she told Jack's people when they

"found" her. Her clothes were torn and stained, and her fur was matted and stuck out at all angles. But she still had that idiotic exuberance that had made her so likeable that night in the Bazaar. I was floored by the sight of her. The risks she was running, surfacing now after having "eluded" Net Set for more than a week. How could she have expected anyone to accept her? Then I saw the childish way she was hanging from her escort's arm and the friendly smile he gave her and I realized the truth: She was just too stupid to be suspected.

Or at least she seemed stupid. I'd recognized her voice out in the hall, so I'd had a moment to prepare. But Samantha hadn't known about my presence until she was in the room. She stopped in her tracks when she saw me, and in her golden eyes I saw the veneer of foolish innocence replaced by shock and calculating desperation as she tried to decide what to do. I decided to make the decision for her.

"Samantha!" I cried, leaping up from my chair. "You're alive!"

Al almost shot me, but a look of relief flooded Samantha's face and she raced over to where I stood and hugged me, burying her face in my chest.

"Ezekiel!" she cried. "You were right! It was like you said! I hid and they didn't find me! Just like you said!"

Big Al was glaring angrily at the man who'd brought Samantha in. "Why'd you bring her here, Benny?" he demanded.

Benny shrugged. "The boss ain't here and someone downstairs said this was where we're keeping prisoners." He glanced uneasily at us. "Should I take her somewhere else?"

As the two started to argue, I sat Samantha down in a chair next to mine. "So how did you escape?" I asked.

She shifted in her seat and smiled in her disarming way. "I managed to crawl into a side duct and hide there. The Psi-Stalkers didn't really search the place too good." Then her look turned to one of betrayal. "Why didn't you come back for me like you said?"

Oh that brazen little... She was good. Real good. In that moment when she'd entered the room I'd got a glimpse of the other Samantha hiding underneath the facade of idiocy. Now as I suddenly found myself trying to think of a lie I realized just how great the contrast was. "I... I'm sorry Samantha," I said, trying with all my might to work up a few crocodile tears. "I got arrested during the riot and then Net Set was crawling all over place so I couldn't go back." An idea suddenly took hold in my mind. Why not use her some more? "Jack had me do some work for him and now... well... I'm in a bit of trouble right now."

Her ears went up in what I guessed was concern. "What? What happened?" she cried. "Why would Jack be mad at you? You're his friend aren't you?" She was getting hysterical so I pulled her to me and hugged her tight.

"Shhhhh," I whispered. "It'll be all right. Really. I've still got a few tricks up my sleeve... Like this!" With a flourish I produced the bronze coin from Samantha's ear. Big Al stared in horror as the coin appeared and disappeared before our eyes, but like most low-ranking goons, he was unwilling to take the initiative and shoot me like he should have. So the performance went on. Samantha calmed down a bit, and soon she was watching

the performance with rapt attention. Yes, I had a trick or two up my sleeve.

"So what happened to you?" she asked suddenly.

By this point I'd worked out what I would tell her. "Do you know about a man named Colonel Lyboc?" She shook her head. "Well, he's not a very nice man, and he's been getting in Jack's way for a very long time." I put down the coin and retrieved one of my decks of cards. "So Jack sent me to steal some money from him." I began running through a series of card tricks, palming cards and making them "appear" and "disappear" before her eyes. "I cheated at a card game, and won a lot of money from Lyboc. But then Lyboc found out that I was working for Jack, so now he's coming after Jack, and Jack's coming after me." With another flourish I made the deck disappear completely.

Samantha stared tearfully at me. "Can't you just explain that it was an accident?" she asked.

I leaned in close. "It wasn't an accident," I whispered. "I let Lyboc find out on purpose."

Her eyes went wide with a surprise that was not at all innocent. "Why?" she gasped.

I wasn't about to tell her about Anita and the Chugg. "The same reason I helped you back in the Bazaar," I said.

"That doesn't make any sense," she said.

"It does to me," I said mysteriously, then winked at her. "Besides, who says I'm in that much trouble?"

"But Jack's holding you prisoner!" she said.

I smiled and stared straight into her golden eyes. "Do you really think I'm in that much danger?" I asked.

There. I could see her pupils dilate ever so slightly. I'd caught her. Almost imperceptibly, her childish exuberance slipped away. "No," she said in a completely even voice.

Suddenly she asked me if I'd show her how to do the trick with the bronze coin again. I smiled and showed her, and wondered as I did so how long it would be before her Net Set platoon showed up. Would they charge me? It would be difficult to maintain my false aura in custody, so I decided that if worse came to worse I would confess to being an unregistered psychic and agree to testify for the state. With luck I would get off with a suspended sentence and forced psionic registration. We passed more than an hour this way until we heard the commotion in the front hall that announced the return of Black Eye Jack.

He stormed into the conference room a moment later, the very image of vengeance. He stopped short at the sight of Samantha, and a short whispered conversation followed with Big Al and Benny. Finally he broke off the conversation and turned to us. "Samantha," he said with a tenderness that was not at all sincere. "I want you to go with Benny here. He's going to get you out of the city."

Samantha clapped her hands in delight and turned to hand the bronze coin back to me.

"Keep it," I said, handing it back to her.

She smiled and hugged me tightly. Then she was gone.

For a moment Jack stood in the doorway, and I could feel the rage building inside him. Then his dead eyes locked onto me and he rapped out an order. "Rocky, Al. Take Mr. Chance out back."

The two men seized me by either arm and dragged me to my feet. I was hustled out into the hallway but this time I was led towards the back of the building. Still, a lingering suspicion remained in my mind. There was no way Jack could get Samantha out of the city that quickly. "What's going to happen to Samantha?" I asked.

Rocky flashed me an evil grin. "Don't worry about your pet cat, Chance," he said. "Benny's quick. She won't feel a thing."

I feigned a look of horror, but inside I burst out laughing. They'd just signed Benny's death warrant.

I was led back out into the underground parking lot. The two men sitting on the bumper looked up as we entered. Including Jack's bodyguards and his 'borg, that now made seven men standing around me.

"Al," said Jack. "If Mr. Chance says one word that sounds like a spell, I want you to shoot him." Big Al nodded and drew his pistol. "As for the rest of you, feel free to get creative."

I started to protest when suddenly Rocky's right fist drilled me in the face. There was a brilliant flash of white light and I would have fallen flat on my back if the two bodyguards hadn't caught me and propped me up. Before I could shake off the effect of the first blow, Rocky had stepped in and delivered a second, this time to my stomach. I felt the wind rush out of me and my legs give way, although my going limp did help cushion the next several blows that the enormous man rained down on me. Then the men on either side of me let go and I collapsed on the floor, trying desperately to catch my breath.



One thing was for certain: Rocky knew how to use his fists. I've been beaten up several times in my life but never with such efficiency. Just when I thought that I might live through it, Rocky kicked me hard in the ribs, lifting me up off the floor and rolling me over onto my back. I looked up at him and he was grinning and motioning for the two bodyguards to prop me up

again. Jack was standing a few feet away, watching with casual indifference while Al stood beside him, covering me with his pistol. I groaned inwardly. There was nothing in my repertoire that would enable me to kill more than one of them at a time. Lying there on the floor, I could see only one way out that didn't guarantee death.

So as the two bodyguards lifted me to my feet, I dropped my false aura, revealing myself to every Dog Boy and Psi-Stalker in a quarter-mile radius.

I had no time to contemplate this decision, however. Rocky stepped in and delivered several more vicious jabs to my face and head, followed by another massive blow to my stomach. Then the brute drew back and let fly with a tremendous blow that spun me around completely and sent me crashing down to the floor. I curled up into a fetal position as Rocky stepped back to allow the bodyguards to close in, kicking me savagely. Then it was over and all three men were backing off, allowing Jack to step forward and examine me.

"You're a very stupid man, Mr. Chance," Jack said, his black eyes gleaming. "And now you're going to die for it." He studied me for a moment longer, then nodded to Rocky. "I want him messed up good before you kill him. Start with his hands."

Rocky advanced on me again, and this time I was shaking with genuine fear. Of all the things I could not afford to lose... With a supreme effort, I gathered my strength and aimed a kick at Rocky's groin. The accursed simian sidestepped it easily and kicked me again in the ribs. This seemed to serve as a cue, and in a flash the other two were on me again. There was a confused scuffle as I tried to break free, but as I said, I was never a very physical man, and the best I was able to manage was biting one of them on the wrist as they pinned me down. I felt a powerful set of hands grip my right arm and draw it out. Powerful hands spread my fingers out and now for the first time, I was screaming. A leering Rocky gripped my index finger in his fist. "You should've played by the rules, Chance!" he yelled. Frantically I wracked my brain for something, anything that would delay my crippling another minute. It couldn't be much longer before Net Set kicked down the door looking for me. Then it hit me.

"Net Set!" I screamed. "They're coming here!"

Rocky hesitated. "Net Set?" he laughed.

"I suppose you're an expert on them, huh?" one of the bodyguards chimed in.

I had them listening. Now I had to hold their attention. "I know Samantha's their undercover operative." This was met with a roar of laughter. "She's the one that brought the raid down on the Bazaar."

Jack was smiling. He looked like a skull. "Nice try Chance, but if you want to save your life you should at least try to come up with a believable story." He gestured to Rocky.

"You idiot!" I shot back. "How do you think she survived the raid?"

This time there was no laughter. I pressed on. "How many of your people got killed in the Bazaar? How many more got caught in the sweep? Do you actually believe that she could escape where I couldn't?" It was my turn to laugh now. It was a hoarse, hysterical laugh, but completely genuine, for I had suddenly realized what an absolutely ridiculous situation I was in.

There I was, about to die a hideously painful death, and yet just by being there I had killed every man in the room, thanks to the help of a mutant soldier who would in turn have killed me under any other circumstances. And for what? To avenge a red-haired waitress and her uncle, whose lives I had ruined in the service of my victims.

Jack and company were all staring at me. Even the two men guarding the entrance had turned to see what was the cause of that unnerving sound. As a result, I was the only one looking at the entrance when Net Set hit.

First there was the high-pitched whine of a nuclear powered engine, then an enormous black shape was looming out of the darkness of the entrance ramp, moving at a terrifying speed. The two guards whipped around just in time to see the Mark IV armored personnel carrier come barreling down the ramp at what must have been fifty miles an hour. One man had enough time to turn away, as if to run, then the eighteen ton behemoth struck the car that had been blocking the ramp, pulverizing it instantly and driving the wreckage before it like a tidal wave that enveloped the two Marketeers before either could escape. The APC pressed on as if oblivious, grinding metal and glass into the concrete floor before it and throwing up a flurry of sparks like some steel dragon.

It continued that way for nearly half the length of the garage before the driver finally hit the brakes, bringing it to a skidding halt, its broad side facing us. A moment later the reinforced steel hatch on its side had hissed open and those terrible black-armoured troops were piling out. A squad of humans, backed up by a pair of Psi-Stalkers, a six man Dog Pack, and two men that looked like EOD specialists weighed down in extra heavy armor and carrying Fusion Blocks. Every man and mutant had a rifle, some had plasma cannons and grenade launchers. They had learned their lesson from the Bazaar. There would be no controlled crowd sweep this time. They were there to kill.

As much as I hated him, I have to admit that Jack could think on his feet. The moment the APC came crashing down the ramp he'd known that there was no hope of making a stand in the garage, and that his only chance lay in running. By the time the metal beast had rolled to a halt, he, Big Al, his two bodyguards and the 'borg had already made it to the doorway and were scrambling to get inside. But Rocky hadn't been so quick on the uptake. While Jack made good his escape Rocky just stood there, rooted to the spot like an animal caught in the headlights of an oncoming car. Seeing the laser pistol jammed in his waist band, I suddenly had a flash of inspiration.

"Shoot them!" I yelled.

Hearing me, Rocky reacted instinctively and went to draw his gun. It was the last thing he ever did. I don't know whether the Net Set soldiers saw the motion, or if their psychics sensed the threat, but before he could raise his weapon four of them fired almost as one, striking the enormous man in the head and chest. There was a sickening "SHLACK!" as the bolts of energy hit home, literally vaporizing a large part of Rocky's torso. I shut my eyes and felt the wetness of his remains raining down on me. Wiping away the blood, I realized that I was now the only non-Coalition man left alive in the garage, and Net Set was almost on top of me. I needed time, even if only a few seconds. With the nearest soldier less than thirty feet away, I cast a quick spell, then dove out of the way.

Although Card Magic is my specialty, I do know one or two "conventional" spells as well. This was one of them. In an instant my corner of the garage was filled with a thick black smoke that completely obscured vision beyond a few feet. As I lurched away, the spot that I had occupied just moments before was obliterated by a veritable storm of laser fire. Casting a spell had given their psychics a definite, if momentary, fix on my location, but now all they had to go on was the 'feeling' that I was somewhere nearby. And with the smoke blinding them they couldn't risk firing for fear of hitting their own people.

Turning, I staggered in the direction away from the Net Set team, towards the exit. For what was the longest few seconds of my life I stumbled blindly forward, the shouts and howls of the Net Set men all around me. Then my groping hands touched concrete, and I saw the faint red glow of the exit sign above the door to my right.

Suddenly a man-sized shape appeared before me in the smoke, in between me and the door. I could just barely make out the white lettering on his body armor and knew it was one of them. I dropped into a crouch, drew one of my decks, and fanned it out, focusing my energies into a spell as I did so. The soldier must have been a psychic, for he immediately levelled his rifle and fired, but without his sight, his shots went high and I felt a searing beam of laser energy pass just inches above my head. I finished casting the spell and felt the fanned deck of cards change in my hand. Magical energy poured into the cardboard rectangles, hardening them to the consistency of steel and giving them razor sharp edges. I aimed at a point about a foot above the letters on his chest and threw, and the fanned cards hurtled through the air like a circular saw blade, to embed themselves in the faceplate of the soldier.

He shrieked hideously and fell to the ground clutching at his face. No sooner had he hit than I followed him, diving behind his twisting armored body. The soldier, a Psi-Stalker I saw, was obviously hurt, for blood was seeping out through the crack in his faceplate, but he was still alive and continued his screaming, oblivious to my presence as I used him as a human shield. The air around us suddenly exploded with energy weapons fire as the soldier's teammates fired at my location. Fist-sized chunks of concrete were being dug out of the wall and a blue-green sphere of plasma energy vaporized the metal fire door behind me. The Psi-Stalker was hit twice, but his armor held. Aware now that he was under fire, he failed about with his hands, as though trying to fend off a swarm of flies. Then just as suddenly, the shooting stopped. The Psi-Stalker continued screaming and in the momentary silence his cries seemed louder than ever, but over this noise I could still hear the guttural shout of one of the Dog Boys.

"Hold your fire! Hold your fire! Fischetti's in there! He's hurt! Hold your fire!"

There was the sound of armored men running and I realized the team was rushing to the sounds of the screams. Abandoning my temporary shield I turned to duck through the remains of the door, stepping over the body of the Marketeer that had been guarding it. The same plasma blast that had destroyed the door had decapitated him neatly, but left his pulse rifle intact. This I snatched up as I passed by, checking the indicator to see that its E-Clip was still at full capacity. Just then I heard a shout behind me. Turning, I saw two Dog Boys emerge from the smoke and

rush to the wounded Psi-Stalker's side. They saw me the same instant I saw them but I already had my weapon ready.

