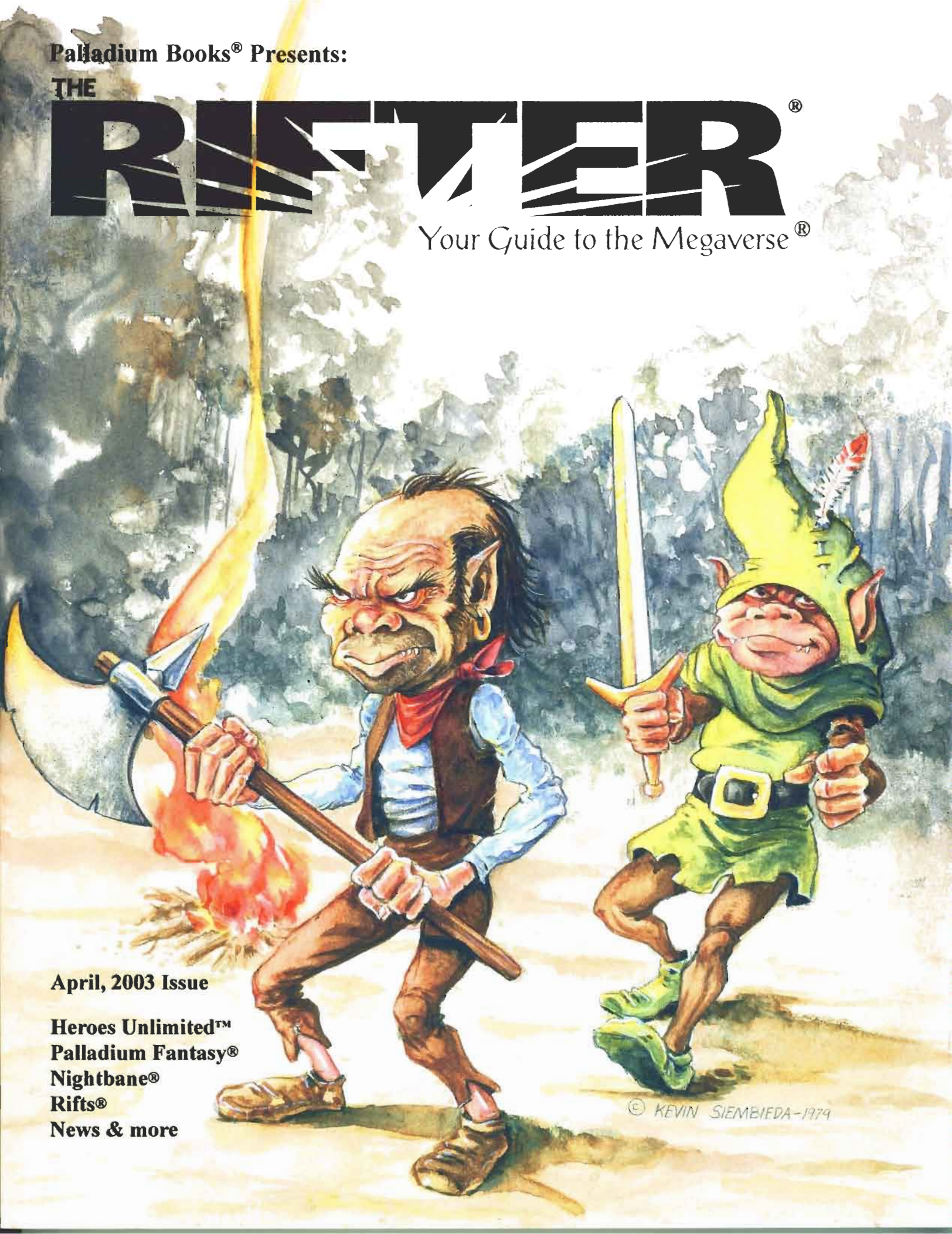


Palladium Books® Presents:

THE

# RIFTER®

Your Guide to the Megaverse®



April, 2003 Issue

Heroes Unlimited™  
Palladium Fantasy®  
Nightbane®  
Rifts®  
News & more

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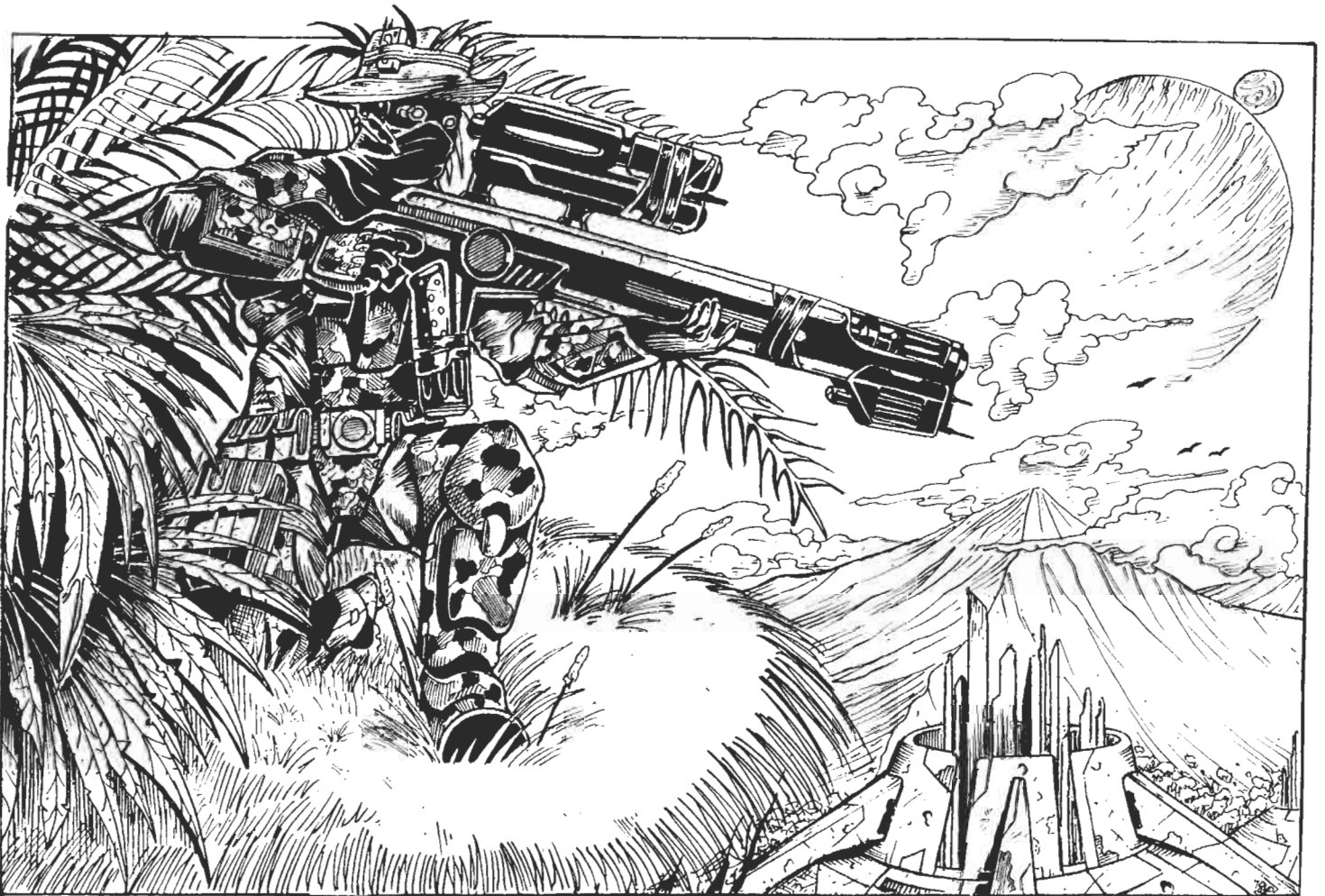
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Some parents may find the violence, magic and supernatural elements of the games inappropriate for young readers/players. We suggest parental discretion.

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## The Rifter® Number 22

### Your guide to the Palladium Megaverse®!



First Printing – April, 2003

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Palladium Books® Presents:

# THE RIFTER® #22

BRANDT -97

Sourcebook and guide to the Palladium Megaverse®

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**Special Thanks** to all our contributors, writers and artists – and a special welcome onboard to the artists and writers making their debut in this issue. Our apologies to anybody who got accidentally left out or their name misspelled.