Despite being caught flat-footed the Dog Boys reacted with blinding speed when I fired. One pulled the wounded Psi-Stalker to his chest while the other threw himself at the pair, tackling them and knocking them sideways out of the line of fire. I ignored this dramatic demonstration of psionically enhanced teamwork and continued firing into the smoke, walking backwards as I did. I've never been much good with guns, but I know enough to stay alive in a firefight. Firing from the hip I sent burst after hissing burst of laser fire into the smoke filled garage as fast as I could. I knew for a fact I wasn't hitting anything, but I also knew that such a volume of disciplined fire would make any professional soldier hesitate. From somewhere in the building behind me I heard a muffled explosion followed by the sound of small arms fire and guessed that another Net Set team was coming in through the front door. From the sound of it Jack's men were putting up quite a fight, but I doubted that they would last as long as the mage in the Bazaar had, which meant that I had to get to the upper floors as quickly as possible.

On my right I spotted another metal fire door, this one leading to a stairwell. I shot it open with a quick burst then hurried through. Glancing at the indicator I saw that the rifle was nearly empty so I tossed it aside and raced up the stairs. I was just coming up on the second floor when I heard another explosion in the hallway. But it wasn't until I'd nearly reached the third floor that I heard the sound of soldiers in the stairwell beneath me. They were playing it careful, clearing the building out room by room, floor by floor, driving me upwards until I hit Level 5's ceiling. There they would trap me and kill me, or so they thought. But I still had a few tricks left that they hadn't seen. If I could get high enough above them then I could escape. So I ignored the cramping muscles in my legs, and climbed for all I was worth.

The highest any building can be on Level 5 is ten stories. I reached the tenth floor when Net Set was still clearing the fourth. I leaned heavily against the wall, gasping for air. For the first time I became aware of the full extent of my injuries, and the throbbing of cracked ribs and a bruised face now added themselves to the symphony of discomfort I was experiencing. Still, I forced my battered body to obey, and kneeled on the landing. Drawing in a shuddering breath I closed my eyes and focused my energies, and from within me the magic again surged forth.

Opening my eyes, I saw hovering in the air before me the deck of cards that I had summoned. Aside from its levitation it seemed to be perfectly ordinary, but I knew different. It was a very special deck, and in it were some very special cards. I gestured and the deck fanned itself out with the faces of the cards away from me. I knew that once I saw a card's face its powers would be unleashed, but I still could tell instinctively which card was which. I studied them for a moment, ignoring the frantic shouts of the Net Set team who could sense the magic being used. I considered drawing the Queen of Hearts in honor of Anita, but drawing the Queen would be too taxing, and I had no way of knowing just how many more spells I would have to cast. So instead I reached out and drew the Jack of Hearts instead. I felt it was appropriate. After all, in the old days the Jack had been called the Knave.



The selected card slipped from the fanned deck and turned to show me its face: A forlorn looking man with a handlebar mustache staring off to one side. It remained this way for a moment, then slowly the image of the man moved, turning to face me. The card was now growing in size, and the man in it shifted and stretched, as though awakening from a deep sleep. Finally the card was over six feet in height, at which point the man gave one final heave, stepping clear of the card and becoming a three-dimensional construct. Brandishing two long-handled axes the Knave of Hearts stood before me, waiting for instructions. The deck from which he had emerged vanished without a trace.

"There are men coming up those stairs," I said. "You will prevent them from gaining access to this floor. Hold them back no matter what the price." The Knave nodded and I made to leave him there, but then a thought struck me. Was Samantha a part of this assault? It was unlikely; she probably wouldn't have had time to suit up and join her unit. Still...

"Knave," I said. "There is one more thing. You are not to kill any of the soldiers coming up the stairs. Beat them back and injure them if you must, but do not kill." Again the Knave gave a solemn nod and I left.

The tenth floor of the building was mostly given over to Jack's private apartments. A short hallway led to a richly furnished foyer, in which Jack and his surviving Marketeers had gathered. I guessed there to be about a dozen or so, all armed.

Not wanting a confrontation, I stayed back in the hallway, just out of sight, and listened.

"Jack, we have to abandon Chi-Town," This was the 'borg speaking. "You heard what they said at Slammer's. All our major operatives are either dead or running. Our minor ones are pretending they don't know us. No one wants to get in Lyboc's way, and who can blame them? The guy's gone crazy!"

Finally one of them was talking sense, I thought. But Jack was having none of it. "We've been through worse. Remember Chico Ramirez? We buried him and we can bury Lyboc!"

"Ramirez never had the guts to bring Net Set down on us!" the 'borg retorted. "Jack, this place is known as the nerve center of our operations on Level 5. If it goes we lose all credibility with the gangs and syndicates. No one will back us up. Even if we all manage to escape it'll only be a matter of time before Lyboc hunts us all down. Our only hope is to get into the 'Burbs before anyone realizes we're beaten."

Jack still wasn't convinced. "We'll talk about this once we're out of here. Now where's that guy..." Almost as if on cue a man hurriedly entered from one of the rooms. He sounded as though he was on the verge of panic.

"Boss!" he almost screamed. "It's no good. They found the hatchway and welded it shut! There's no way we're getting up onto Level 6 from here!"

Jack swore. "They must have found the one we used at the Bazaar!"

I shook my head. *So that's how they escaped the first raid*, I thought. Served them right for trying to use the same trick twice.

"What're we gonna do?" one Marketeer shouted.

"There's no way out!" another added, on the verge of hysterics.

"Everybody shut up!" Jack bellowed. A tense silence fell, broken only by the muffled thumps of grenades exploding down on the sixth floor. Net Set was getting closer. "Okay, what do we know for sure about the raid."

"Full Net Set company assaulting," the 'borg replied. "At least two more companies of Specters supporting. We got people in with the Specters but I doubt they'll want to risk helping us."

"They taking prisoners?" Jack asked.

One of the Marketeers spoke up. "Are you kidding? They're killing everybody they see! It's revenge for the Bazaar! They shot Damien and he was..."

"Alright!" Jack interrupted. "We get the picture. Surrender's not an option."

"Well then what do we do?" the Marketeer snapped back. "There's no way out and those guys are coming up here to kill us..."

I decided to make my move. Now while fear was at its highest but before panic could set in. "I've got a way out." I said, stepping around the corner. I wish I'd had a camera, the image was priceless. Jack and his men stood gaping. Then all at once the shock wore off and they were fumbling for their weapons.

"Shoot me and you shoot yourselves!" I shouted, and they hesitated.

"What are you doing here?" Jack finally managed to say.

"The real question is, what are you doing here?" I answered. "How do you plan on getting out of here now that your little escape hatch is gone?" I glanced around expectantly. There was no answer. "What's this? At a loss are we? Can't come up with one decent idea between you? Well then, I suggest you put those things away and start listening to me. Unless you want Net Set to kill you."

Some of the weapons vanished. Jack kept a hold of his pistol and glared at me with a naked fury. "How're you going to get out Chance?" he snarled. "I thought your magic was only good for cards?"

I drew a deck of cards out from one of my pockets and levitated it so that it spun in the air before me. "If you think that's all I can do well then you're even more stupid than I thought!" I snapped. "Anybody here think I can't help you then you're free to shoot." No one fired. I had them.

"Alright then," I went on. "Everyone put your guns down on that coffee table over there. Nobody moved. "I'm not saving your miserable lives just so you can shoot me in the back! Get rid of the guns or you rot here!"

"Tell you what," Big Al stepped forward. "You get us out of here or we waste you and take our chances with the cops!" He grabbed me by the collar and jammed his pistol against my face.

I put on my best poker face and sneered at him. "Obviously you don't know who I am. I'm the guy Jack was about to kill when Net Set showed up. I was about to die then and I'm just as dead if Net Set takes me out so unless I get some insurance that you won't pick up where you left off once we're clear, I'm not giving you a thing."

He snapped the safety catch off the pistol and pressed it even harder against my face. I held my ground. I knew if I showed fear now it would be the end of me, but Big Al was just as implacable. I was just starting to wonder how long this standoff could last when I received an empathic message from my Knaves guarding the stairwell. It was not an actual message as much as it was an impression, but it was clear enough.

(They are coming.) I looked the Marketeer straight in the eye. "Better make up your mind quickly," I said. "Net Set's right outside that door."

From the stairwell there now came the sound of armored boots on the stairs. It sounded like a full platoon. I could hear them come up past the landing on the ninth, then stop suddenly as they came up on the tenth. There was a startled exclamation, then a crash of metal on metal and the sound of bodies falling back down the stairs and I guessed that the Knaves must have leapt among them in order to take full advantage of its strength.

The effect the noise had on Jack's people was electric. That Net Set had reached their floor was bad enough, that I had predicted it only made things worse. I made a great show of glancing at my watch. "What you hear right now is the sound of the Net Set team dealing with... an ally of mine," I said. "I estimate that he can hold them there for another minute or two, then they will be through. This really is your last chance."

To my surprise it was Jack who stepped forward first. "Alright Chance," he said in a tone that made me certain he was planning something. "You got a deal." He held up his pistol for all to see, then put it down on the coffee table. "If this works I'll even make you a rich man." The rest of the Marketeers fol-

lowed suit, including the man who'd been holding me at gunpoint. "There you go," Jack said once they were done. "Now how are we going to get out of here?"

He had a strange look in his eyes, but there was no time to figure him out. I had not been exaggerating as to how long the Knave could hold out. So with as much authority as I could muster I pushed past the Marketeers and headed for one of the rooms that overlooked an alleyway. I was relieved to see that the windows were the kind that opened. I opened one and stepped out onto the ledge, the Level 5 ceiling just a few feet overhead. There were only a few Specters in the alley and none of them were looking up. Drawing another deck, I again shut my eyes and concentrated. A wave of vertigo swept over me and I feared for a moment that I would be overwhelmed and would fall. I'm not used to such heavy magical exertions, but I knew I had enough left in me for a few more spells. The magic flowed into the deck and each card became the focal point of a disk of force. The deck rose from my hands and, with a simple mental command, flew out across the alley. The cards spread out into a long line, stretching to the building across from us, then stopped, hovering in mid-air.

There were a few murmurs from the Marketeers behind me, but most stood in an awed silence. For most of them this was probably their first real glimpse at actual magic in use. "The Bridge of Cards will last for about five minutes and is strong enough to support our weight easily. The cards are actually focal points for the magical fields that will hold you up. These fields are about two feet across so don't worry about putting your foot wrong. Mr. Kavanagh," I motioned towards the bridge. "After you."

Jack smiled and shook his head. "You first."

I matched his insincere smile with one of my own. "As you wish," I said. "But I should warn you, if I die the bridge goes with me." I turned and stepped out onto the bridge. There was a slight tremor when I first put my foot down on a card, but by the time I'd leaned my full weight on it the Bridge was as firm as ever. Without a backward glance I started off for the other side at a brisk pace. I'd hoped that the Marketeers would be reluctant to follow me and that I could get a head start for the other side, but no sooner had I cleared the ledge than I heard the sound of a scramble and then suddenly Jack's hand was on my shoulder.

"No tricks, Chance," he warned.

"I wouldn't dream of it!" I retorted as loudly as possible. My words echoed up and down the alley, and reached the ears of a squad of Specters who'd been assigned to watch the area. I heard them shout, then when the first shots sizzled past us I slipped free of Jack's grip and ran. The Marketeers were panicking. One of them was hit and fell screaming from the bridge. Others tried to run, either back into the building or after me. But only Jack was close enough and confident enough to keep up. The neighboring building was close, and directly in front of me was a large dirty window towards which I hurtled myself. In mid air I cancelled the spell and let the bridge fall, but somehow Jack was still behind me and just as I hit the window I heard his bellow in my ears.

"Blast you, Chance!"

The window gave way with an explosive crash, and as I passed through I felt something heavy hit me from behind. It was Jack. He'd leapt at the same moment I had and followed me through the window. I hit the floor and rolled, coming up to my somewhat unsteady feet quickly enough. There were people screaming in this apartment too, and I realized that we'd come down inside another poor family's residence. There must have been a dozen people living there, and most of them had gathered by the windows to watch the raid. Our arrival brought a mad scramble to escape and in the confusion I spotted Jack crouched low, drawing a holdout pistol from a concealed ankle holster.

There was no time to form a proper buzz saw, so I just drew a deck and wildly flicked a half dozen cards at him. Jack saw them coming in time to shield his face. Three of the cards found a target and Jack screamed as they embedded themselves in his arms instead. In that instant's distraction I'd fanned the rest of the deck out properly, to create a killing weapon, but Jack recovered too quickly and fired at the exact moment I threw the deck.

In all my years I don't think I've ever seen anything quite like that shot. Closing my eyes I can still see that fanned deck leaving my hand, as if in slow motion, only to be hit in mid-air by Jack's laser bolt. The deck was obliterated instantly and the beam travelled on, passing between the thumb and index finger on my throwing hand (still outstretched) and missing my face by such a tiny distance that it left a burn mark on my cheek.

I dropped straight to the floor, more out of surprise than as part of any real plan. Jack must have thought he'd killed me, for he didn't fire again. In the room behind me I could hear the crackling of a fire and realized that the beam must have struck the wall and ignited the insulation within. Someone somewhere screamed "fire!" then suddenly there was a rush of feet and I heard Jack bellow in pain. Opening my eyes, I saw Jack struggling with three of the apartment's residents. A knife had been driven into his thigh by a man who must have been eighty, and two boys who couldn't have been more than fourteen had his right arm in a death grip, trying to wrench the pistol away from him. They had no way of knowing who these two intruders were, and the light was too poor for them to make out Jack's eyes. All they knew was that Jack had a laser pistol and if they didn't disarm him quickly he would burn their home to the ground. Jack fought back ferociously, kicking the elderly man in the groin and head-butting another who tried to take his place. But then one of the little brats on his arm sank his teeth into Jack's wrist and the gun fell to the floor.

I was diving for it even before it hit the ground, catching it by the barrel even as one of the women caught hold of me. She clawed at me with surprising strength but before she could really get a hold on me I'd struck her across the face with the pistol butt and the gun was mine.

"Back!" I screamed, waving it at the people around me. "Get back all of you! I'll use this if I have to! Not you, Jack!" There was another rush as the residents scrambled to get out of the room. I turned towards Jack who had crawled over to the window. Looking out across the alley, I could see the last of his men clustered at the window where the Card Bridge had been. Net Set had beaten the Knave and now the tenth floor was filled with explosions and fire as they cut down the remaining defenders. The few Marketeers at the ledge were calling out to their

leader, pleading for help that would never come. Suddenly a noise behind them caused the men to turn, some fired hopelessly at their attackers, others simply stood and watched. Then there was flash, and both Jack and I shielded our faces as the Marketeers were engulfed in the blue-green flames of a plasma grenade.

The flash from the grenade faded, and slowly Jack turned around to face me. His black eyes gleamed in the dim light and for the first time I found that I could actually see some genuine emotion in them: Horror. I had destroyed everything that he had ever had and the full realization of this had struck him like nothing else in his life.