# Contents – The Rifter® #22 – April, 2003

## Page 6 – Art

A sequential page of action by artist *Freddie Williams II*. We thought it fit current events and this issue's editorial. Is this guy a butt-kickin' artist or what?

## Page 7 – From the Desk of Kevin Siembieda

Strange times and war days – a few words about the conflict in the Middle East, followed by what's happening at Palladium. So what is happening at Palladium? We're meeting our release dates, have a ton of great new products coming out, we're trying new things, using new freelancers and . . . hey . . . go read the darn thing for yourself.

## Page 8 – Palladium News

Palladium Books will have a booth at *Origins 2003*, and Kevin Siembieda's schedule is so demanding that this may be the *only* game convention he (or Palladium Books) attends this year. We hope to see a lot of gamers there. More info on page 8.

In other news, *Rifts® Chaos Earth™* has been delayed till May, the new *Nightbane® sourcebook* is on schedule, *Rifts® Conversion Book Two: Pantheons of the Megaverse®* is out of print, but *Rifts® Conversion Book One (revised)* and *Dark Conversions™* are selling like there's no tomorrow. Plus a notice about galactic source-material online, and more.

## Page 10 – Coming Attractions

The updated and expanded 2003 Spring and Summer schedule of releases, descriptions for *Shadows of Light™*, *Powers Unlimited 1 & 2*, *Beyond the Supernatural™ 2nd Edition*, and new stuff coming for *Rifts®*. Hey, if you haven't heard about Palladium's new *Rifts® Adventure Sourcebook series*, get the lowdown on page 12. The first book is already in the stores, the second one will be out in May and the third in June. Each is a stand-alone sourcebook.

## Page 13 – Chaos Earth

In case you missed it last issue, check out the hype for *Rifts® Chaos Earth™* and tell your local stores that you'll be wanting a copy. We have a sneaking hunch demand may be greater than some stores and distributors are anticipating and that we may be sold out quickly.

## Page 14 – Questions and Answers

Rodney, Shawn and Kevin are back to answer your questions. This column's theme: Children. Their heightened P.P.E. levels, ability to use magic, age restrictions (and death) for getting Juicer and M.O.M. augmentation, bionics and kids, and other good stuff.

## Page 17 – Rifts®

### Mage Armor

What does the well dressed practitioner of magic wear while traversing the wilds of Rifts Earth? Find out right here as Brian and Kevin present the latest in Mega-Damage body armor for spell casters and sorcerers of every stripe.

Art and original concept by Brian Manning. Finished text and stats by Kevin Siembieda.

## Page 18 – Heroes Unlimited™, 2nd Ed.

### Building a Better Super-Soldier

John Polojac presents optional rules for expanding and developing different types of Super-Soldiers for use in HU2. Some have super abilities, others bionic augmentation. Includes Success Level Table, side effects and other stuff.

Art: Page 18 is by Kent "the Gent" Burles, the rest is by the talented supermen at Drunken Style Studios: Mike "is his last name really" Majestic and Ka "the man" Xiong.

## Page 25 – Rifts®

### New Ludicrous Magic

Daniel Denis, the lunatic who first introduced the Ludicrous Mage and his wacky brand of magic in the now legendary *The Rifter #9½*, is back with more Ludicrous magic spells. Great stuff like Boo, Butter Fingers, Create (and Play) Theme Song, Ugly Kid Joe, Balloon Flight, Bigger Guns, Create Dough-Boy Golem, and more.

Artwork by Brian "I'm Gaming Again" Manning.

## Page 47 – The Palladium Fantasy RPG®

### Medieval Army Combat Rules

Dan Felkins presents optional rules for creating and running entire armies, using archers and cavalry companies, defending fortified positions, breaching enemy defenses, typical training, and an example of army units.

In addition, Dan "the Man" Felkins presents a short guide on how to use the *Rifts® Mercenary Company Creation Rules* to construct armies in any setting. See page 59.

Art by Drunken Style Studios' Mark "Spudley" Dudley, and Ka "the golden one" Xiong (sorry Mark, Ka slipped me 20 bucks for that one).

## Page 62 – The Palladium Fantasy RPG®

### Flashing Blades: Fencing in Palladium Fantasy

Richard Thomassen offers optional rules for a host of fencing skills, rules, bonuses, dueling and more.

Artwork by Drunken Style Studios' Ryan Cszaszar.

## Page 67– Nightbane® and Heroes Unlimited™

### Flynn and Company

R.L. Newman presents a unique short story that combines the worlds and characters of Nightbane® and Heroes Unlimited™. Another example of the endless possibilities of the Palladium Megaverse®.

Artwork by Brian Manning.

## Page 82 – Heroes Unlimited™

### The Games Palladium Plays

Wayne Breaux Jr. has suggested a series of articles in which Palladium creators feature one of their own campaign characters as an example of the thought processes we go through in creating our own characters. In fact, this is an open challenge from Wayne to the rest of us. Is this something, as gamers and fans, you, the readers of *The Rifter*, would like to see more of?

Art by Wayne Breaux Jr., duh.

## Page 89 – Rifts® Phase World®

### The Hammer of the Forge

Chapter 22 of James M.G. Cannon's epic saga.

Artwork by Apollo "Mr. Transformer" Okamura.

## The theme for issue 22

Potpourri – a mixed bag of material to say, "Life is rich and diverse. Try to sample as much of it as you can and enjoy the diversity." The Ludicrous Magic is in tribute to April Fool's Day, my birthday (April 2<sup>nd</sup>, a truly ludicrous event) and the third year anniversary of legendary *The Rifter* #9 ½ (well, we like to think of it as legendary). Then there's some Rifts® material, a bunch of fantasy combat material, some super-hero stuff, horror, kids, and fun all around.

## The Cover

Palladium Fantasy Anniversary! Believe it or not, The Palladium Fantasy Role-Playing Game is TWENTY years old! Twenty years and it has never been out of print or changed publisher. Not bad, eh?

To help commemorate this impressive event, Kevin Siembieda dug up one of his old concept paintings depicting a pair of Goblins (one nasty, one dim-witted, and actually, the dim-witted one is a Hob-Goblin). The painting is watercolor and this is the first time it has ever seen print.

Help us please. It seems like Palladium should do something special to commemorate the Fantasy game's 20 year history, but what? We're going to release three or four fantasy sourcebooks this year, but don't you think we should be doing something else? Some kind of give-away or special promo item? Give it some thought and send us your suggestions via the web site ([www.palladiumbooks.com](http://www.palladiumbooks.com)), U.S. postal service, telephone or smoke signals. Thanks.

## 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 you can use (if you want to), or which might inspire you to create your own wonders.

[www.palladiumbooks.com](http://www.palladiumbooks.com) – Palladium Online

## Coming Next Issue

### The Rifter™ #23

- Material for *Nightbane*® and/or *Heroes Unlimited*™.
- More material for *Palladium Fantasy*®.
- More material for *Rifts*®.
- Questions and Answers.
- The next chapter of *The Hammer of the Forge*™.
- The latest news and developments at Palladium Books.
- Source material for the entire Palladium Megaverse®.
- New contributors and fun. So please join us.

**Palladium Books® role-playing games  
... infinite possibilities, limited only  
by your imagination™**

**Palladium's games are found  
in stores everywhere**



# From the Desk of Kevin Siembieda

## Disquieting times

These are strange times.

As I sit down to write this editorial, Saddam Hussein has been told to get out of Dodge ... er ... Iraq, and war is only a matter of hours away. In the face of that, it seems rather trite to be talking about exciting new products and developments at Palladium Books. I mean, a lot of the guys and gals who play our games will soon be on the battlefield. Some won't be coming home. Others won't return quite the same.

Ironically, role-playing games are full of make-believe violence, war and death. We talk about "nuking the bad guys," "justice," and "crushing evil," funny how it's much more difficult defining evil and nuking the bad guys in real life. That's why they call them *fantasy games*. The violence and death aren't real. The action all takes place in our heads and we enjoy swashbuckling adventures that truly have very little to do with reality. For the soldiers in the Middle East, right now, war is no laughing matter. Combat is no fun and games. Their reality is soon to become life and death. It is as frightening and difficult a situation as anyone can ever find themselves in.

Whether you personally support the war or oppose it, whether you think it is good or bad, let us not forget the human element. Good people on both sides are going to suffer and die. For those on the front-line, the politics behind the scenes are like ghosts in the sand – completely unimportant as they face the grim reality of combat. We want our readers to know that the hearts of each and every one of us at Palladium Books go out to the American soldiers and our allied forces. We wish you all a speedy and safe return home. We thank you for doing an ugly and thankless job. We want to thank you for putting your lives on the line in the hopes of making the world a better and safer place.

To the good people of Iraq and all Middle Eastern folk, please know not all Americans think the people of your nations are all monsters or terrorists. We know too many innocent people will inevitably get caught in the middle and suffer gravely for it. We hope for a quick end to the war and a lasting peace and prosperity to rise out of it.

Wherever one stands, the die is cast. Come what may, we must all live with the consequences. Right now, all any of us can do is pray for a brief conflict and that, in the long run, the world does, indeed, become a better, kinder place for the sacrifice of so many.

## Life goes on

For the rest of us, life goes on, and that means going to work, doing our best and going on with our lives.

At Palladium Books that means unleashing our imaginations to weave new worlds of wonder in the form of new games and sourcebooks. I'd like to think we're doing a pretty good job of it, too. We also take some solace in the fact that a good number

of military personnel play our games. We're told it helps to relieve the tedious moments and helps to take their minds off the daily grind of war.

**Meeting our 2003 schedule.** For the first time in Palladium's 20+ year history we are meeting our deadlines. Better than 90% of our releases have come out on time or within a week or two of the advertised release date, and most titles on our schedule are currently on track. Hey, I can guarantee we *will* miss some release dates and have to reschedule or cancel some titles, but we hope to get the overwhelming majority out on time.

**More bang for the dollar.** Yeah, Palladium has had to raise its prices a buck or two, and reduce our page count a little, but we continue to hold the line on price and quality compared to much of the gaming industry. In fact, a competitor jokingly accused us of practically giving our books away. He went on to voice his wonder at how we can do it. There are three main factors: 1. Palladium is a no nonsense operation that keeps manufacturing expenses down to a minimum, allowing us to pass the savings on to the consumer. 2. Palladium enjoys a long history of high volume sales, which means we produce and sell enough copies of a title that we can afford to hold prices under the rest of the market. 3. We love what we do, and that means we go that extra mile to keep quality high, the ideas flowing like water, and the price low so as many people as possible can try our books and discover the excitement of the Palladium Megaverse.

**Trying new things.** We like to think Palladium Books is a house of ideas. That means trying new concepts and approaches as well as filling our books with idea after idea. One of those new approaches is to do smaller books enabling Palladium to produce more books. Actually, this is sort of an old idea, 'cuz that's what we were doing way back when with the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*® and *Robotech*® game lines. The advantage to this approach is gamers don't have to wait months between new titles and it allows us writers to tackle different ideas at a more rapid pace. That's part of the excitement (for me anyway) behind the new **Rifts**® **Adventure Sourcebook series**. I've been wanting to do the Chi-Town 'Burbs and tackle a number of other subjects for a long time now, but weaving them into *big* books would take me months of time. By narrowing the focus and tackling them in a smaller format, we can actually pound 'em out at a rapid pace, keep the quality high and move from one idea to the next, keeping both the writer and the reader excited about each new prospect. Talk about a win, win situation for everybody. Other writers and I stay fresh and excited about each new project, and the gaming community gets more products which you've been begging Palladium to do for years. Plus, it is enabling us to produce books for many of Palladium's game lines, not just one or two.

**New faces.** You'll notice a number of new faces at Palladium Books as we try out a number of freelance writers and artists. Some of these guys have been waiting in the wings for a few years now, and are finally getting through the logjam.

**And the excitement is only starting.** Trust me on that. Palladium is on track to achieve new heights in and outside the gaming industry in the months and years to come. We hope you hang around with us for the journey. I don't think you'll be disappointed.

– Kevin Siembieda, March, 2003



# Palladium News

By Kevin Siembieda (the guy who should know)

## Palladium Books to exhibit at *Origins*<sup>®</sup> 2003 – June 26-29

Palladium Books will be attending Origins two years in a row. The good folks running the show just know how to entice us to attend.

Palladium will be at **Booth #752** located in the back of the exhibitors' hall.

- The newest and latest Palladium Books products.
- Special give-aways and promotional items.
- A ton of back stock books and a few out of print and rare odds and ends available on a first come, first served basis.
- Get the latest news, catalog and special convention promotional items.
- Speak with Kevin Siembieda, Ramon Perez, Wayne Smith, and other Palladium staffers and freelancers.
- Get autographs – the Palladium staff is always glad to sign books.
- Purchase original art by Ramon Perez, Wayne Breaux and others.
- Join in all the fun.

With everything going on at Palladium this year, *Origins* 2003 *may* be the *only* gaming convention Kevin Siembieda (or Palladium Books) attends all year!

For information on how to attend *Origins*<sup>®</sup> 2003, check out the *Origins* convention website at – or call (303) 635-2223.

## The Latest on the *Rifts*<sup>®</sup> Movie

We anticipate a big announcement . . . soon. Very soon.

## More Three Galaxies<sup>™</sup> online

By the time you read this, the *Phase World*<sup>®</sup> sourcebook *Rifts*<sup>®</sup> Dimension Book Six: *Three Galaxies*, by newcomer Carl Gleba, will be in stores everywhere. Okay, you probably knew that, but did you know there is a wealth of *EXTRA* information that got cut from the book, all of which is available on Palladium's website? And lots of it. Something like 40 or 50 pages, like dozens of new space magic spells, planet creation rules and an index of planets by intergalactic organization (i.e., TGE, CCW, etc.).

[www.palladiumbooks.com](http://www.palladiumbooks.com)

## Nightbane<sup>®</sup> sourcebooks are coming your way

Jason Vey's first *Nightbane*<sup>®</sup> Sourcebook, *Shadows of Light*, hits stores in mid-April. This book is packed with cool ideas, monsters, villains and adventure! *Nightbane*<sup>®</sup> fans will love it. And Jason has already submitted an outline for his next *Nightbane*<sup>®</sup> sourcebook.

Palladium is working hard to support all its lines. Now go out to the stores and buy, buy, buy . . .

## Support for Heroes Unlimited<sup>™</sup>

Freelance writer, *Carmen Bellaire*, adds to the *Heroes Unlimited*<sup>™</sup> milieu with his two *Powers Unlimited*<sup>™</sup> sourcebooks coming this Spring and Summer. Meanwhile, Carmen is working on two other projects that we want to keep under wraps for the moment.

Oh, and if you haven't seen *Mutant Underground*<sup>™</sup>, drop this book and run to your favorite game store right now and take a peek at it.

## Rifts<sup>®</sup> Chaos Earth<sup>™</sup> delayed one month

### – May release

Despite Palladium's best efforts, we had to reschedule *Rifts*<sup>®</sup> *Chaos Earth*<sup>™</sup> for an end of *May* release, rather than the previously scheduled April release. We ran into problems with getting all the artwork we needed fast enough to meet the deadline without sacrificing quality, and quality is something Palladium never wants to sacrifice. As a result, the release date had to be bumped to May. We think it will be worth the wait.