"Why?" he said, in a voice barely above a whisper. Then again in a drawn out, plaintive wail he screamed "Why?!"

I almost didn't tell him. In a way I think it might have been proper that way. He didn't deserve an explanation and probably wouldn't have understood it anyway. How could I make him understand the sheer horror of what he did, of the tragedy his existence had caused for so many. How to make him understand that a girl like Anita didn't deserve to be ground down and consumed by his malignant organization. That such an entity, that took so much and gave so little in return, had no right to exist. How to explain that stopping him was worth losing whatever sum of money I might have made by working with him. That I could not stand by and watch when I had the ability to act. I almost didn't tell him, but then, in the instant before pulling the trigger an answer came to me, and in three words I summarized the reason for his fall.

"Because I can."

* * *

Escaping the building proved easy enough. The fire that Jack had started spread quickly, and although Net Set had wanted to seal the entire area off, the press of panic-stricken people fleeing the blaze eventually forced them to give way. There were numerous incidents and fights. I later heard that one man was shot dead when he took a swing at a nervous Specter. But dressed in my shabby coat and with my false aura back in place, I attracted little attention and was easily able to slip away into the crowd.

* * *

And that's the real story of how Black Eye Jack met his end. No great duel to the death with Thaddius Lyboc, no great chess game of strategy and maneuver. These two great arch-rivals never even saw each other. Jack died in a dirty little slum apartment, overwhelmed by its impoverished owners and shot by his own gun. His body, or what was left of it after the fire, was never identified, as his belongings had been picked clean by the residents moments before the flames claimed it.

With no concrete evidence against him, Lyboc was effectively untouchable. He weathered the resulting inquiry with ease and was even eventually promoted to full Colonel. His control over the streets had been secured for him by the very man he'd wanted dead, and that control would remain for three long years before the Juicer Uprising finally broke him.

But that didn't matter much to me. I was more concerned about my own survival at the time. Returning to my apartment I

was relieved to see that Rocky hadn't disturbed anything. It would make packing that much easier. I snatched up my valise from its place by the door and hurried to the bedroom to retrieve the rucksack I used to carry my clothes. I knew my landlord would have called Lyboc by then, but with all the chaos and confusion it would probably be some time before anyone could get there. I finished bundling my clothes into the sack and started for the door when my eye caught sight of something shiny on the coffee table. A second glance confirmed that it was the bronze coin I'd given to Samantha. That's when I realized she was sitting in the chair across from me.

It was the first time that I'd ever actually seen the real Samantha. Gone was bubbly air-head from the Midnight Bazaar that had been so enamoured of my magic tricks. The real Samantha was dressed in gleaming DPM riot armor, complete with clawed vambraces and military webbing. She studied me with the cold, dispassionate gaze of a professional soldier, and her eyes were fiercely intelligent. A C-10 laser rifle was propped up against the chair, but my main concern was the C-18 laser pistol she held in her hand.

For a moment I considered making a run for the door, but then I thought better of it and flashed my most charming smile. "Samantha?" I said. "Well I'll be... Is it really you?"

"Don't act so surprised, Ezekiel," Samantha purred. "You knew who I was back at Jack's place."

I shrugged. "Guess there's no point in trying to fool you." I sat down across from her. "So what can I do for you?"

"Well, when we didn't find your remains in Jack's place I figured you'd probably come here first," she said. "Mainly I wanted to make sure you were all right."

I had no idea how she'd found my address and decided it was better not to ask. Instead I launched myself into my cover story: Jack had decided to kill me, and had ordered me to be taken from the place by car (much as they had done with Samantha herself). The raid had occurred just a few moments after we'd left, and when the driver panicked I took that opportunity to escape. "Sorry I didn't check in with you, but I figured your people might not be too happy to see me, given my connections with Jack."

Samantha nodded, but she didn't put away her pistol. "I know what you mean. A guy like you would have to worry about being picked up by us."

A single bead of sweat ran down my back. There was something in her tone of voice that made me uneasy. My own pistol was in the false bottom inside my valise. It was an NG-H5 converted to a Techno-Wizard power source and could probably penetrate her armor at this range, but there was no way I could get to it quickly enough. Jack's pistol was in my coat pocket, but the pistol was a Wilk's holdout, and there was no guarantee it would be effective. A spell would be easier, but I doubted that I still had the strength to cast one.

For that matter, I wasn't sure if I wanted to kill her. It was a matter of survival of course, but she had saved my life (in a manner of speaking). Torn by indecision, I looked into her golden eyes, and then I saw something that made my blood run cold. There was a slight dilation in her pupils, a momentary slackness to her face, as though she were seeing something far away. It was a look that I'd seen in psychics before, but I had to

make sure. Very casually, I moved as though to slip my hand into my pocket.

With a click that seemed to echo throughout the apartment, Samantha snapped off the safety catch on her pistol. *Oh no!* I thought. *It's not possible!* Her lips never moved, but suddenly I could clearly hear her voice inside my head. (*Yes Ezekiel, I'm a Telepath.*)

I almost fainted. She knew everything. She was Net Set. There was only one way for this to end and that was with one of us dying. But then again, if she was reading my mind, then wouldn't she know...

(*I'm a lot faster than you, Ezekiel.*) Her telepathic voice almost purred. (*And I'll know what you're planning as soon as you do. Now give me the gun. Slowly. Slide the bag over as well.*) With a trembling hand, I complied. I was trying desperately to remember what I'd learned about Telepaths. How long could they maintain a scan?

"Not that long," Samantha replied vocally. "But it doesn't really matter now, does it?"

"So how long have you known?" I asked.

"I first suspected it back in the Bazaar," she said. "You seemed to recognize the mage's Ball Lightning. But I couldn't get a decent reading on you. It was hard to tell whether you were thinking about real magic or your card tricks. Same thing when we talked in Jack's office. It was pretty frustrating. It wasn't until I heard about my teammates facing the Jack of Hearts at the top of the north stairwell that I knew for sure. Only you would have conjured something like that."

"Sorry about that one," I said, then tentatively asked how the rest of the team had fared.

Her expression hardened a bit. "Sgt. Fischetti's got a cut across his face from that buzz saw thing you threw at him. Fang's got multiple rib fractures and Bruiser's missing a piece of his left ear. Picton has a concussion. But they'll live. It's the main reason why I didn't shoot you dead as you came through the door."

I shuddered inwardly. I probably never would have seen it coming. I also felt a bit perturbed. "But why didn't you? I mean, you're Net Set, I'm... a mage..." I looked at her expectantly.

Samantha seemed surprised. "Do you want me to kill you?" she asked.

"No! No!" I said. I was a bit too hasty in the way I said it and she chuckled at my unease. "It's just that I'd like to know why I'm still alive."

She considered this, then nodded. "Fair enough," she said. "But first tell me one thing: Why?"

"Why what?"

"Why did you do something so stupid, Ezekiel? What was going through your mind that made you tangle with us? Did you actually think she would have forgiven you?"

"Who?" I said out of reflex. Samantha gave me an angry look. "Sorry, I suppose you know all about Anita as well."

"Even in the Bazaar she was always on your mind," she said. "So yes, I knew about her from day one. Let me tell you something, if you think you were able to save her uncle's restaurant by getting Jack killed then you haven't met the people at the

Seized Property Office yet. It'll take them months to prove they have no connections to the Market, and even then they'll probably need a second loan to buy it back. All things considered, they might have been better off with Jack as the owner."

That was one comment that I couldn't let pass. "No, they wouldn't," I said.

This seemed to impress her. "Yes," she said slowly. "I think you're probably right on that one. And that's why I didn't kill you when I had the chance." To my immense relief she returned her pistol to its holster. "You are one of those strange human beings who will throw away everything they have for a noble cause that doesn't have a prayer of succeeding. It's not a very practical philosophy and it'll probably send you to an early grave, but it's something I respect."

I wasn't buying it. "So you're turning your back on your instincts and a lifetime of training because of Anita?"

She flashed me a sly grin. "For her. And for a certain mutant leopard whom you saved from the raid at the Bazaar."

"They were your own people," I retorted. "You were probably the safest person in the room. You probably kept me from getting shot."

"True," she said. "But you didn't know that at the time. Look, I may be a mutant but I'm not stupid. I know what the score is, we're all expendable. I could get shot in broad daylight in the middle of a busy street and I'd be lucky if one person in a hundred so much as calls an ambulance. And that's when they know I'm on their side. You had no reason to help me back at the Bazaar, but you did. I respect that."

There was another awkward silence. "So what do we do now?" I asked.

She sighed with frustration. "I guess there's only one thing to do. How long are you staying here?"

This time I actually felt it. A weird sense of *deja vu* that told me she was back inside my head. There was no point in lying now. "I'll be here for another month or two at the most. I just need to lie low for a little while."

She mulled over this for a moment. "Okay then, you keep a low profile for the duration and don't even think about anything illegal. Then, when you're ready to move on, you go and you don't ever look back. And if you say a word about any of this to anyone, I've got a couple of friends in the Rangers who'll make sure no one ever identifies your remains. Got it?"

I nodded very slowly, almost afraid of jinxing it. "Sounds fair," I said carefully. "Anything else?"

Yes," she said. I felt my gut tighten but then she nodded towards the coin on the table. "How did you do that trick with the bronze coin? I've been trying to figure that thing out all week."

* * *

The rain had stopped by the time my apprentice friend called, asking about his book. I told him he could come pick it up in the afternoon, then I began searching. I sifted through the drawers and shelves of my study for several hours before I finally found it.

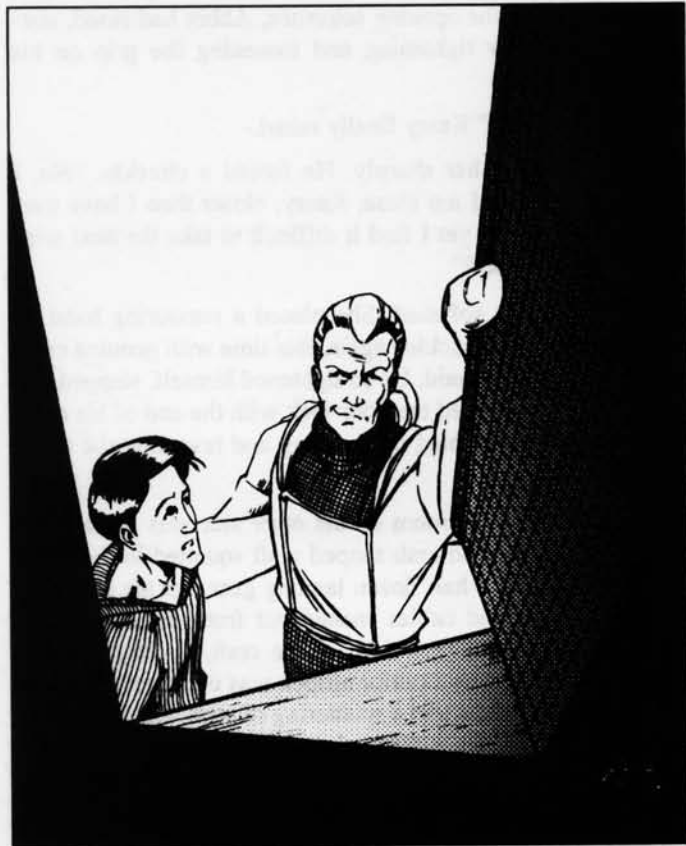
Even now, twenty five years later, I wish I could strangle Jack. Or Lyboc, or Rocky, or that jerk Moore. If any one of

those people had had the decency to die before coming in contact with me, then none of this would have happened. I'm not a troublesome person as a rule. All I'd ever wanted to do was lie low for a little while, make a bit of money at the gaming tables, and get a bit more "familiar" with Anita. Harmless pastimes, every one of them. If I'd just been left to my own devices, no one would have been hurt. I blame them entirely for what happened.

The boy arrived later that afternoon and immediately asked me what I'd thought of his book.

"Not bad, I suppose," I said. "Although Mr. Devonshire doesn't seem to have fully grasped the subtleties of the time."

The boy looked at me with blatant skepticism. And why shouldn't he? After all, how many books had I written?



I handed the book back to him, then waved him towards my study. "I want to show you something," I said.

He followed me into the study and there I handed him the item I had been searching for. It was an advertising leaflet for Howlers that included full color pictures of the various acts the club featured. There, just left from the center of the page, between the pictures of another female vocalist named Nikki Zamba and a band called Matchhead Bozo, was the only actual picture I had of Anita.

My apprentice friend studied the picture for a moment. "Cute," he said. "Who is she?"

I smiled. "It's like you said, sometimes the greatest historical events are decided by complete nobodies on the street level."



The Hammer of the Forge

By James M.G. Cannon

Chapter Seventeen

Origin

The strangest thing about the Prometheans is that they just don't care. For an enlightened species, they're surprisingly selfish and short-sighted. They can build the city of Center — all ten amazing levels of it — and design the jump gates that make Phase World the hub of the Three Galaxies, they can master both phase magic and phase technology. They can do all this and more, but they don't seem to care too much that a good chunk of Center is owned and operated by the Splugorth, the Transgalactic Empire, and the S'hree Vek Confederacy. Slavers, drug runners, murderers, trigalactic despots, genocidal madmen, and worse call Center home. And the Prometheans don't care. I don't understand it. I don't know anyone who understands. Whenever I press a Promethean for an explanation, their little blue faces tighten up and they refuse to talk to me.