## Everybody is buying Rifts<sup>®</sup> Conversion Books

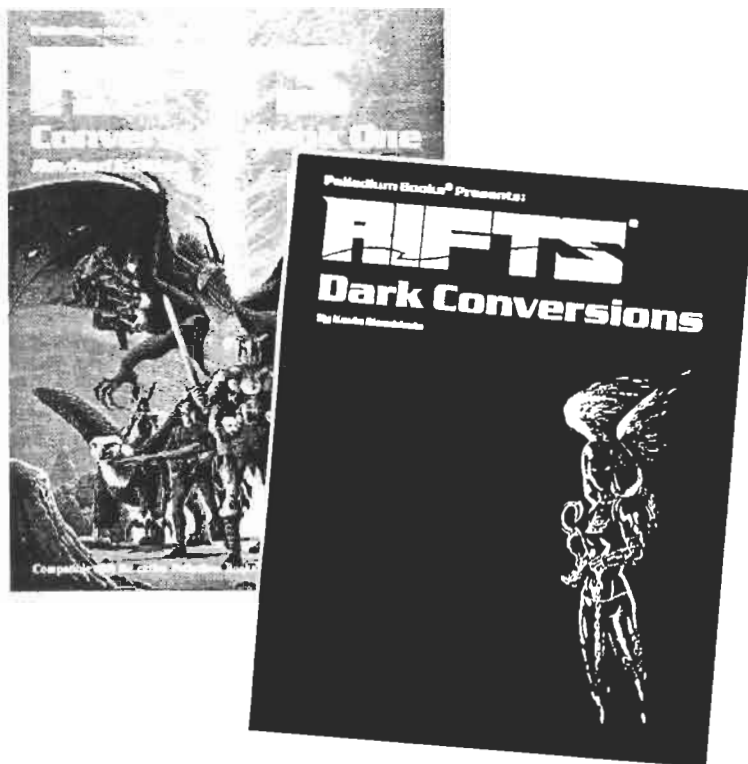
Sales of Palladium's two new *Rifts*<sup>®</sup> Conversion Books started off a bit slower than expected, but wow, have back orders been coming at a furious pace. Have you gotten yours?

## Revised Rifts<sup>®</sup> Conversion Book One

This is a revised and updated version of the *Rifts*<sup>®</sup> *Conversion Book*, one of the best selling *Rifts*<sup>®</sup> sourcebooks of all time. The new, updated edition includes conversion rules for all of Palladium's games for use in *Rifts*<sup>®</sup> plus specific conver-

sions for characters, mutants, giants, monsters, Elementals, Faerie Folk, super abilities, powers, and other material from the Second Editions of *Heroes Unlimited™*, *Ninjas & Super-spies™*, *After the Bomb®* and *Palladium Fantasy RPG®*, and more.

- Conversion rules to adapt the Megaverse™.
- Rules and character clarifications.
- Tables, charts, lists and information packed into one book to expand Rifts Earth and offer a glimpse of the rest of the Megaverse® to which it is linked.
- Over 100 monsters and inhuman creatures, plus an in-depth look at select characters, magic and other things in *Rifts®*.
- Written by Kevin Siembieda. Art by Long, Perez, Wilson, Gustovich and others.
- \$22.95 retail – 192 pages.



## Rifts® Dark Conversions

### Conversion Book Three

This is the *new* Rifts® Conversion Book representing the dark and monstrous creatures in the Palladium Megaverse. A host of *undead*, *Nightbane*, *Nightlords* and their minions, *Alien Intelligences*, *Beyond the Supernatural* monsters, *Palladium Fantasy Demons & Deevils*, and other weird and dangerous supernatural horrors fill this 192 page tome.

- Were-Beasts, Voodoo Xombies, Gremlins, and more.
- Demon and Deevil hordes from the *Palladium Fantasy RPG®*.
- Supernatural monsters and entities from *Beyond the Supernatural™*.
- Nightbane, the Nightlords and their minions from the *Nightbane® RPG*.
- Dark Magicks: The Shifter revisited, Witches, Diabolism and more.

- Over 120 monsters all statted out for use in *Rifts®*.
- Written by Kevin Siembieda.
- Art by Truman, Perez, Breaux, Wilson, Gustovich, Long and others.
- \$22.95 retail – 192 pages.

## Rifts® Conversion Book Two

### Pantheons of the Megaverse® discontinued

Palladium has let this long-time sourcebook go out of print to help make way for new products like *Rifts® Dragons & Gods*. If you haven't gotten your copy of this C.J. Carella classic, it's too late now. Sorry.

## Issues 1-14 of The Rifter® to be discontinued

Just a *reminder* that Palladium Books is discontinuing back issues of *The Rifter®*. When the early numbers 1-14 run out of print, they are *GONE!* We plan only to keep the last 6-8 issues in print. *The Rifter® #4* is *gone*, numbers 1, 8 and 9 are almost gone. True collectors, get 'em while you still can.

## Palladium Weapon Series For use with ANY game system

Designed to be easy to use and easy to carry anywhere.

**Weapons & Armor:** Over 600 different weapons and 35 types of armor from around the world. ALL illustrated. \$7.95 retail, 48 pages, striking color cover. Cat. No. 401. *Available now.*

**Weapons & Castles:** Different types of bows and arrows, crossbows, siege weapons and 15 real world castles complete with basic floor plans. ALL illustrated. \$7.95 retail, 48 pages, striking color cover. Cat. No. 402. *Available now.*

**Weapons & Assassins:** Ninja, Thugee, Assassins of India, their background, training, and "tools of the trade" – weapons, poisons, and tools of some of the most famous assassin guilds in history. ALL illustrated. Written by Erick Wujcik. \$7.95 retail, 48 pages. Cat. No. 403. *Available now.*

**Weapons, Armor & Castles of the Orient** is a beautiful, little, 48 page, comic book sized reference book *packed* with real world weapons, armor, castles, and data from ancient Japan and China. It presents dozens of famous and obscure weapons, armor and fortresses of Japan, China and the Orient. Includes samurai armor and several castles complete with floor plan diagrams. All illustrated. Written by Matthew Balent. Art by Mike Kucharski & Ed Kwiatkowski. Gorgeous cover by Scott Johnson. \$7.95 retail, 48 pages. Cat. No. 404. *Available now.*

**New Books coming soon:** Palladium Books has discontinued the **Compendium of Weapons, Armor & Castles**, making the small format weapon books your only source for historically based data. Never fear, we plan to release *Exotic Weapons* and *European Castles* later this year.

# Recent Releases

## Wolfen Empire

### Adventure Sourcebook

The Wolfen Empire sourcebook outlines Wolfen society, land holdings and culture, helping to set the stage for the coming *Wolfen War*.

The adventures are set in the Great Northern Wilderness and lead our heroes into the heart of Wolfen country.

- History and details about the 12 Wolfen Tribes.
- Information about Wolfen society and economics.
- The Wolfen Army and the Coyle Hordes.
- Allied races and places.
- Five complete adventures in the Northern Wilderness.
- Cover by Ramon Perez.
- Written by Erick Wujcik, Kevin Siembieda, Bill Coffin and others.

## Also Coming for Palladium Fantasy®

**Monsters & Magic** – A sourcebook filled with new magic items, secrets of magic and a host of new and unusual monsters. Final size and price not yet determined.

**Mysteries of Magic** – Final size and price not yet determined.

**Land of the Damned Three: The Bleakness** – By Bill Coffin and Kevin Siembieda. 160 or 192 pages. Final size and price not yet determined.

## Mutant Underground™ For Heroes Unlimited™

- Dozens of mutants – villains, heroes, anti-heroes and lost souls.
- New ideas and variations for mutant humans and mutant animals (like animals with super abilities).
- The secret underground society of mutants, runaways, criminals & rejects.
- The super beings who protect them.
- The super-villains and agencies who hunt them.
- Art by Wilson, Burles and Breaux. Cover by Scott Johnson.
- Written by Kevin Siembieda, based on character concepts by Mike Wilson.
- \$13.95 retail – 96 pages.

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# Coming Soon

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## Spring & Summer Releases

### March, 2003

March 17 – **Rifts® Adventure Sourcebook (one): Chi-Town 'Burbs.™** Available now!

March 28 – **Rifts® Dimension Book 6: Three Galaxies.™** Available now!

### April, 2003

April 4 – **The Rifter® #22.** In your hands!

April 18 – **Nightbane® Sourcebook: Shadows of Light™.** The first in a new series of *Nightbane®* supplements. In final production.

### May, 2003

May 8 – **Rifts® Adventure Sourcebook Two: The Tolkeen Crisis™**

May 23 – **Heroes Unlimited™: Powers Unlimited™ One**

May 28 – **Rifts® Chaos Earth™** – an entire series showcasing the Great Cataclysm and the *origins* of Rifts Earth. This RPG series should appeal to old, current and new Rifts® fans.