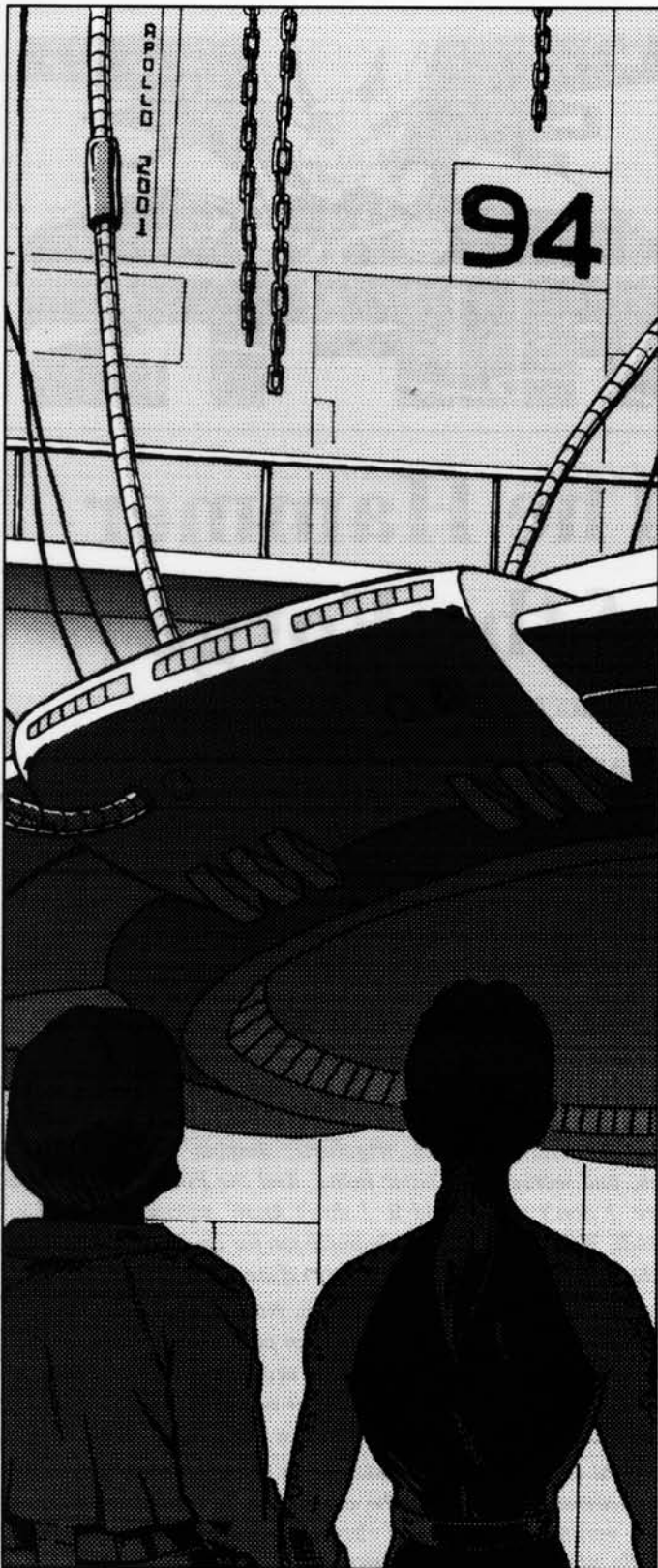
It's true that the Splugorth, TGE, Naruni, and even Thraxus are wealthier than half the sovereign planets in the Three Galaxies, but the Prometheans aren't greedy. Center would be profitable even if the Prometheans didn't turn a blind eye to all the cruelty and evil going on under their watch.

What is particularly maddening is the number of individual Prometheans I have met who could best be described as paladins, veritable paragons of virtue. I've known Prometheans to gladly give their lives to protect innocent beings, who have fought tooth and claw against Splugorth or Kreeghor, who have boycotted the Naruni, and used their magic and technology to improve the lot and lives of thousands.

And yet...

... the madness of Phase World, the madness of Center, continues unabated. If only I could gain an audience with a Second Stage Promethean, I believe all my questions would be answered.

— Weddron Nurrick, Noro scholar and quantum psionist.



Doctor Abbot and Kassiopaeia Acherean stood before the doorway to docking bay ninety-four, on the second level of Center. The doctor, a being composed entirely of shadow, wore a trenchcoat and fedora to lend himself some corporeality. Slightly taller than Abbot, Kassy wore her long dark hair tied into a tight ponytail, and the halter top she wore revealed arcane blue and white symbols running up and down her arms and across her collarbone, the Atlantean tattoos that made her an Undead Slayer, stark against her pale skin.

Abbot's glowing orange eyes, his only perceivable feature, seemed to bore into the massive slab of megasteel that served as the docking bay's access door. Beyond it lay the end to the quest that had driven Abbot for his entire life: a clue to his origins. In all the Three Galaxies and beyond, in several hundred years of existence, Abbot had never encountered a being quite like himself. He had searched all that time for some clue, some inkling, as to where he had come from, but only in the past few weeks had his mystic senses detected another Shadowbeing elsewhere in the Three Galaxies. Mere days before, Abbot had tracked the Shadowbeing's essence to Phase World. Upon setting foot on Phase World, Abbot traced the emanations to docking bay ninety-four.

He and Kassy had reached the door ten minutes previous. But rather than keying the opening sequence, Abbot had stood, staring, and alternately tightening and loosening the grip on his cane.

"You okay, Doc?" Kassy finally asked.

Abbot looked at her sharply. He forced a chuckle. "No, I don't suppose I am. I am close, Kassy, closer than I have ever been in my life. And yet I find it difficult to take the next step. Why is that, I wonder?"

Kassy's features softened. She placed a reassuring hand on his shoulder. Abbot chuckled again, this time with genuine emotion. "Thank you," he said. He straightened himself, stepped forward, and gently stabbed the door lock with the end of his cane. The massive door rumbled open, rising and revealing the docking bay beyond.

Kassy started as the room on the other side was revealed. A massive, red hulled and crab shaped craft squatted in the midst of the docking bay, a half dozen landing gear bracing it against the tarmac. Coils and cables snaked out from the ceiling and walls and plugged into the sides of the craft, cycling fuel and gases into the ship. The exterior airlock was open, revealing the cold Phase World night and a smattering of stars. An arctic wind swept across the room, ruffling the edges of Abbot's coat and raising goose bumps on Kassy's exposed flesh.

"A S'hree Vek vessel," Abbot said, his voice harsh.

"The Confederacy?" Kassy asked. "Are you sure?"

Abbot nodded. The S'hree Vek Confederacy was a small alliance of worlds in the axis of the Corkscrew Galaxy. They were slavers and peddlers of biotechnology and psi-tech. Though not allied with the Splugorth, the Confederacy counted them among their best customers. The ships they flew were grown with biotech, enslaved with hard technology, and crossed the vast distances between worlds through warp-gates created by the psionically powerful Adinum. The Adinum, highly intelligent fish-like beings, were the nominal rulers of the Confederacy, and they lorded over the other five member races.

If the Shadowbeing was aboard the ship, then it was very likely that he — or she — was imprisoned, ready for the auction block and whatever atrocities the Splugorth could devise.

Abbot took an angry step forward, but Kassy tugged at his arm. "Be careful," she said. "If it is a Confederate ship, they're a long way from their section of Center. And notice the lack of guards."

Abbot paused. "Of course, Kassy," he said. "You're right. We must be on our guard. It's just, the thought of my... kinsman in a S'hree Vek pen has me angered beyond reason."

"Let's try to keep from doing anything rash," Kassy told him. "Without Caleb's firepower, we're at a bit of a disadvantage." She made a vague gesture at the S'hree Vek ship. "Let's at least get beneath the arc of fire her guns possess before we start throwing our weight around."

Abbot's orange eyes glimmered slightly, his version of a smile. "Agreed."

They crossed the threshold together, and began to lazily walk across the tarmac in the direction of the vessel. Abbot felt almost relaxed, but he knew it was the false kind of ease that he always felt before a deadly row. He had felt it most recently on Delian-4, Malthus' World, when he and Kassy and Caleb had fought against the Draconid wizard Quajinn Huo, and Abbot's oldest and dearest friend, Lothar of Motherhome, had perished.

"The guns should be tracking us, but they're frozen," Kassy observed. "This is very strange."

Abbot nodded. "I'm not sure what to make of it. Even the running lights aren't functioning. Is it possible the ship is dead?"

"Or a renegade?" Kassy suggested. "We are a long way from the Confederacy's sphere of influence on Center."

"A distinct possibility," Abbot said, trailing off. Halfway across the docking bay, they were finally witness to signs of life. One of the airlocks beneath the ship cycled open with a low burr, and a cylinder descended to the floor. Kassy tensed beside Abbot, her right hand dropping to her left wrist, ready to call upon her Atlantean magic. Abbot, for his part, tucked his cane beneath his arm and eyed the activity with concern.

A door slid open, and out spilled a squad of Conaigher, massive creatures that should not have been able to fit in such a confined space. Each of them towered over two meters in height and bristled with weaponry. Covered in red fur, each Conaigher possessed six arms, and each hand appeared to be gripping a laser gun of some sort. And all thirty-six muzzles were aimed in Abbot and Kassy's direction.

"I believe, my dear," Abbot said softly, "that we have been made."

The ape-like humanoids swarmed across the docking bay. One of them shouted out in Trade Three at the duo, "Do not move! Or you will die!"

"I think you may be right," Kassy said out of the corner of her mouth. She raised her hands slowly. "We go with Plan K, right?"

Abbot risked a glance at Kassy, while also raising his hands in surrender. "What was Plan K, again?"

Kassy's ice blue eyes shot him an angry look. The Conaigher had reached them, and dozens of guns were jammed into their faces. "You will come on board the ship or you will die!" growled the leader. The Conaigher obviously possessed a limited proficiency with Trade Three.

"Okay," Kassy said, stressing the second syllable. "We give up. Take us to your leader."

Beneath the brim of Abbot's hat, his orange eyes glimmered. He had suddenly remembered what Kassy had meant by "Plan K." They had used it once before, years ago, against a group of

bandits in the S-K system. Lothar had been with them then; it was one of the few times the Wolfen had stepped into a dangerous situation without his armor.

* * *

Aboard the Orion Industries Comet starship that served as Abbot and Kassy's base of operations, their pilot, Siv Yurilak, sat cross-legged in his cabin. The Noro had honed his clairvoyant abilities in order to increase his piloting skill, to be able to "see" the space around his ship without resorting to electronic sensors. But his psychic abilities came in just as handily when it came to monitoring the progress of his employer's daughter.

Siv Yurilak had known Hiram Acherean for years, and pulled many jobs for the Atlantean in that time. Most recently, Hiram had hired Siv to pilot his daughter's ship while she and her companions tracked down the mad wizard Quajinn Huo. But Hiram had also deposited a bonus in Siv's Noro-Gor account to ensure Siv kept a close eye on his eldest child's activities and ensure her safe conduct.

Now, though, it appeared as though her faith in Abbot and that wild card Caleb Vulcan had been misplaced. She had walked into a trap, led there by the wizard and abandoned by the Cosmo-Knight.

Siv unfolded himself from his crouch and stretched, feeling the bones in his shoulders pop. He pulled his leather jacket off his chair, slipped it on, and went to look for the other member of the crew left behind. He knew Arwen Griffin was in the ship's hold, using the broad space to practice her martial arts.

* * *

The Conaigher separated them as soon as they stepped aboard the craft. Three of them dragged Kassy down a darkened corridor into the bowels of the ship, while the remaining three flanked Abbot.

"She goes to the pens," the apparent leader growled. "You see the Commissar."

Abbot nodded and followed, though he was concerned about Kassy. It was her plan, but if they bound her in some way and she couldn't reach her tattoos, then Kassy would be all but helpless. It was quite a gamble.

To reassure himself, as he followed the Conaigher soldiers, he extended his supernatural senses and found the nearest of Phase World's ley lines. It thrummed only a kilometer to the southwest, closer than he needed it to be. So long as it was there, he at least could not be disarmed. Though reassured, he suddenly noticed an odd shimmer encircling the Conaigher guards. Someone or something had ensorcelled them. Abbot's faith in the outcome of this situation faded suddenly, and he found himself unsure of Kassy's course of action. Plan K depended upon their captors not having any magic sensitives present.

The corridors they passed through were empty of other traffic. Some of the lights appeared to be malfunctioning as well, and in more than a few areas, Abbot thought he saw signs of carbon scoring on the walls. Had the crew rebelled? Would that

explain the inactivity of the vessel, and the distance between it and the S'hree Vek part of Center? Perhaps the mysterious magic-user was involved.

That train of thought was not heartening, Abbot silently admonished himself.

Then the final set of doors scissored open, revealing the bridge. The Conaigher ushered Abbot into the room. One of them gave him a rough shove with an elbow, and Abbot nearly fell. He recovered quickly, catching himself with the aid of his cane. Abbot righted himself, adjusted his trenchcoat, and shot the offending conaigher an angry look. The beast nudged Abbot once more, directing his attention to what lay before him.

Abbot turned, and felt his hands go slack on his cane. It clattered to the floor, and he knew that, had he a mouth, it would be hanging open in surprise and horror.

Abbot knew that S'hree Vek ships were always captained by an Adinum, the psionic species in the Confederacy. To facilitate the Piscean creatures movements through the ship, most of the key chambers in the ship possessed tanks of virium, the same fluid that covered the surface of the Adinum homeworld. An ingenious network of tubes connected each virium tank in the ship to the others, allowing the captain — or Commissar in S'hree Vek lingo — to move about the ship with nearly the same ease as his air-breathing crew.

But no tank existed on the bridge of this ship, not any more. Bits of glass and puddles of virium were scattered across the bridge's expanse, though the command stations were all empty and no crew was evident. In the bowl of the empty virium tank sat a throne, a horrid thing fashioned from flesh and bone through some twisted form of biomancy. The lifeform used to create the massive chair was unmistakable; the sloping fins that served as armrests, the thick tentacles fused together to make the legs, the six unwinking eyes that stared out from the top of the throne's backrest, sickeningly aware yet shining with madness.

The throne had once been the Adinum Commissar of this craft, and Abbot knew that the creature sitting upon it was to blame for the poor thing's horrid transformation.

The Shadowbeing Abbot had tracked across half a galaxy reclined in his chair, orange eyes shining brightly. "So," he said, "it appears to be me lucky day. Ye've come ta me, saving me considerable trouble tryin' to track you down, me wayward boyo."

The Shadowbeing leaned forward. "Good lad," he said. "Good lad."

* * *

Kassy followed the lead commando down a darkened corridor, wrinkling her nose in distaste as the other two crowded a little too close to her in the narrow passage. The Conaigher were pungent creatures, and given the disrepair of the S'hree Vek craft, Kassy had to wonder if the showers were working. She doubted the Conaigher would satisfy her curiosity if asked.

A door scissored open, and the leader paused. Around him, Kassy saw a winged figure standing in the doorway. Red armor plates and maroon wings were all she could see with the multi-limbed primate obscuring her vision. With the newcomer's arrival, the commandoes snapped to attention. The leader's shoulders began to tremble.

Interesting. Kassy recognized the winged figure as a Celestine, a bio-engineered superhuman created by the S'hree Vek to counter Cosmo-Knights, Quatoria, Invincible Guardsmen, and the like. Kassy allowed herself a grim smile, mentally adding Undead Slayers to the list.

The Celestine shouldered aside the lead Conaigher, and Kassy found herself looking in the man's crimson eyes. Kassy was slightly surprised to see that the Celestine looked almost



completely human, despite its coloring. Red eyes, fine, maroon colored hair, and dark skin were all that separated him from an entirely human look. "Gentlemen," he said without taking his eyes from Kassy, "you are dismissed. I'll take her from here."

The three Conaigher shifted uneasily, looking from one to the other, trying to keep from looking at the Celestine. "Lor Hazmat..." the leader finally began, but the Celestine interrupted.

"Hazmat rules the ship," the Celestine snapped, "but I remain your superior. And the penalty for insubordination has not changed."

The lead Conaigher wilted, shoulders slumping and ears folding back. "Yes, commander. We hear and we obey." As one, the three commandoes turned and shuffled down the passage the way they had come, leaving Kassy alone with the winged warrior.

He surveyed her for a moment, looking her over head to toe. Kassy returned the look, noting that the Celestine cut an impressive figure. The blue flightsuit, overlaid with highly polished plates of crimson megasteel, combined with his bioengineered features and sweeping wings to create a powerful image. The sneer that crossed his face ruined it, however. "So," he said, "do you have a name, Atlantean?"

"Kassiopaeia Acherean. What's going on here?"

The Celestine's eyes narrowed. "Something terrible, Kassiopaeia Acherean," he said. "My ship has been usurped by an alien being and my Commissar has been murdered. I fear what may happen if the alien gains any more power."

"What alien?" Kassy asked.

"Your friend's kinsman, of course," the Celestine said. He smiled grimly. "And you're going to help me kill it."

Kassy arched an eyebrow. "I am?"

"Indeed," he said. "Because if you don't, both you and your friend are doomed."

"A threat?"

He shook his head. "A simple fact. Without your help, I am doomed as well. Yet I doubt somehow that your sympathy lies with me."

"You're right about that," Kassy said. "You people are no doubt getting what's coming to you."

"With interest," the Celestine agreed. "Half the crew was sacrificed to fuel the Shadowbeing's magical abilities. Do not assume that the prisoners and slaves in the ship's hold were spared, either. My lieutenants, Kalel and Kariel were butchered before my eyes. It made a throne out of my Commissar. A hundred denizens of the planet no longer live because of this monster, and each death seems to make it stronger."

Kassy looked at the Celestine for a long moment. "What's your name?" she asked.

"Joriel. Until recently I was the senior Celestine aboard the Vigilance."

"Well, Joriel," Kassy said. "It appears that you do need my help. More importantly, we're going to need my friend Abbot's help. Tell me, what is the Shadowbeing likely to do to my friend?"

Joriel shrugged. "I'm not certain. It originally commandeered the Vigilance to track down the other Shadowbeing it sensed

abroad in the Three Galaxies. When it came aboard, it claimed that it was going to bring the other Shadowbeing back to its home dimension. But it also claimed that it would deal with us in good faith." The grim smile returned. "I do not see any reason to trust its good word."

"Shivok!" Kassy swore. She spun on her heels and began to run down the corridor. She brushed the star within a circle on her wrist and sheathed her body in a suit of blue-white body armor.

"Wait!" Joriel called after her. "We need a plan!"

"Too late!" Kassy shouted back at him. Though, in her heart, she hoped it was not.

* * *

"Who are you?" Abbot asked.

"A good question," the Shadowbeing said, rising from his grotesque throne. "A natural question," he added. "But a complex question. My appellation is Hazmat, and I'm in the employ a' the Shaar Continuum. They sent me along ta this bloody backward universe ta track down a missing Shadowen. But I'm currently also the Commissar of the Vigilance, which makes me the local Lor, whatever that may be. I must admit ta not trying terribly hard ta understand these primitive carbon beings. They're useful in their own way, though. Just fulla psychic energy ta fuel me magics."

Abbot tightened his hands around his cane. He felt unsettled, and slightly ill. Though Abbot prepared himself to see his fellow Shadowbeing — the "Shadowen" — imprisoned in a S'hree Vek slave pen, witnessing the true state of affairs made his earlier assumption seem almost innocent. This Hazmat person was just as monstrous, if not more, than the Confederacy. But unlike the beings from the S'hree Vek system, Abbot was related to this one.

"Living creatures are not batteries," Abbot said coldly.

Hazmat's orange eyes glimmered. "A' course they are, lad. By the Dark, ye've spent far too much time in this universe. We've got ta get ye back home and put ye right."

Abbot felt torn. His natural instinct was to harness his own wizardly might and smite this abominable creature, yet at the same time he felt a terrible curiosity. This Hazmat was his only link to his origins, the only clue he had ever found in all his travels that proved he was not unique, that he came from somewhere, that he was not alone. "What is home?" he heard himself ask. "What is the Continuum?"

Hazmat stared at him for a moment, then hopped down from his perch. "The Shaar Continuum lies on the edge a' the Void in the Astral Plane. It's a place fer higher beings ta congregate, exchange ideas and energy, an' exist apart from the primitive solids that propagate the majority a' the Megaverse, wasting space and resources." Hazmat reached out with his left hand, his eyes shining brightly. Abbot sensed Hazmat summoning up his energies, but still flinched as a bolt of light leapt from the chest of one of the Conaigher soldiers and flew to Hazmat's hand. The soldier writhed and then collapsed. Hazmat turned his attention to the two remaining Conaigher.

"Ten thousand years ago, more or less, the Continuum seeded the Megaverse," Hazmat said, gesturing once more. Two more beams of light leapt into his hands, and his eyes began to

glow more brightly. "Seven hundred thousand podlings were scattered across as many realities. The purpose was to mine those realities for their magical knowledge. The podlings were to bring that knowledge back to the Shaar, strengthening the Continuum, and giving us the tools to mount a long-delayed attack against our old enemies, the Nightlords. Very few of you've survived, however. At last count, we've only recovered about four hundred of you."

The baleful, orange eyes examined Abbot closely. "You will make four hundred and one."

Abbot returned Hazmat's stare for a moment, then thumped his cane on the floor. "I don't think so. I... have searched all my life for the source of my origins, assuming that, by doing so, I would find my life's meaning. Yet this Continuum that you speak of has no place in my life. I must decline your offer, Hazmat."

Hazmat nodded. "Well said, lad. But what makes you think I'll take no for an answer?"

A flash of light leapt from Hazmat's open palm, but Abbot reacted just as quickly, deflecting the beam with the head of his cane. "The thought never crossed my mind," Abbot replied, happy that his voice didn't shake.

Abbot's finely honed magic senses had detected a ley line nearby earlier, and he instinctively tapped into that reservoir of power. A shadowy shield rose up around his form, a field of coruscating light and dark that all but obscured Abbot's features.

Hazmat cackled. He stretched his arms out and rose off the floor of the bridge, levitating about a foot in the air. Waves of light and heat began to emanate from him, washing across the bridge and Abbot. His shadow-shield protected him from the effect, but Abbot could see the dimensions of the bridge begin to warp and twist as the waves struck them. A crack appeared in Abbot's field suddenly, alarming him. Nothing short of a Cosmo-Knight or a small nuclear device should have been able to do that.

Abbot could not help but feel concerned.

He tapped his cane on the floor panel under his feet, and focused his will. A beam of concentrated blacklight flashed from the force-field and slammed into Hazmat. It dissipated without fanfare against Hazmat's own protective field. Hazmat cackled again.

"You're no match for me, boyo," he said. "I've survived on the edge of the Void for twenty thousand years, shattered Torturians and Hounds alike with a wave of my hand, and I've the skulls of a dozen Night Princes hanging on the walls of my tower. You're but a podling with delusions of grandeur. You're still using the ley lines to power your magics. Silly child."

As Hazmat spoke, the light and heat pouring off of him increased in rate. The bridge wasn't built to withstand the kind of punishment Hazmat gave it. The bulkhead warped and shifted, the computers cracked open and sent sparks flying into the air. The empty tank, holding Hazmat's horrible throne, collapsed. The throne itself burst into flame, emitting a psychic scream that echoed in Abbot's ears.

Abbot narrowed his eyes. He was angry before, but now he felt a terrible fury rising within him. Hazmat was a perversion, a monstrous creature that violated everything Abbot held dear, whose very existence made Abbot's some kind of cosmic joke.

Abbot summoned a pack of Shadow Beasts to distract Hazmat. There was too much light for them to appear in strength, but they made up for it with numbers. A half-dozen of the immaterial, misshapen creatures stepped out of the shadows cast by the broken bulkheads. They swarmed towards Hazmat, growling and snapping their shadowy jaws. Hazmat didn't flinch. As the Shadow Beasts leapt for him, beams of light reached out from his body and caught them, devouring them in the blink of an eye.

Abbot followed up with a stream of fireballs, spheres of orange-white flame that hammered into Hazmat. Still without effect; they scattered harmlessly against Hazmat's protective field.

Hazmat cackled again, a sound nearly lost in the roar of his magical energies and the metallic crunch of the bridge collapsing in on itself. Hazmat brought his hands together, and as they met, a nearly invisible beam flashed from them towards Abbot. Abbot's shadowscreen splintered under the onslaught. Bits of shadowstuff fell to the floor like panes of glass.

"Can't you see, lad? Your cause is hopeless!" Hazmat shouted. Abbot dropped to one knee, shaken.

Abbot heard a familiar sizzling sound behind him, and heartened instantly. He pivoted on his heel to look over his shoulder. A blue-white blade sheared through the door, cutting through megasteel as if it were tissue paper. As Kassy smashed through the door, clad in shimmering blue-white hoplite armor, Abbot turned back to Hazmat. The other Shadowen barely acknowledged Kassy's arrival. Hazmat's orange eyes were locked on Abbot.

Mistake.

Abbot tucked his cane under one arm smoothly, reaching out to place his fingertips against the floor with his other hand. The bridge shuddered, the floor panels cracking apart under Hazmat's assault. Abbot concentrated, focusing his magic, and helped the process along. An explosion of metal fragments erupted beneath Hazmat, and chunks of red megasteel shredded through Hazmat's protective field. The Shadowen staggered, orange eyes blazing dangerously.

Kassy leapt over Abbot's kneeling form, her energy blade swinging in a wide arc. Hazmat roared as Kassy's blade connected with him, cutting through his protective field as easily as it had the ship's door. Hazmat bled darkness, and lashed out with a closed fist. He clipped Kassy's temple, knocking her sideways into a sparking computer bank. The Undead Slayer recovered quickly, leaping to her feet with a growl.

As she did, a dull, heavy echo resounded through the room. At first Abbot assumed it a side effect of Hazmat's warp field, but when it repeated, Hazmat appeared surprised at the sound as well.

A winged figure appeared in Abbot's peripheral vision, snarling savagely, a shimmering blade of psychic energy in his hand. "Joriel," Hazmat said. "Now this is a stunning turn of events."

"I've watched you despoil this craft long enough, Hazmat," the Celestine shouted.

Hazmat's eyes glimmered dangerously, and he waved his hand. Joriel the Celestine was lifted bodily by a wave of heat and light, and slammed into the ceiling of the bridge with a sickening crack. The strange echo repeated once more.

Abbot twirled his cane and sent a dozen red and black darts through the air to slam into Hazmat. Hazmat shook, releasing the Celestine, and took a threatening step in Abbot's direction. He didn't get far. A glowing white tiger with blue stripes slammed bodily into Hazmat and dragged him to the floor, claws tearing into him and ripping up bits of shadow. Hazmat roared in anger, and the tiger disappeared in a flash of light, absorbed into Hazmat's body like the Shadow Beasts and the Conaigher before it.

Hazmat leapt to his feet, helped a little by his levitation, but Kassy was waiting for him. As soon as he was upright, Kassy tagged him in the back of the head with a glowing blue-white sledgehammer. Hazmat's eyes dimmed slightly, but he did not fall. He spun around, grabbed Kassy's glowing breastplate, and tore it from her. Kassy fell backward, while Hazmat absorbed the energy from her armor into himself.

The dull echo sounded again, louder this time. Hazmat looked up at the ceiling, irritated.

Abbot set his cane on the ground and stood up. Hazmat twirled to face him once more. Hazmat raised his hand, made a fist, and dropped it. A cascade of light fell towards Kassy, but she was quicker than Hazmat; a finger on her collarbone called up a shimmering blue white shield that caught the brunt of the blast.

Abbot stepped toward Hazmat. "You may indeed be as old as you say," Abbot said tightly. He didn't know if Hazmat could hear him or not, and wasn't sure if he cared. "You certainly seem powerful enough, and what you've done to this ship is certainly impressive."

Hazmat cocked his head, watching Abbot's approach and apparently listening. The loud clang from above did not distract him this time.

"But the clincher must certainly be your colossal arrogance. I may be a mere podling, I may be only a few centuries old. But I have spent those few centuries crossing the length and breadth of the Three Galaxies and a dozen different universes. Your style of magic, for all its vaunted superiority, is not unknown to me." Abbot held his hands out, palm forward, and closed them. It was a simple Negate Magic spell, but given how Hazmat was powering his magics, he had no protection against the maneuver.

Hazmat dropped to the shattered floor, the shimmering field around him snuffed out. He blinked. "What —"

Abbot stepped forward and decked him hard. Hazmat slumped, eyes dimming. Abbot followed with a devastating uppercut that knocked Hazmat sprawling across the empty, warped tank behind him. As if to punctuate the blow, the hammering sound above them echoed once more.

Abbot held his right hand out, and the cane flew into it. While Hazmat struggled into a sitting position, Abbot lashed out with the cane, hammering the other Shadowen again and again. He only stopped when Kassy put her hand on his shoulder.

"You're killing him," she said.

"I know," he told her. He barely recognized his voice, however. It was something guttural and ugly.

"Abbot," Kassy said softly. "Let him go."

Abbot stood still for a moment. Finally, he craned his neck to look in Kassy's eyes. "You've won," she said. "He's beaten. If you go any further, you'll murder him."

The hammering sound had continued unabated while Abbot beat Hazmat, and now the sound of screaming metal was added to the noise. It barely registered on Abbot.

He stared at Kassy. "He is an abomination," he explained. "He needs to be destroyed."

"That may be," she told him, "but is this the best way?"

Her blue eyes bore into his orange ones, and at last, Abbot's shoulders fell. He threw his cane to the ground.

Abbot felt a shadow fall across him, but before he could react, Kassy pulled him out of the way. Abbot twisted, and saw the Celestine, face bloody and contorted in anger, slam his psionic blade into Hazmat's chest with a sizzle. The other Shadowen shivered, made a small sound, and dissipated. The psionic sword sank into the bulkhead, burning through it as Hazmat disintegrated.

"As you said," the Celestine said hoarsely. "It needed to be destroyed."

Kassy and Abbot exchanged concerned looks, but the Celestine made no move to attack. He slumped to the floor, dispelling his sword.

As Abbot straightened himself and Kassy took a tentative step in the Celestine's direction, another hammering sound echoed above them. This time, the scream of metal was more pronounced, and suddenly the ceiling split open.

Arwen Griffin dropped into the room through the gap, her body glowing with a violet light that gave her normally green skin and blue hair a darker shade. Siv Yurilak, two grav pistols in hand, landed beside her. He looked around, smiled grimly when he saw the scene, and said, "Sorry we're late. What did we miss?"

* * *

Thraxus, the richest man in the Three Galaxies, reclined in his plasmoid chair. The chair molded itself to his frame, hovering a foot off the ground. Nearby, a computer screen twirled slowly in the air, the day's financial news scrolling across it quickly. Thraxus did not blink as the numbers sped past.

A slight, polite cough brought him out of his reverie. Thraxus looked away from the screen, into the eyes of his manservant Hecubus. Tall and spare, Hecubus was a red-skinned Catyr with burnished bronze hair and impeccable fashion sense. "My apologies, my lord," Hecubus said softly, "but I thought it best to inform you immediately."

Thraxus raised an eyebrow. "Inform me of what?"

"Seven hours ago, two of the 'adventurers' who foiled your plan for Delian-4 arrived on Center. Their business here is unclear, but they do appear to be staying for an extended period."

"Interesting," Thraxus said after a moment. "Thank you, Hecubus."