### June, 2003

June 9 – **Rifts® Adventure Sourcebook Three: The Black Vault™**

**Note:** Another title *may* be added to the June releases.

### July, 2003

July 10 – **The Rifter® #23**

July 18 – **Heroes Unlimited™: Powers Unlimited™ Two**

**Note:** Another title *may* be added to this month's releases.

### August, 2003

August 8 – **Rifts® Adventure Sourcebook Four: The Vanguard™**

August 25 – **Beyond the Supernatural™ RPG, 2nd Edition**

### Other likely Summer or Fall titles not yet scheduled

**Rifts® Africa Two**

**Rifts® China** (probably a fall release)

**Palladium Fantasy®: Book of Magic (items) and Monsters™**

**Palladium Fantasy®: Mysteries of Magic™**

**Palladium Fantasy®: Land of the Damned™ Three**

**Weapon Series: Exotic Weapons**

**Weapon Series: European Castles**

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## Shadows of Light A Nightbane® Sourcebook

The forces of Light and Darkness clash as never before in the modern realm of Nightbane®. *Shadows of Light* is the first new sourcebook for Nightbane® in three years, and it is epic! The first of several new sourcebooks coming your way.

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- In stores, late April, 2003.

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August, 2003 release date

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The setting is our modern world. A place and time where science rules and spiritualism and the belief in the supernatural are mocked and scoffed at, but it is they who are the fools.

Magic and the supernatural are real.

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Players are at the vanguard of lost, forbidden and secret knowledge. They navigate through a shadowy world of magic, superstition, disbelief and monsters that science refuses to admit even exist. They are the unsung heroes behind the scenes trying to help and protect others while they simultaneously seek to unravel the mysteries of the unknown.

Cat. No. 700

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- Horror, mystery, monsters, and more.
- Interior Art by Perez, Breaux, Wilson, and others.
- Written by Kevin Siembieda and Randy McCall.
- \$22.95 or \$24.95 – 192 to 288 pages – final size not yet determined.
- Date of Release: August, 2003.



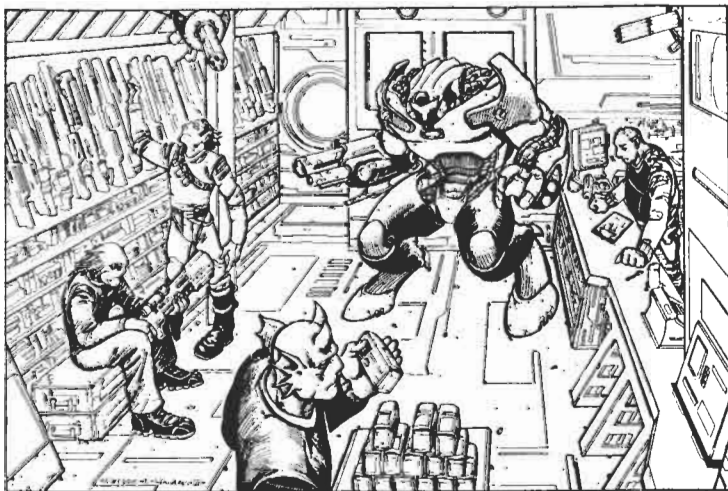
# For Rifts®

## Rifts® Dimension Book 6:

### Guide to the Three Galaxies™

This Phase World® adventure sourcebook will replace *Cosmo-Knights*™ in the schedule and presents a dynamic overview of the Three Galaxies' alien technologies, people and conflict.

- Overview of the Three Galaxies with Hook, Line & Sinker™ adventures for each.
- New Magic O.C.C.s, Tattoo Magic and spells.
- New aliens and monsters. Key people, leaders and villains.
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- Art by Williams, Wilson, Burles and others.
- Written by Carl Gleba (some additional material by Siembieda).
- \$17.95 – 160 pages. Available now. With more, free, material on Palladium's website.



## Rifts® Adventure Sourcebooks

The Rifts® Adventure Sourcebook *series* are 48-64 page books released every 4-8 weeks. Each will offer at least one fleshed-out adventure with numerous additional adventure ideas, or a place with numerous adventure hooks and ideas, plus Non-Player Characters, villains, gizmos, and source material.

Each book is to explore people, places and rumors that have been part of the Rifts® world for years, but never fully described before. Places like the Chi-Town 'Burbs, the Black Vault, Old Chicago, and the ruins of Detroit. People and groups like Tolkeen Retribution Squads, the Black Market, the Republicans, and members of the Prosek family and regime. The plan is to provide Rifts® fans hungry for more world and adventure information with more frequent books that focus on specific details, people, places and *adventure* on Rifts Earth.

• **Rifts® Adventure Sourcebook (One): Chi-Town 'Burbs: Forbidden Knowledge.** An overview of the Chi-Town 'Burbs, brief history and the New Town 'Burb of *Firetown* – part one. Emphasis is on forbidden knowledge and contraband. Includes notable places and residents of Firetown such as Karl's Revenge (a tavern that attracts CS soldiers, human supremacists and D-Bee haters), Camp Fireplace orphanage (home to City Rats), Robert Street (a cagey dealer in pre-Rifts books and artifacts), the Meat Market (a secret body-chop-shop), the Psi-Cola man, a restaurant for the criminal elite and others, over 70 adventure hooks in all. Artwork by Wilson, Williams, Okamura, and others. Written by Kevin Siembieda. \$8.95 – 48 pages; color cover by Mark Evans. *Available now.*

• **Rifts® Adventure Sourcebook (Two): Chi-Town 'Burbs: The Tolkeen Crisis.** The fall of Tolkeen has sent a flood of refugees, Retribution Squads, sorcerers and villains into the Chi-Town 'Burbs. Some seek revenge on the CS, some look to buy or sell the mystic secrets of Tolkeen, and others come with a darker purpose. This has created a crisis for Chi-Town security and trouble for the inhabitants of the 'Burbs.

The rest of *Firetown* mapped and described, with scores of new people, places and adventure hooks, plus one fleshed out adventure around a Tolkeen Retribution squad, plus data on other Coalition hate groups operating in Firetown. Written by Kevin Siembieda. \$10.95 – 64 pages; color cover. *In stores May 2003.*

• **Rifts® Adventure Sourcebook (Three): Chi-Town 'Burbs: The Black Vault.** For years, rumors have persisted that the Coalition States have collected magic and alien artifacts and locked them away in a secret place in Chi-Town – someplace known as *the Black Vault*. Now, a CS hate group claims to know the location and has plans to rob the Black Vault of its most powerful magic relics. Could it be true? Find out for yourself. Written by Kevin Siembieda. \$8.95 – 48 pages; color cover. *In stores June 2003.*

• **Rifts® Adventure Sourcebook (Four): Chi-Town 'Burbs: The Vanguard.** Born in the days before Chi-Town forever banned the use of magic on Coalition soil, these practitioners of magic fight *for* the Coalition States and the Prosek regime. They do so in secret, as wolves in sheep's clothing, quietly undermining agents of the Federation of Magic and other CS hate groups. Learn about their organization, goals, current operations and how they continue to serve the CS even though they are hunted as dangerous fugitives by the very nation they work to protect. Written by Kevin Siembieda. Final size (48 or 64 pages) and price (\$8.95 or \$10.95) not yet determined; color cover. *In stores August 2003.*

## Also for Rifts®

Not yet scheduled, but listed in the likely order of release.

**Rifts® Africa Two: The Legacy of the Four Horsemen™**

**Rifts® Dragons & Gods™**

**Rifts® Australia Two**

**Rifts® China** (At last, the demon haunted lands of China, summer or fall 2003)

**Rifts® Adventure Sourcebooks** will keep on coming.

# Chaos Earth™

## Rifts' past comes alive

Discover the horror and ruthlessness of the Apocalypse. Live on the ragged edge, where one's greatest challenge is not only survival and battling monsters, but keeping one's sanity, goodness and soul.

### Chaos Earth: The Apocalypse

**Chaos Earth™** puts *you* in the center of the *Great Cataclysm* – the apocalyptic upheaval that, in the end, creates what we know as *Rifts Earth*.

The very term “apocalypse” means “a turbulent and chaotic end.” Fire and brimstone. Demons and death. Treachery and betrayal. Destruction on a global scale.

Living through the Apocalypse means just when you think things couldn't get worse, they do. It means when you think you've hit bottom the floor drops out from under you, plunging you to new depths. It means when you've dispatched the last horror, a new threat lurks around the corner.

You, through your characters, live through the death throes of human civilization, the reshaping of the very planet, and the birth of *Rifts Earth*. You bear angry witness to the Earth's fiery rebirth as it goes screaming to become a cauldron of mystic energy, a multi-dimensional doorway to infinite alien worlds and the catalyst for endless possibilities.

### Apocalyptic Warriors

You – the player – exist in the eye of the hurricane. A maelstrom that, even as you play, is reshaping the entire planet.

You – the hero – are the last bastion of goodness, idealism and life.

You – the protector of the innocent – are all that stands between the helpless masses and the devouring hordes.

You – as one of the last people standing, unwilling to give up, unwilling to die, unwilling to let chaos win – fight with ruthless conviction against every face of evil, from the openly inhuman and monstrous to your fellow man.

You – as gamers – have never experienced anything like it. The absolute chaos, ruthlessness and savagery in a no-holds-barred free-for-all for survival . . . and more. Your characters fight not only to save lives and carve out a niche where people can live free and in peace, but they fight for their very souls.

### Defiant Heroes

Death and destruction are everywhere and never ending. Nightmarish monsters crawl out of the *Rifts* – dimensional portals to countless worlds and demonic planes of existence. Driven mad by desperation, thousands of people engage in a dog-eat-dog frenzy to survive, and in so doing, sacrifice their own humanity. Worse, there are those who listen to the evil whispers that come from the abyss. Soft words promising power, greatness and life for the small price of their eternal soul. These are the witches, necromancers and other dark sorcerers who gain power from malignant forces beyond the veil to become servants of evil and traitors to humankind.

Against all odds stand the **Apocalyptic Warriors**. These are the player characters and heroes who *are* the defiant ones. The heroes who stand against all odds to battle evil and fight not only for their own survival, but for the lives of all innocents.

This is your player character, be it man, woman or otherworldly being. Some are ex-military (Soldiers, Glitter Boy pilots, Juicers, etc.), others newborn psychics or magic-wielding sorcerers or just those unwilling to bend and break and who have the courage to pick up a weapon.

### Chaos Earth™ is something different

I had originally intended to make **Chaos Earth** a separate and distinct role-playing game, however, as my vision took shape, I realized it is the origin of *Rifts Earth*. An epic story of courage and heroism against all odds in a changing nightmare world.

**Chaos Earth™** will be rules light and heavy on setting and characters. It will be ruthless and hard hitting. One of the most hard edged and brutal games to ever rise out of role-playing, and you can be – should be – part of it.

The material presented in the pages of *The Rifter®* is just a glimpse of how it all begins. The actual **Chaos Earth™** series of books will go into much greater detail about the world, the horrors within and the brutal things one must do to survive. It will have elements of the familiar (at least for those already familiar with *Rifts®*) woven together with diabolic and frightening new material, people, villains and events. It should be hardhitting and action packed as well as challenging to role-play. A setting that is as close to Hell on Earth as you are ever likely to see. And your characters are like fallen angels or Knights Templar who struggle to find redemption through acts of heroism and kindness in a world gone mad and turned black.

Books like **Rifts® Dark Conversions™**, **Rifts® Conversion Book One**, and **Rifts® Book of Magic** serve as *instant* sourcebooks for monsters, demons, undead hordes, and magic, because the abominable creatures, aliens and magic within each abound in **Chaos Earth** and can be used by the Game Master in any diabolical way he or she deems fit.

So join us in the saga of *Rifts Earth's* birth. Make the past come alive as heralds of a future yet to be. Fight the good fight in an epic tale of survival, and become part of the legend that is already **Rifts®**.

**Chaos Earth™ will be hitting store shelves May, 2003.  
Are you ready?**

# Questions and Answers

By Rodney Stott, Shawn Merrow and Kevin Siembieda

Since the Rifter is now 22 issues old, it has finally come of age. So this Q&A Column had to have a focus on Children, and coming of age.

I would like to add a special thanks to *Ryan Rawlings* for his assistance with this column, without your group, some of these questions may never have needed answering!

— Rodney Stott and Shawn Merrow

**I noticed that children have a natural high level of P.P.E. and are more open to the supernatural. My question is, can they also use Techno-Wizard devices?**

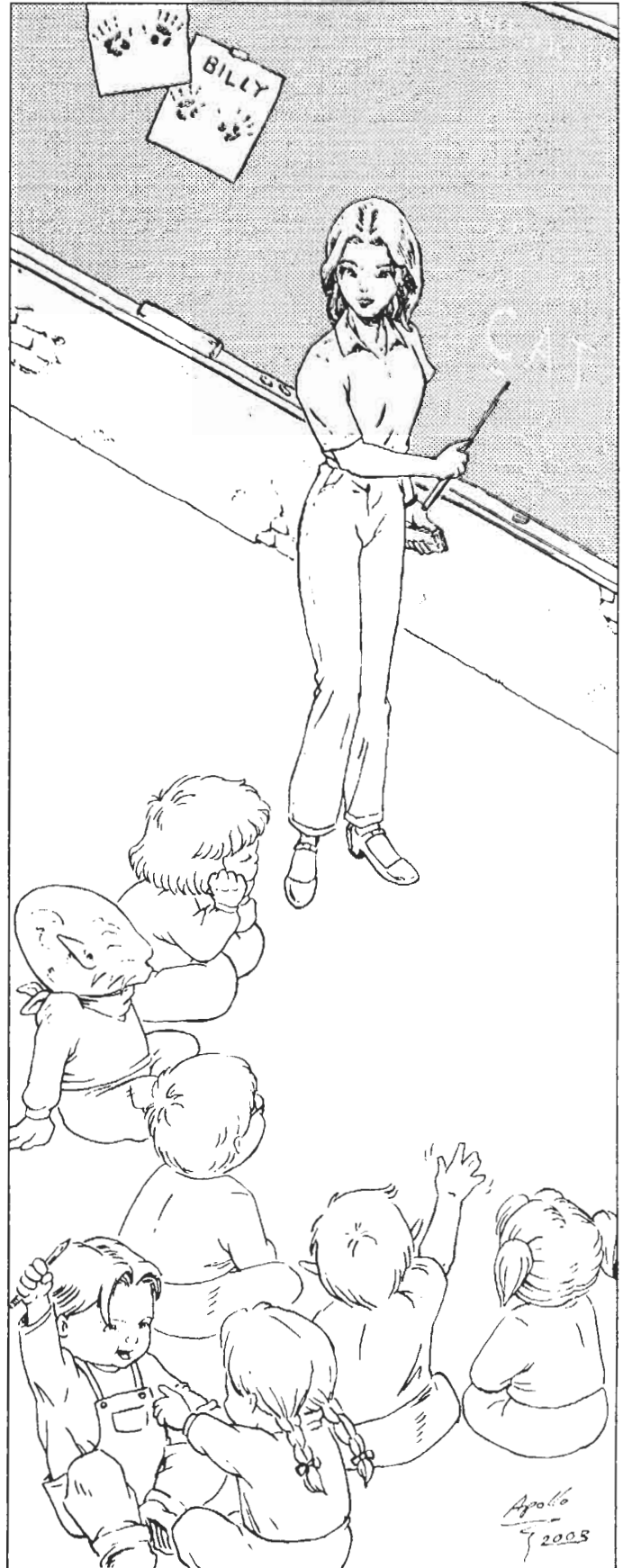
Absolutely, yes. They can use Techno-Wizard devices, and can even be taught how to fuel them providing they have enough P.P.E.

**At what point do children lose their natural magical abilities like the ability to use Techno-Wizard items?**

Once taught how to use a Techno-Wizard device and how to direct one's natural P.P.E. into a TW device, the individual can do so for the rest of his life. However, the individual may not have sufficient P.P.E. to use all, or even most, TW items once he becomes an adult.