Thraxus returned to the financial news, while Hecubus bowed and departed. Thraxus barely noticed his manservant's retreat, nor did he follow the images and numbers on the computer screen very closely. Thraxus was wealthier than most planetary governments, and nearly ageless. An infinite source of wealth and eternal youth had left Thraxus possessed of a nearly soul-crushing boredom. In ancient days, he had taken up broad-

sword and battle axe to alleviate that boredom, but since becoming one of the premier personalities of Phase World, Thraxus had taken to more esoteric pursuits. Several months before, Thraxus had contracted a band of mercenaries to sabotage the food production facilities on Delian-4, a terribly overpopulated planet in the fringes of the Consortium of Civilized Worlds. The destruction and terror of such an act would have provided Thraxus with hours of entertainment, while his own controlling stock in several food production companies in systems near Delian-4 would ensure Thraxus' considerable fortune would increase by several factors.

But Thraxus' plans were foiled by a band of crusaders led by the Wolfen Cosmo-Knight Lothar of Motherhome. Delian-4 survived, relatively unscathed, and the mercenaries were caught and punished. Their leader, a former Invincible Guardsman of the Transgalactic Empire, was sentenced to two hundred years on a penal planet. Not once during his trial or sentencing had Elias Harkonnen mentioned Thraxus' name.

The former Guardsman deserved some kind of reward for that, at least. Though his failure against Lothar didn't warrant a rescue attempt, Thraxus could certainly exact revenge for Harkonnen against the heroes. Besides, Thraxus was having a slow afternoon.

Thraxus activated his personal comm-unit and contacted his bodyguards. "Saburo," he said, "gather the boys. I want you to collect some people for me."



Chaos Earth™

A role-playing game in the making

By Kevin Siembieda

What brought this all about?

It's all Maryann's fault. Her and some **Rifts®** fan online. You see, Maryann passed along somebody's comment that **Rifts®** was never really a "post apocalyptic" game, but a "post, post apocalyptic" game. After all, our story in **Rifts®** takes place AFTER the Great Cataclysm and AFTER the 200+ years of the Dark Ages. It BEGINS with the *resurgence* of human civilization, and the tenuous rebirth of *civilization* in general.

That got me thinking.

Rifts® is a "post-, post-" apocalyptic game. And over the years, there have also been a number of "post-apocalyptic" games. Then it dawned on me – nobody I can think of has ever done the *apocalypse itself* – not as a role-playing game. I mean living through the actual cataclysmic and convulsive collapse of human civilization as it was unfolding! Not the recovery period. Not survivalist adventures, but the confusion and chaos of an ever changing landscape in the throes of an apocalyptic crash.

Then it struck me, Chaos Earth™ ...

That's what **Chaos Earth™** should be. Not some parallel dimension where events transpired differently, but the *real* thing. *The Great Cataclysm* and the total collapse of human civilization. Not the Dark Ages – those were good times compared to the Great Cataclysm. I'm talking about the explosive worldwide calamity of the *Coming of the Rifts!* The devastating storms, tidal waves, earthquakes, and eruption of the Rifts. Adding to the horror is the inexplicable appearance of strange lines of blue energy that not only seem to be the root cause of the global holocaust and plague of natural disasters, but they are also responsible for the impossible. The unimaginable! The appearance of magic, monsters and portals to other worlds. The source of alien invaders, vampires and the supernatural.

Total chaos on an unimaginable scale! And you, the *players*, are heroic government operatives assigned with trying to make sense of the madness, formulate a response, and save lives while trying to restore some measure of order and safety – even if it is only in some small corner of the world.

You are the best of the best.

Heroes with a license to go anywhere and do anything to save the day. At your disposal is "state of the art" technology. Weapons, vehicles and equipment more advanced than anything we have seen in **Rifts®**, for technology like Juicer augmentation, M.O.M. conversions (Crazies), advanced bionics, the SAMAS, and the Glitter Boy are just *some* of the technology from the Golden Age of Man *rediscovered* centuries later, and made to play a new role in a new age of rebirth that is the story of Rifts Earth.

The setting of **Chaos Earth™** is something very different.

Rifts® players may recognize certain machines and elements common to Rifts Earth some 300 years in the future, but Chaos Earth is a very different world.

Chaos Earth™ is a *stand-alone* role-playing game that tells the story of a future Earth torn asunder. It is a tale of heroism, treachery, titanic change and the human spirit pitted against impossible odds. For **Rifts** players, it is a piece of history. The story of how Rifts Earth came into being. For everyone else it is something new, bold and exciting.

Players do NOT need to know a thing about **Rifts®** to play and enjoy **Chaos Earth™**. While **Rifts®** players will have a unique perspective and appreciate some of the little ironies, as well as the fun of playing through a previously "unknown" part of Rifts history, **Chaos Earth™** is a completely different time and place. A world environment as unique and different as any other.

The Rifter® presentation

Why do **Chaos Earth™** now and in parts? Because I'm exploding with ideas. My mind can't stop thinking up new ideas. **Mechanoid® Space**, **Void Runners™**, and **Beyond the Supernatural™ Second Edition** all swirl around inside my head like excited bees longing to burst free. And now **Chaos Earth™** joins them, screaming to come out.

Creative people will understand that sometime, you just have to give *vent* to the creative energies and cut loose. I plan to get all of the first three projects done and out in 2002 (as well as a number of other world books and sourcebooks already on the schedule). As always, I can't do them all at once, and other commitments demand my time and energy. Meanwhile **Mechanoid® Space** and **Chaos Earth™** are screaming the loudest to be unleashed. My solution is to focus on The **Mechanoids®** project and my previous commitments, but to give vent to **Chaos Earth™** by writing bits and pieces throughout the year and publishing them in **The Rifter®** as I go along! This way, I can get the satisfaction of getting *parts* done whenever I can sneak some time to do them, and you guys and gals don't have to wait a year and a half before the "entire" game comes out! I think it is a win, win situation for everybody. I hope you think so too.

This issue sets the stage for **Chaos Earth™**, presenting the opening and setting for the Great Cataclysm and a world in crisis.

Next issue **Chaos Earth™** will be expanded and focus on NEMA, its organization, resources, mission platforms and operatives (key O.C.C.s) and their role in a world turned upside down.

Our story ...

Earth December 21, 2098

The future holds nothing but promise.

Humankind has enjoyed an age of science, learning and relative peace for over fifty years. The human genome has been mapped, explored and tweaked. Medical cloning, genetic manipulation, nanotechnology, and advanced bionic are all a reality. Most diseases have been cured, the *average* life expectancy

is 180 years (20% live past 200) and new breakthroughs in medicine promises to extend life 50% longer than that. Thus, a ninety-year old looks and feels like a thirty-year old; the mind sharp and the body strong.

The ocean depths are a new frontier being plumbed for secrets in medicine, farming and history. The fringes of outer space are also being conquered with several national and international space stations locked in orbit around the Earth, and bases established on the moon and even Mars. The latter is only a tiny outpost, the latest in humankind's space trekking efforts. The moon base is considerably larger and home to the *Cyberworks Aerospace Network*, a mega-corporation that specializes in space research, robotics, artificial intelligence and virtual reality robot systems.

Back on Earth, massive megalopolis style cities cover the globe, with skyscrapers regularly reaching 100 floors and beyond. Ribbons of highways cover the landscape and hovercrafts of infinite variety remain all the rage. They are vehicles that ride on a cushion of air, a foot or two off the ground, provide superior maneuverability and place considerably less wear and tear on the roads. Then again, the highways and byways of the civilized world (which is 80% of the planet) are made of a new concrete that lasts ten times longer than anything known in the 20th Century. What "wilderness" remains in North America and much of the world, are nature parks, cultivated logging territories and government sponsored preserves.

Even more impressive is the fact that after 27 years of terrorism, vendettas, treachery and war, from 2001-2028, the major nations of the world put aside their differences to bring about a new age of science and peace. The world had finally become the "global village" people had talked about ad infinitum during the later part of the 20th Century. All the major powers began to share their ideas, technology and resources – truly working together. Trade goods came and went from all across the globe. The United States of America, Canada, and Mexico formed the North American Alliance that would become the blueprint for other nations to build strong, multi-national cooperatives. Many of the world's nations rose to prominence to enjoy prosperity the likes of which had never been known. Germany, India, China, Korea, Mexico, Argentina and Canada became the *new* super-powers, the USA and Russia thrived at the head of the pack, and human civilization flourished like never before.

Poverty, inequity, injustice and war still existed, and there remained impoverished and aggressive third world nations, but these places were in the minority, and generally considered exceptions, outcasts and backwater places.

What brought about this "global age of prosperity" were a number of facts, but foremost was a universal weariness of the constant strife and war, an explosive series of technological breakthroughs that sent the world on its ear and the North American Alliance Pact (NAAP). The sharing of knowledge, the mutual exploitation of ideas, and the sharing of technology among many friendly nations followed by rapid expansion on those ideas had a domino effect, spawning more breakthroughs and innovations that gave birth to a new age of science, technology, cooperation and excitement. It seemed like a new epic discovery in medicine, technology or science was being announced every week. Medicine led the way with breakthroughs to extend life, preserve the mind, defeat disease, slow the aging process and

improve the human body. Advancements in genetic manipulation and augmentation, cloning, cybernetic and nano-technology filled the media. New technology in the micronization of electronics, communications and energy into generators, power cells and batteries with the power of a small nuclear power plant brought about explosive changes in technology, transportation, communications, manufacturing and space exploration. Each major discovery unleashed a chain reaction of new discoveries and applications in diverse areas. In fact, some pundits of the day claimed that people were too excited and busy creating new wonders to be concerned with petty differences, squabbling or war. Besides, every new advancement and the scores of new applications that followed, made individuals, businesses and nations rich overnight. If this was not the *Golden Age of Humankind* or the *Age of Prosperity*, it was without doubt the age of wonder. For mankind now believed anything was possible and looked to conquer the universe before them. Old age, sickness, and human frailty were all washed away, outer space became the frontier, and the impossible seemed within reach in every direction.

The North American Alliance (NAA)

The North American Alliance Pact of 2035 was a daring treaty that united and bound the North American nations of *Canada, Mexico* and the *United States of America* in a sweeping social, economic and military coalition of unparalleled scope and cooperation. It rose out of an era of economic and political strife that had lasted nearly thirty years. A roller coaster period of terror, retribution, war and economic uncertainty that had stifled growth and personal freedoms for more than a generation. On the heels of renewed peace and an upturn in the market, the *North American Alliance Pact* unified three of the (arguably) most powerful and promising nations in the world. An act that jump-started the global economy and helped to bring about a new era of unparalleled cooperation and scientific advancement. Some would credit it for bringing about what would be dubbed the "Golden Age of Man."

The NAA heralded a new age of international cooperation spearheaded by the North American nations "starting in their own backyard." The NAA had the following immediate and lasting effects:

1. The opening of national borders (borders virtually disappeared).
2. Strident efforts to create economic parity between the three allied nations.
3. True and equitable sharing of ideas, technology and information.
4. Open trade and universal regulations, laws and measures.
5. The trilateral incorporation of the NAA "credit/debit system" of monetary exchange; effectively one common monetary unit for all three nations.
6. The creation of NEMA; the Northern Eagle Military Alliance.

Northern Eagle Military Alliance (NEMA)

Effectively an elite police-paramilitary agency and troops with jurisdiction in all three of the allied nations charged with

the defense of North America as a whole. Thus, they could come and go with impunity battling crime, smugglers, terrorism, espionage, etc. NEMA incorporates an equal number of operatives from each of the allied nations to deal with all sorts of crimes and actions across national borders. A sort of tri-national FBI, CIA and NSA rolled into one.

This joint military operation quickly became one of the most efficient and advanced in the world, virtually replacing the FBI. It works with both federal and local authorities and is involved with all matters that involve two or more nations, or any one of the allied nation's defenses. As an elite police and military force, NEMA has access to the most advanced crime fighting, investigative, rescue and military equipment and innovations (including prototypes). **Note:** Most player characters will be NEMA operatives or be associated with the organization in some way.

The last days of a Golden Age

It is said that all good things must come to an end, and so it is that the Golden Age became tarnished over the last twenty years.

One of the humankind's obsessions in recent years was in the area of human augmentation. The quest to create the perfect human, physically, emotionally and psychically. All sorts of research and technology involving genetic manipulation, cloning, chemical augmentation, brain implants, nano-machines, cybernetics and robotics had been developed in the quest to make the ultimate human. Many offered diverse and diametrically opposing views. Many claimed to be superior for one reason or another, each was pitted against the other in a fierce social-economic war to win the world market. All would play a tremendous role in the cooling (some would say freezing) of the Golden Age of knowledge, cooperation and sharing. For under the scrutiny of intense competition, all sorts of finger pointing revealed reckless applications, short-cuts, crackpot theories, problems and potential dangers.

This turn of events made nations and corporate powers reexamine other areas of technology and to pull back on the easy availability and exploitation of their scientific discoveries and secrets. This caused a slowdown in tech development which translated into a sharp decline in world economics. Businesses faltered, the stock markets crashed, nations began to suffer and a new technological elite began to surface. Worse, after two generations of peace, many of the "wonders" were now seen as having incredible military applications. Robotics, cybernetics, lasers, super alloys and other super-materials, and even genetic engineering, cloning and other medical discoveries had vast potential for *war*.

Even the vast majority of world powers who did *not* rush toward military supremacy looked at their wondrous creations with a twinge of horror. They were so busy creating, building and developing that they had not realized they had unleashed a thousand Genies from their bottle. Now that the finger had been pointed at one, they could see all the others. They now realized how recklessly they had thrown themselves into science without completely thinking through the global ramifications and the potential for evil misuse. It is this sudden realization that caused the real problem as nations and corporations scrambled to establish new restrictions, protocols and laws to contain and rebottle

at least some of the most potentially dangerous genies they had unleashed. But as the fairy tale warns, once unleashed, the genie can not be put back – at least not easily.

The rate of new discoveries and innovation slowed to a comparative crawl. The sense of wonderment exchanged with fear. Excitement with apprehension. As unexpectedly as it had begun, the age of enlightenment came to a sudden halt. The nations that had thrown themselves into creating marvels and building a better world, took a new look at themselves, their neighbors and their not so friendly rivals, and shuddered. Although many had prospered, there remained areas of tremendous disparity. Some found themselves clutching onto technological secrets they now refused to share. Technology that gave them political, scientific, manufacturing, communications and/or military superiority over their rivals. And suddenly, "rivals" is how they looked at one another. Envy, suspicion, paranoia and disharmony bloomed overnight, reshaping the landscape. What many were calling the "new Cold War" era had arrived with a vengeance.

Once friendly allies now bickered and argued over the "safe" application of their respective technologies. Proposed laws and restrictions intended to keep the people of the world safe from tech and scientific abuses were demonized and condemned as measures by those who held the patents to control those who did not, or even for entire nations to keep other nations under their thumb. Accusations flew fast and furious. Industrial espionage exploded. New walls and borders were established and emotions ran high. All this contributed to global recession, with the poorest and least technologically advanced countries suffering the hardest. Widespread poverty erupted among the third world nations, and even some of the most advanced and powerful nations suffered – crippled by new trade restraints, confining laws, and competition from rival technological giants. Some pointed to this as deliberate economic leveraging of the leading world tech-powers and unfair competition. Others saw it as a first step toward war. Civil unrest mounted and barriers rose.

Still, all in all, the world is a good and better place than anything known in previous centuries. Technological marvels prevail, prolonged life, binding governmental alliances, and pervasive world peace (other than a few hot spots and trouble zones) continues. Most believed this decade of slowed growth, stabilization and *responsibility* would turn into an even greater age of advancement and prosperity. After all, the economy and civilization is a living thing, with cycles of difficult transition and change. This was one of those periods.

Life is good. The future bright.

That all ends tomorrow.

The Great Cataclysm

December 22, 2098

Central & South America feels it first, North America thirty seconds later. Europe, Asia, Australia and the entire planet is engulfed a few minutes later. Engulfed by a disturbance caused by lines of energy erupting out of the ground and shooting three miles (4.8 km) into the sky. An energy stream that crisscrosses the globe, with isolated networks clustered at places long held to have magical, spiritual or supernatural significance. However, before anybody can even recognize the event, the planet spasms and the world is reshaped.



When the reports start to rush in, they come in too quickly and are too frightening to internalize.

Contact with half the world is lost in a matter of two heartbeats.

In the United States, New York City, Washington D.C., Boston, Baltimore, Savannah, Orlando, Miami and the entire Eastern Seaboard is ... gone. Tens of millions of lives disappear in a matter of minutes!

The West Coast shares a similar fate.

If the initial reports can be believed, the oceans have swelled to swallow coastal areas all around North America. All around the World! Dormant volcanoes erupt with explosive fury, earthquakes along every fault line rise, fall and shake with primordial fury. Savage and freak storms appear without warning, and the planet shudders.

Cuba, Haiti, and southern Florida are engulfed in a Level Five hurricane the size of Texas. Most of the **Carribbean Islands** vanish. Tidal waves a thousand feet (305 m) tall rush 100 miles (160 km) *inland*, smashing and washing away everything in its path. That includes the cities of Boston, Manhattan, Savannah and Miami in the east and San Diego, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Vancouver in the west.

The waters known as the legendary **Bermuda Triangle** are ... well, nobody can quite find the words to explain it. A triangular zone of white mist and crackling blue energy. Any air or water vessels to enter the Triangle vanish – never to be seen or heard from again.

The President of the United States, away at Colorado to make a speech, survives the initial carnage and is spirited away to NORAD in the Cheyenne Mountains. The Vice President,

half of Congress and the Senate, and the President's family, are not so fortunate.

NEMA and the nation's military goes on high alert and scramble for action.

Reports coming out of **Detroit** and **Windsor** border on the absurd. Walls of blue energy have appeared from which "demons and monsters" are said to be pouring into the streets. Both cities burn out of control – presumably from rioters and a panic stricken public. It is absolute bedlam.

Chicago and **Toronto** also report the appearance of blue energy lines, rioting, fires, unexplained phenomena and hysteria about "monsters." So do a hundred other cities and towns across the country, especially in the midwest and northeast.

St. Louis, Missouri and Illinois, seems to be the epicenter of unexplained phenomena and more hysteria about "monsters and demons." Rioting, fires and destruction rages throughout southern Illinois, Missouri, Indiana and Ohio.

The Mississippi River suddenly surges over its banks to flood every community along its shores from the Gulf Coast to Minnesota. Likewise, the **Rio Grande** reaches water levels never seen in modern times.

The West Coast (US and Canada) and **Alaska** are hammered by massive tidal waves, savage storms, and successive waves of earthquakes ranging from 7 to 9 on the Richter Scale!

Mount Saint Helen's erupts, as do nine other volcanoes in the west.

Calgary (in the northwest) is the scene of rioting and mass hysteria, as well as freak storms. Reports coming out of it claim the city is being invaded by demonic or alien invaders. Then contact with that Canadian city is lost.

The Northern Provinces of Canada are engulfed in a winter storm that stretches from British Columbia to Manitoba, and up into the arctic.

Communities in the Provinces of **Nova Scotia, New Brunswick** and the coast of **Newfoundland** are obliterated by the raging Atlantic Ocean. **Prince Edward Island** vanishes under the waves.

Mexico City is reduced to rubble in a series of powerful earthquakes and volcanic activity that is off the scale. Half the population, ten million, perish in the first three hours. Elsewhere, Mexico's coastal communities are wiped from the face of the Earth. Fourteen volcanoes erupt across that nation.

The rest of the world bears a similar fate in what will later become known as the *Great Cataclysm*.

It comes without warning. Without reason. Without mercy. And it is only the beginning.

December 23, 2098

The world is in the throes of what will come to be known as the **Great Cataclysm**. Future generations will also refer to it as the *Coming of the Rifts*. Both names are appropriate, although for those living in the here and now, it is indeed the "Great Cataclysm." A disaster of biblical proportions.

Satellite and Moon Base reports confirm that the Saint Louis area has erupted with an estimated 200 energy lines with at least 13-18 points of super-activity and flares of energy that seem to correspond with reports of strange phenomena and even alleged dimensional and chronol distortion. The **Detroit-Windsor** area, among others, are similarly the site of intense activity of inexplicable energy and unknown disturbances that can be seen from space like giant flares or erupting volcanoes of cosmic energy. The **Ohio Valley** also suffers from similar phenomena and disturbances. Other places around the planet exhibit similar or worse anomalies, with the so-called *Bermuda Triangle, British Isles* and *China* among the most spectacular.

Initial reports from orbital satellites, space stations and moon bases present a clearer global picture of the situation, confirming the appearance of over 5000 lines of unknown energy and thousands of intersections that appear to be focal points for that energy. Exactly what these lines of energy have to do with the worldwide calamities is, as of yet, unknown. The picture from space also confirms 33 volcanic eruptions, 119 tidal waves, the appearance of 47 freak "storm events" and mass destruction over the last 24 hours. One observer summed it up as well as any when she said, "It's as if the very planet Earth is convulsing. Tearing itself apart." Indeed, the planet is undergoing convulsive change. As for the lines of energy, what role they might play in all this, and the energy and unimaginable disturbances at their epicenters where more than two lines cross is beyond anyone's understanding. For now, data is collected as quickly as possible to assess the situation and to formulate some kind of a response. But truth be told, the devastation is so widespread and comes so quickly and without warning, that the nations of the world are overwhelmed and lost to chaos.

Meanwhile, the data from most North American and European satellites are patched through the global corporation, Cyberworks and its "A.R.C.H.I.E." super-computers – a trio of revolutionary *neural cell synthetic artificial intelligences* that can think, learn and formulate subjective thought – the most ad-

vanced computer system currently known to man. **A.R.C.H.I.E. Three**, the earliest working prototype, survives the carnage buried deep inside the underground military complex in Aberdeen, Maryland. **A.R.C.H.I.E. Four** is believed to be at the safest location at the Cyberworks Aerospace Network (CAN) *moon base* (A.R.C.H.I.E. 5, 6 & 7 come later for the moon). It links with its Aberdeen counterpart in an effort to assimilate and process all incoming data as quickly and efficiently as possible. All data is shared with **A.R.C.H.I.E. Two** at NORAD (NORTH American Air Defense) in the Cheyenne Mountains of the Colorado Rockies. **Problem:** "The disturbance" is felt even on the moon as solar storms and heavy doses of radiation bombard it as well as the orbital space stations and hundreds of man-made satellites. An estimated 32% of all satellites are knocked offline, space stations scramble to respond to crashing systems, and the moon itself shudders and quakes! Fortunately, damage to the CAN moon base is minimal; only 5% of its personnel are lost. The most disturbing news is that *A.R.C.H.I.E. Four* appears to be damaged and malfunctioning. The extent of the damaged is yet to be determined; it continues to function at 69% capacity (and deteriorating).

At 9:45 pm, the Yellow Stone super-volcano erupts. Its magma pool rockets 20 miles (32 km) into the stratosphere. Sulfur fills the air and rock, lava and a volcanic ash begins to rain down across the United States and southwestern Canada from the Pacific coast to Nebraska. This half of the country will feel the worst of it, but the rest of the continent and the entire world will suffer the consequences as temperatures plummet 30 degrees Fahrenheit worldwide. Summer will not be coming in 2099.

December 24, 2098

Christmas Eve

The world is in a panic. Contact with all but one's nearest neighbor is lost. In the United States, the West Coast shattered and lost to a roller coaster of earthquakes and tidal waves, is now being buried under feet of hot ash already over seven feet (2.1 m) deep. Everything from the Rockies to the Midwest is likewise being buried by a storm of ash. Winter storms and strange "disturbances" only complicate matters. Contact with the eastern seaboard and numerous cities and states are completely lost.

Current estimates suggest one third of the world's population has been lost. Computer models project an additional 30-40 percent will perish within the next six months, worldwide.

Many believe it is the end of the world.

December 25, 2098

Christmas Day

Nobody is celebrating Christmas, although a multitude is praying. People everywhere seek refuge at places they believe to be safe havens. Others struggle to escape and flee the holocaust, only there is nowhere to go.

At 7:53 A.M. comes the last direct communications from Earth with the colonists in space. It is a garbled message that reports continuing disasters, panic, hysteria and "extreme chaos." The space stations and moon outposts are helpless witnesses to what they fear may be the last days of their civilization and home world. The spreading ash and particles spewed into the at-

mosphere by the super-volcano and other volcanic activity, storms and strange disturbances now cloaks 98.9% of the planet, cloaking it from their telescopes and sensors. For all intents and purposes, the Earth is *gone*. Those in orbit around their home world are left blind, deaf and mute to what transpires below. It is an excruciating loss that anaesthetizes the mind and suffocates the human spirit. After a few days of numbed pain and disbelief, the space community suffers its own bout with panic and hysteria. Thousands will take their own lives and cause disaster before some measure of order and hope is restored.

December 31, 2098

New Year's Eve

Nations, States and Provinces, even cities, are cut off and isolated. Left alone and terrified to deal with events as they unfold. Government agencies, police, fire, rescue and similar departments struggle to maintain some sort of order and engage in rescue operations, but the carnage seems endless.

The world continues to heave and convulse. It is a much colder, dark place now. The ashen skies blot out the sun and reflect its heat, making winter in North America and Europe like those in Siberia. Looking out from a window one can not tell whether it is snowing or whether it is ash that falls – one or the other falls continually. Where public utilities fail and power is lost, people freeze to death. There is not enough manpower or coherent government left to mount rescue operations, so entire cities toppled by seismic turmoil and other disasters are left to dig themselves out.

If there is any good news, it is that the volcanic ash (already 15 feet/4.6 m deep in the western *half* of the USA and Canada, and about three feet (0.9 m) in the rest – and still falling with no sign of an end), is burying the millions of dead, preventing serious outbreaks of disease that comes with decay. But that is the only good news.

The planet earth is enshrouded with ash, sulfur and particles that reflect the sun. Ash falls as far away as Hong Kong and New Zealand, although it is only a thin dusting. However, even here, at the bottom of the world, the sky turns grey and the sun disappears.

Across the globe temperatures drop by 30-40 degrees Fahrenheit, turning it into a cold world of snow and twilight. On the brightest day in the warmest places (barely reaching 60-70 degrees), the sun is but a pale hint of yellow in a darkening grey sky.

Vegetation is the first to suffer in the chilling transformation. Entire ranges of forest, jungle and farms withers away. Crops begin to fail before most people know what has hit them.

Worldwide communication collapses. There is no internet. No satellite feed. No far reaching television. No telecommunications. Interference comes not just from the ash filled heavens, but from the walls of blue energy, raging storms, cables severed by earthquakes and the collapse of communication systems and the businesses and relay stations that maintained them only yesterday.

In most cases, communications is so shattered and limited that cities are cut off from their nearest neighbors, and in the worst case, even from the people just down the road. Events happening only a few miles (kilometers) away go on without

media coverage or news reports. Radios and televisions buzz with static or garbled noise. When a voice is heard, it usually offers tales of new terror, mass destruction or a plea for help.

Feeling isolated. Alone. Lost. Bedlam and terror reigns. Those who do not huddle together to seek shelter, try to flee or lash out violently at the world around them.

Rumors of every conceivable subject abound. Some say the country's leaders have survived and are working on a response at the very moment. Others warn that the government is gone. No help is coming. And it is the end of the world.

Some claim the planet Earth is under attack by space aliens. Others tell of "monsters" and "demons" and strange phenomena that sounds like something out of a horror or science fiction movie. Most attribute these reports to hysteria, but the reports not only persist but grow in number with each passing hour. For many, such stories only confirm that this *is* the end of the world.

In North America, the military and NEMA have mobilized, and where their forces are obvious, there is some sense of hope, law and order. The new, *USA-G10 power armor* (known to future generations as the "Glitter Boy") are deployed by the thousands. They are walking tanks made of laser reflective chrome serving as highly visible sentinels that bring comfort to the frightened multitudes. As do the *Flying Eagle SAMAS power armor*, each branch painted in the colors of its national flag (USA, Canada and Mexico). The Flying Eagles are exclusive to NEMA and functions as an all-terrain air, ground and water combat vehicle well suited for urban environments, riot control force, rescue and quick response teams. Both the Flying Eagle and G10 power armor units provide robot augmentation to one-man suits of robotic armor for a wide range of combat and humanitarian



operations. Both reflect the latest innovations in North American technology. However, their deployment and the sense of security they bring are the exceptions rather than the rule.

Most communities across North America (and the world) are left to their own devices with little or no guidance or protection from their national or regional government. Some people unite to help one another. Leaders rise from the local government, local police and fire departments, churches, businesses and charismatic individuals.

Those places that have suffered the least destruction, generally, fare the best and mount the best response, rescue and recovery. However, the majority of cities, especially along the coastlines, are lost to tragedy, destruction and terror. Where the devastation has been the worsts entire states and provinces lay in rubble and people do what they must to survive.

Elsewhere, riots, looting and panic tear apart communities that have survived the initial wave of destruction. Mob rule is law. At this point there is nothing resembling gangs or groups of any kind, only panic stricken mobs and madmen.

Indeed, the world is suddenly a frightening and violent place. The skies dark. The wind cold. The world turned upside down.

January 1, 2099

A new era begins – Chaos Earth

This is where our story begins. The struggle to survive in an ever crumbling civilization and world transformed in more ways than anybody can yet imagine.

Our emphasis is on North America: The USA, Canada and Mexico, but most of the world is faring similarly.

Join us next issue as we delve into the madness and chaos, and what NEMA is trying to do to save North America.

The Origin of Chaos

Most of the world will *never* know how or why the world changed in the blink of an eye. Even the sketchy information and outline of events presented here is known in its entirety to only a handful of elite personnel in the world's militaries and governments. Virtually all of it will be lost to posterity over the next few years. Ah, but for you, gentle reader, we will reveal the origin this disaster.

Ironically, despite humankind's leanings toward self-destruction, we play a tiny role in the convulsive birth of **Chaos Earth**. Most of the events leading up to it is pure coincidence and unfortunate timing.