Generally, children lose their natural magical aptitude when they go through puberty. For humans that's between the ages of 12-15. During this time most children see their P.P.E. drop by 10% each and every year (40% total). At ages 16-20, the P.P.E. levels out and remains constant till age 21, when it drops again by 1D6x10%. The remaining P.P.E. number is what the individual has for the rest of his days. Youngsters who begin to study magic at an early age (6-12) lose less P.P.E. during puberty (2D4% each year) and none upon reaching adulthood at age 21. Those who attained a full-fledged Magic O.C.C. (Level One) gain the usual P.P.E. for their particular occupation added to their base P.P.E.

Those who don't pursue an occupation as a practitioner of magic, but are lucky enough to retain a high P.P.E. reserve (10 or more points), are able to continue to use Techno-Wizard items and other magical devices that require the user to pump in his own P.P.E. for activation, but only if the character has sufficient P.P.E. to do so. For example, if a character has a TW gun that requires the user to invest 10 P.P.E. per magical energy blast, the individual with 13 P.P.E. can charge it with one shot (expending 10 P.P.E. points). The remaining three P.P.E. is insufficient for charging the weapon with another mystic energy bolt, until he recovers his spent P.P.E., usually after a good night's sleep. While the extent of the character's ability is minimal, he can use the weapon.



## At what age is a character considered Adult in Palladium Fantasy?

This generally varies by race, and location throughout the Palladium World, but with many rural cultures it is when the child is considered old enough by the rest of the community to pull their own weight (generally around the age of 16 or 17).

In urban areas, the age one is considered a man is generally higher, as those undergoing apprenticeships are not considered adults or at least not completely productive citizens. Apprenticeship generally starts between ages 12 to 15, and ends between 18-21 in most crafts.

In many tribal situations, a child is not considered a man until they have gone through a rite of passage. In more cultured societies this could be a simple ritual, and a big excuse for a community celebration, though it could include dangerous hunts, like that of the *Emerin Clan of Kankoran*, whose rite of passage is for a pair of young Kankoran to hunt down a kill an Emerin.

As for "Drinking Age," and other social or cultural activities, once the child has come of age, it is considered perfectly acceptable, no matter what their age, and in some societies may be acceptable to those who are still considered children (12 and younger). Modern western society may have rules allowing things like drinking and smoking, or even work being restricted to a certain age, but such restrictions are cultural and are not likely to apply in a medieval setting like Palladium Fantasy® or a post-apocalyptic setting such as Rifts® or After the Bomb®. Note: Even in the real world, drinking age varies. While drinking age in most of the United States is 21, in some parts of the world it is only 18 or non-existent.

## What is the minimum age for a character to receive Bionic or Cybernetic Augmentation?

Technically, none.

Cybernetic implants can be implanted at any age. In fact, most City Rats are teenagers commonly ranging in age from 12-19.

Artificial prosthetics and internal organs can be fitted to children of any age, though they may need to be modified and surgically replaced at regular intervals to adjust for the child's growth.

Bionic augmentation on the young, unless a total full conversion is done, is not suggested until one reaches adulthood, or close to it, say ages 16-21. However, while bionic conversion and serious augmentation is not recommended for teenagers, physically, all it may do is stunt the character's growth or make him look disproportionate as the flesh and blood parts of his body may outgrow the mechanical ones. It is on the emotional level, hidden beneath the tough, metal exterior where potential trouble lurks for young cyborgs. The main reason bionics is ill-advised for children and teenagers is that most youngsters are not emotionally mature enough to handle the trauma of becoming more machine than human. Nor are they able to handle the raw power that comes with being a partial or full conversion cyborg. Teen 'Borgs tend to be cocky, reckless, and aggressive. Many become bullies and thugs, who use their bionics to intimidate, threaten and hurt others to get their way or to impress

those around them. The youth is already going through a rough time making the transition from child to adult. He is still searching for his place in the world and trying to prove himself as an individual. Add the extra weight of handling the powers of bionics into the mix, and you have a potentially explosive situation on your hands. A teenager given the body of walking M.D.C. tank, but who is still a kid full of spit and vinegar and minimal life experiences.

That having been said, body-chop-shops and many of those who deal in illegal bionic augmentation will do whatever a paying client wants, whether that character is a ten years old or a hundred. Money talks to these unscrupulous bionics dealers, and the fate of their client is not their problem. Furthermore, callous, evil and desperate governments and military organizations recruiting for cyborg soldiers often target teenagers, especially orphans and those with a chip on their shoulder. These recruits can be as young as 14 and 15, though 16-19 are the norm. The recruiters, knowing exactly which buttons to push, appeal to the teens' desires to be men, to be respected and important, to be independent and able to take care of themselves, and/or able to extract revenge or make big money and/or go on exciting adventures. Of course, as always, the price for this "unique opportunity that only the bravest of young men dare even consider," is 4-8 years of servitude in some military capacity with combat a certainty. A full fifty percent of the teens recruited into becoming cyborgs never live to see the end of their contract. Most employers don't care, because the kid served his purpose. All they want, after all, are a bunch of young yahoos, bold as brass, fearlessly charging into battle and doing as they are told.



## What about M.O.M./Crazy or Juicer augmentation, can they be done on a child?

In theory, but highly dangerous for anyone under the age of 16. The process kills 70+1D6% of all subjects under the age of 16, and of those who survive, 80+1D6% are seriously deranged. Again, the problem is emotional maturity. The M.O.M. surgery itself takes a heavy toll on the developing brain, while the chemical bombardment on the undeveloped body of a teen or child sends it into trauma and convulsions. Then, the new found power and abilities are more than most adults can handle. Besides, unlike cybernetics and bionics which have medicinal ap-



plications, M.O.M. Conversions and Juicer Augmentation have only one purpose, physical (and in the case of Crazies, some mental) augmentation for the explicit purpose of war.

Juicer augmentation is especially morally questionable since the process ultimately *kills* everyone who receives it within 10 years and even if one undergoes detox before death, the emotional and physical toll is more than most people can survive. While becoming a Crazy doesn't kill, all recipients suffer significant mental deterioration, and over a relatively short time, most become quite insane. Can a teenager, even a very mature one, honestly make these life and death decisions? Should anyone under the age of 21 be allowed to even consider such life altering forms of augmentation? Most responsible people and leaders say no. That is one reason both forms of augmentation are outlawed in most "civilized" communities. However, as with bionic augmentation, there are business enterprises, organizations, armies and governments willing to provide these dangerous forms of human augmentation to anybody with sufficient money or who fills a need.

### **At what age do most psionic powers and special abilities develop?**

This can vary widely from individual to individual. There are children under the age of twelve who exhibit psychic abilities or unique power, however, most people do not begin to exhibit special abilities until ages 12-17 (1D6+11). Why most natural abilities don't awaken until puberty is unknown, but probably has to do with natural physiological changes that occur during this time of physical change.

### **What is the enlistment age for the Coalition States Military?**

Sixteen, though those born in the wilderness and 'Burbs may be able to enlist earlier if they look old enough.

### **In my campaign several of the characters are female, are there any rules for pregnancy? Or at least chances for falling pregnant?**

No, there are no rules which govern the chances of a female character falling pregnant, nor are there any rules which govern the course of the pregnancy (or any penalties that apply). Nor are there reproduction or pregnancy rules for the many different nonhuman races.

Remember, while different species may copulate and enjoy sex, two completely different species can *not* reproduce and bear offspring. Humans, True Atlanteans, Psi-Stalkers and Ogres are fundamentally the small species and can reproduce, but a human and a Kittani, or a human and a Goblin, or a dragon, etc. can *not* spawn young.

As for pregnancy, we suggest using common sense and modern medicine, at least for humans. There is plenty of real world documentation about pregnancy and childbearing and you can easily find this data and adapt it to the role-playing setting. Remember, in Rifts Earth communities, like Chi-Town and other advanced cultures, there are numerous highly effective methods of birth control.

### **If a group of children attacked an adult, what would be their damage from hand to hand strikes, and kicks?**

Children from about 6-15 inflict half damage from punches and kicks, have only one or two attacks/actions per melee round and probably don't have skills or attributes high enough to provide any combat bonuses. Teenagers from the age of 16 and up inflict full damage and have the full range of their attribute and skill bonuses.

Note that certain monster races may reach physical maturity at a younger age, and may inflict greater than human damage even as a child.