Unknown to human science, there has always existed a sublime energy source that courses throughout the planet, and indeed the infinite Megaverse. In the days of ancient man, this primordial energy was known as "magic." The ancient Chinese actually identified the lines of energy as "Dragon Tracks" and places of magic, and the abode of good and evil spirits. From this knowledge grew the mystic art of Feng Shui. Others knew something of magic and the "earth energy." The druids of England and France, the dowsers and mystics past and present all spoke of "earth energies," "lines of power," and "places of healing and magic ... or evil." Some even spoke of doorways to hell and other dark realms. However, with the advent of *science* and the industrial revolution, the notion of magic, the mystical and

even the psychic was replaced with science and technology. Ideas of spiritualism, magic and the supernatural were rejected by most modern people and relegated to the realm of fantasy, fiction and fairy tales. Consequently, the genuine existence of Dragon Tracks or ley lines was ignored. In fairness to science, the magic energies of Earth had faded over the eons and by the Renaissance Age in Europe, had dwindled to virtually nothing. Even the most powerful nexus points such as Stonehenge and the Bermuda Triangle were scarcely measurable even by those *spiritually or psychically attuned* to such shadows of magic energy. However, while the mystic energy lay quiet and forgotten, it still existed. These are the lines of energy that exploded onto the scene at the onset of the Great Cataclysm – but it was mankind that provided the spark to reignite them.

As noted earlier, the Golden Age had given way to a period of unrest and renewed hostilities. Considering humankind's past, it was a comparatively small stumble along the way to a better, gentler civilization.

South America, much of which had enjoyed a boom-time during the Golden Age, now reeled from economic hardship and civil unrest. While most of the nation struggled through the downturn, others became violent and unstable. Two such small nations clashed repeatedly. One, supported by the USA (with an uncanny knack for backing the wrong horse) and grudgingly, its two allies in NEMA, was given a dozen suits of *USA-G10 power armor* (i.e. Glitter Boys) to support its sagging military defenses. After an altercation with its enemy, the nation defied the conditions of the loan, in which the G10s were only to be used for "defense," and sent the squad against enemy forces active inside their border. The invading rebels were routed, pursued *across* the border, and into the neighboring nation. There the enemy forces were slaughtered, but the power armored troops pressed on to attack and decimate several innocent villages. That nation responded by dispatching a full army battalion. When the battle ended, in one short hour, 1200 soldiers and the town of Gauda Marta was obliterated. 24,000 townspeople were killed. An additional 800 soldiers and 13,000 civilians were injured. The town itself flattened. All at the hands of the twelve USA-G10 power armor troops. While several of the power armor units were severely damaged only one had been completely destroyed. The new super alloy of the armor and the powerful shoulder mounted gun worked beyond expectations with devastating results.

The invading nation withdrew, but refused to apologize or make any overture to their enemy, claiming self-defense. The injured nation appealed to the world, condemning NEMA and the USA specifically and calling for worldwide reform of such weapons of destruction and vowed bloody revenge. Tensions rose to a fever pitch.

On December 22, 2098 the two South American nations struck at each other with a limited (very limited) exchange of nuclear weapons. Millions of lives perished in a heartbeat. The brutal event in and of itself would have been horrible, but an isolated incident with minimal direct impact on the rest of the world. What nobody could appreciate was the nature of *ley lines* and *magic*.

Ley lines are lines of (for lack of a better word) "magic" energy. This energy has always existed as part of the natural order of things, like electromagnetic energy and light rays. It is virtu-

ally identical to what psychic researchers had come to label Potential Psychic Energy or P.P.E. for short. Both ley line energy and P.P.E. can influence and supplement each other. Ancient rituals of human and animal sacrifice may have actually been designed to draw upon that energy, for at the moment of death, the P.P.E. in a living creature is unleashed at double its normal magnitude. If a priest or sorcerer knows how, he can capture the escaping magic to work feats of healing and magic. Likewise, the energy along ley lines ebbs and flows, increasing during certain times of the day or year, often coinciding with the position of the sun and the planets.

As fate would have it, the planets were aligned, causing the ley line energy to surge to begin with. The hour was midnight, a peak time when ley line energy spikes, and the city nuked was built upon a pair of intersecting ley lines, with other ley lines nearby. When the bombs went off, a million lives perished in flash, their magnified P.P.E. energy, doubled at the moment of death, poured into the already active and magnified energy of the ley lines. This had a ripple effect on the neighboring ley lines causing them to surge and flare with energy not seen in 150 million years. A moment later came the retaliatory strike sending in the life's energy of a million more lives, feeding the lines of energy and causing them to erupt with energy. The limited nuclear exchange, however, had started a chain reaction that could not be stopped. An incident that jump started the ley lines, making them explode to life. The surging ley line energy raced across the land like electricity would race across a circuit board, igniting other ley lines worldwide. As the wave of energy covered the planet (in under three minutes), the uncontrolled magic energy touched off massive natural, unnatural and dimensional disturbances causing sudden freak storms of immense power, maximum strength earthquakes, titanic volcanic eruptions, massive tidal waves, flooding and all manner of disasters. A massive succession of mass death (human and animal) the ley lines, making them more powerful and wild with every passing second, causing more death and disaster. Which in turn fed the lines causing more devastation in a cycle of death that once started, could not be stopped! In a matter of minutes, half of all life on the Earth was destroyed, though it would take weeks before anybody would realize it.

The massive powering of the ley lines, however, would have other ramifications beyond the understanding of the scientific mind. The life energy of trillions of living creatures had turned the once invisible and forgotten ley lines into raging conduits of mystic energy that would last for thousands of years. The ley lines now radiated with such power that the Earth was being realigned on a cosmic scale, becoming a trans-dimensional nexus spanning the Megaverse. Where two or more ley lines crossed, power was increased, creating a nexus point where the very fabric of space and time is meaningless. Portals to and forces from other worlds, other dimensions, other realities were now linked to the Earth. Without any intelligence to control them, doorways — to any where and any when — opened and closed unleashing terrible things into our world. It is from such places that some of the storms and strange, unearthly phenomena came. These portals, these Rifts in reality are also responsible for the reports of invasions by monsters, demons and aliens. The worst of the worst, the so-called "demons" had always walked among mortal man, but with magic energy being so low on Earth, their numbers were few and their existence banished as myth, legend and

superstition without any bearing in reality. With the Great Cataclysm and the Coming of the Rifts, they now had easy access to the realm of humans, but even most of these supernatural horrors would avoid the planet while it remained locked in its apocalyptic transformation. They would come later, as would a host of aliens. Beings as mortal as any human, most torn from their own world and hurled to Earth via some dimensional anomaly beyond their reckoning. But now we are getting ahead of ourselves.

Our story is the here and now of the apocalypse, and surviving the impossible.



Technical RPG Notes

Chaos Earth™ will be a complete role-playing game. The setting starts with the apocalyptic Cataclysm that sets the course that will turn our planet into Rifts Earth and plunges humankind into a second Dark Age.

The action covers the period immediately following the Great Cataclysm as human civilization (and humankind itself) slides into oblivion as it struggles to survive the cataclysm and the increasingly hostile and alien apocalyptic environment.

While this setting may sound bleak, it *will* provide ample opportunity for heroic adventure.

The Game Mechanics

Game Mechanics: For now, use **Rifts®** or **Heroes Unlimited™** or one of Palladium Books®' other role-playing games. Using the same *basic* game mechanics means that as I serialize this new game, I will NOT have to use up space in these pages reprinting basic and modified rules, alignments, skills, combat and basic weapons and equipment – players of **Rifts®** or **Heroes Unlimited™**, etc., can draw from those games for the “basics,” allowing me to focus on the setting, story and new aspects of this **Chaos Earth™**. Most everybody buying **The Rifter®** should own and play at least *one* of Palladium Books®' RPGs that will suffice as the temporary rules for this larger game world.

Alignments: Are the same as always. If anything, playing in alignment is more important than ever in this chaotic setting. Most characters will represent the government, protectors and law and order, even though many situations will give them absolute power over life and death. The words, “with great power comes great responsibility,” have never been truer than in **Chaos Earth™** where the player characters often represent the last hope for the thronging multitudes.

Attributes: All player characters are human (at least to start) so 3D6 are rolled for every attribute. A roll of 16, 17 or 18 provides an extra roll of 1D6. If a six is rolled another (and last) time, 1D6 can be rolled. Otherwise, attributes may be improved with the wise selection of certain physical skills.

Aliens & Augmented humans will not be introduced till later.

Combat: Hand to hand and ranged combat remains pretty much unchanged. The rules in **Rifts®** or **Heroes Unlimited™** work fine. See **Rifts®**, **Robotech®**, or **Mechanoid Space™** for Mega-Damage rules.

Equipment: Whatever one owned or can buy, trade or steal since the Great Cataclysm. Only government agents (including regional law enforcement) have easy access to guns and military equipment, especially high-tech gizmos.

Experience Points: I prefer level systems and experience points so this book will be no exception. They work the same as always. The O.C.C.s to come will include experience tables. Any common O.C.C. like a modern day soldier, policeman, doctor, etc., can be built using existing Palladium games and skills. The Rifter #18 will present a bunch of em.

Hit Points & S.D.C.: People are Hit Point and S.D.C. creatures. Roll it up as usual. Most non-military equipment is S.D.C. items, only special NEMA, military and government forces have access to Mega-Damage weapons, armor and equipment (and most of those are in short supply). The only other exception are high-tech corporations and manufacturers under military contracts; again, rare.

Insanity: Trauma like the “end of the world” or a cataclysm of biblical proportions tends to be trauma. Insanity, shock and other maladies of the mind and emotions are commonplace. Use the insanities from most any Palladium RPG; some modification may be necessary. However, people are tougher and more resil-

ient than many give humans credit for, thus many battle their depression and fear to save themselves and help others.

Magic is largely yet to be discovered. It is something new, alien, and frightening. At first nobody understands it and nobody other than the occasional monster or demon, can use magic. Mastery by humans does occur, but later (probably in The Rifter #20 or #21).

Mega-Damage: If you hate it, don't use it. Throw it out. Also see *M.D.C.* and *Hit Points*.

Money, for the moment, still has value, but goods in hand are worth even more, and it may cost 8-10 credits to buy a single 20 ounce bottle of water or a can of beans.

M.D.C.: Like its cousin, **Rifts®**, the rules will include Hit Points, S.D.C. and Mega-Damage/M.D.C. – after all, this is the early days that lead to Rifts Earth.

However, **Chaos Earth™** is very different from *Rifts®*. While there will be some obvious similarities, like the presence of Glitter Boys (USA-G10 power armor), SAMAS (Flying Eagles), Juicers and Crazies, they will all be different from the ones you may think you know from *Rifts®*, especially the O.C.C.s. Remember, these are the “original” versions. **Chaos Earth™** will present the creations, sciences, O.C.C.s and back-story from which the later *Rifts®* versions are derived. There will also be all kinds of new and different characters, weapons, vehicles, and organizations. Floundering governments and other powers like NORAD, Cyberworks (creators of A.R.C.H.I.E. Three) and the KLS Corporation (creators of the Glitter Boys and advanced weapons and armor), among others, *still* exist and struggle to survive with an arsenal of never before seen equipment.

Psionics & Psychic Phenomena was little more than mysticism and pseudo-science mixed in with quackery and chicanery before the Great Cataclysm. Now, legitimate psychics (including many who never knew they possessed psionic powers) are exhibiting increased psychic ability. The supernatural also comes with the territory. More on both later. For now, only the most common and rudimentary psychic abilities (telekinesis, levitation, nightvision, clairvoyance, empathy, sixth sense, and mind block) manifest themselves in the typical (latent) psychic; usually without any real understanding as to how to call it forth, how it works or why it happens.

Skills: The skills in **Rifts®** and/or **Heroes Unlimited™** will work for most characters as they are presented.

World information and adventure ideas will be presented down the road, starting with the next issue of **The Rifter®**. Until then, keep those imaginations burning.

– Kevin Siembieda, *Chaos Master*



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Don't become a slobbering beast driven mad because you're afraid you'll miss an issue of **The Rifter™**. Subscribe and get every issue delivered to your doorstep in a protective cardboard envelope.

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Well, flipping through this issue should give you a fairly good idea, but every issue will be different.

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The Rifter is a synthesis of a sourcebook, Game Master's guide, a magazine and talent show — a fan forum.

The Rifter™ is like a sourcebook because it will include a ton of role-playing source material (optional and official). This will include New O.C.C.s, NPC heroes, NPC villains, new powers and abilities, weapons, adventure settings, adventures and adventure ideas, and Hook, Line and Sinkers™.

The Rifter™ is like a G.M.'s guide because it will include special articles and tips on role-playing, how to handle common problems, how to build an adventure and so on.

The Rifter™ is like a magazine because it will come out four or five times a year (we're shooting for a regular quarterly release schedule), and because it will feature Palladium news, advertisements, serial articles and continuing features.

Most importantly, The Rifter™ is a forum for Palladium's Fans. At least half of each issue will be text and material taken (with permission) from the Web, as well as fan contributions made especially for The Rifter™. We get tons of fan submissions that are pretty good, but not good enough for publication as an entire sourcebook. In other cases, the submission is something clever and cool, but only a few pages long. There's lots of cool stuff on the Internet, but you must have a computer and Internet access, something a lot of fans just don't have.

The Rifter™ will reprint some of those "Web-Works™" allowing fans (and the world at large) to get a glimpse of their genius. It is one more avenue in which fans and professionals alike can share their visions of role-playing and the Palladium Megaverse with other fans. It's a chance to get published, get a little cash, get your name in lights (well, in print) and have fun.

This also means, more than any RPG publication ever produced, The Rifter™ is yours. Yours to present and share ideas. Yours to help shape and mold. Yours to share.

Why call it The Rifter™? Because each issue will span the Palladium Megaverse of games, adventures and ideas. Each issue will publish features from people across the Web and beyond! But mainly because each and every one of us, from game designer and publisher, to Joe Gamer, traverses the Megaverse™ every time they read an RPG or play in a role-playing game. We travel the infinite realm of the imagination, hopping from one world to the next — building one world to the next. Time and space are meaningless in our imaginations as we *Rift* from one place and time to another.

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A complete role-playing game – November, 2001

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

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Coming Soon

Heroes Unlimited® and *The Palladium Fantasy Role-Playing Game*® are two of Palladium's best selling game lines. And we have plenty of product planned to support both of these lines. All books listed here are currently in production.

For *Heroes Unlimited*™:

- *Hardware Unlimited*™ sourcebook by Bill Coffin and Brent Lein – early 2002
- *Mutant Underground*™ by Kevin Siembieda – 2002
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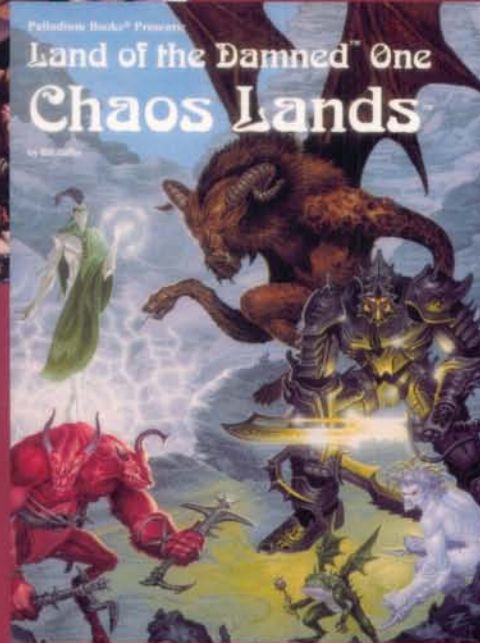
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