### **Where can one find stats or any rules for children?**

Statistics for children can be found in the **Heroes Unlimited™ G.M.'s Guide**, or an optional set of Victim rules which can be found in the first edition of **Beyond the Supernatural™**.

There are no official rules for playing children as characters, except for the *victim rules* found in the first edition of **Beyond the Supernatural™** (not sure if they will appear in BTS, 2nd Edition). Characters as young as 15 can be played as normal characters, but anything younger will need an abridged O.C.C., or may not even have an O.C.C. at all, plus as noted in the answer to the previous question, they are less physically strong. They are not fully developed, so attribute dice rolls should be less for youngsters: 1D4 for children under the age of six, 2D4 for kids 7-10, 2D6 for ages 11-15, and normal for 16 and older. **Note:** The range of ages in BTS, 1st Edition is children through senior citizens.

### **What about non-human children?**

There are no rules for non-human children printed, but by using the statistics for human children, children of other races can be derived. Some R.C.C. descriptions may provide modifiers, stats or notes regarding young or females. As a rule of thumb, assume all young possess half the combat, damage and physical capabilities of an adult, while those in their late teens will have three quarters to full (first level or basic) capabilities.

### **Do children have any special abilities or bonuses that are not in adults?**

Children, generally, have no special abilities or bonuses, but their childlike innocence and lack of life experience may make them more open to the supernatural and magic than adults, as well as being more receptive to new ideas and deception. Also, as noted previously, human children, and the young of most intelligent beings, possess 3-5 times greater amounts of P.P.E. than the average, normal adult, until puberty.

### **I am setting up an adventure where an evil Wizard is to sacrifice infants to gain P.P.E. (under the sacrifice rule), how much P.P.E. does an infant have?**

Human infants start out with 4D6 to 5D6 P.P.E. Some non-human races may have even higher amounts of P.P.E. for their infants.

## Mage Armor

Concept & Art by Brian Manning.  
Written by Kevin Siembieda.

The illustration shows one of the most popular and common styles of body armor used by practitioners of magic. This is a recent development that has appeared throughout North America in just the last two or three years, but similar protective suits have been in use by the Federation of Magic for at least six. All Mage Armor uses a combination of Mega-Damage plastic and ceramic materials with recent advancements in Mega-Damage fabrics (first introduced in the *Rifts® New West™* world book). This affords the practitioner of magic a good amount of physical protection while allowing the mage to cast spells without penalty or interference. A cloak made of these M.D.C. miracle fibers covers the shoulders and back (down to the rump) offering additional protection, while the entire body is clad in a loose-fitting M.D.C. jumpsuit. The jumpsuit has additional padding and plating at the shoulders, elbows, hips, and knees. The lower legs and feet are protected by M.D.C. fabric (sometimes natural skins from Mega-Damage creatures) with additional plating, and a similar style of gloves covers the hands. A conventional M.D.C. helmet of almost any variety can be worn to protect the head, but the suit comes standard with an M.D.C. pull-over hood and gas mask or face covering (with air filter and goggles) to shield the face. An M.D.C. skirt protects the groin area. A thick cowl or collar offers protection around the neck and deflects blasts aimed at the head. The chest and shoulders are protected by lightweight ceramic plating that slips on, over the head or in two pieces. This chest covering always comes with three rings and clasps/hooks on the left and/or right shoulder, as well as 4-6 along the bottom for hooking small sacks, ammunition, additional belts, talismans, and other small items.

Variations on this style as well as entirely different designs are available, though most keep the Ley Line Walker/spell caster hooded cloak styling. The best suits of Mage Armor are augmented with Techno-Wizard features that provide additional M.D.C. (70-90 M.D.C. total).

**Weight:** 16-22 lbs (7.2 to 10 kg).

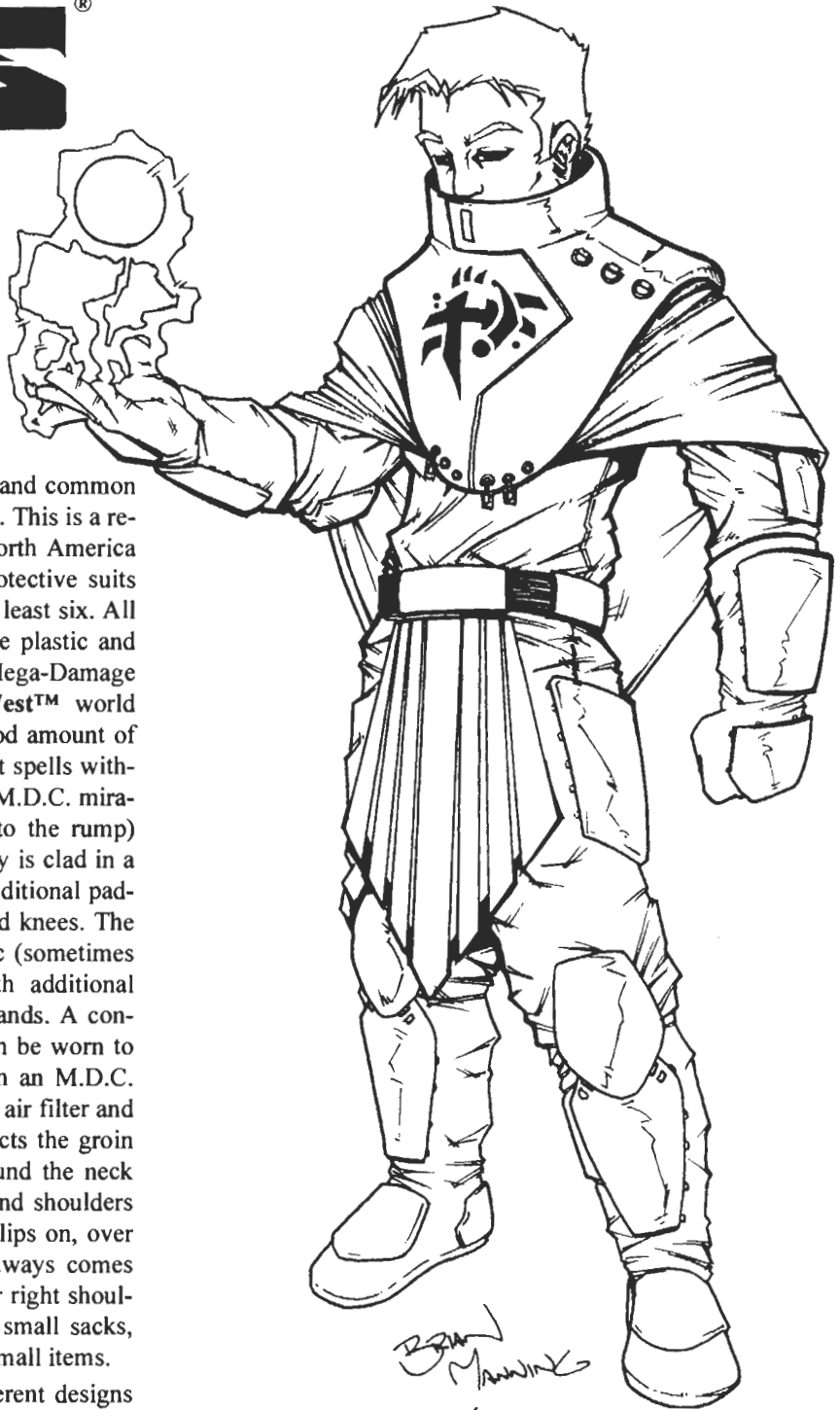
### M.D.C. by Location:

Main Body – 45 conventional (no magic) or 70-90 M.D.C. for magic armor.

Arms – 15 or 25 M.D.C. each (the second number is for magic suits).

Legs – 30 or 45 M.D.C. each (the second number is for magic suits).

Head Protection – 20 for hood, 50 for a helmet or face mask and hood.



**Mobility:** Excellent to very good; -5% to prowl and swim, no other penalties applicable.

**Cost:** Conventional: 32,000 credits.

Magic enhanced: 55,000 credits. As many as three additional TW magic features can be added, like Breathe Without Air, but increases the cost by tens to hundreds of thousands of credits, so most don't have them.



# Building a Better Super-Soldier

## Optional Rules for Heroes Unlimited™

By John Polojac

This article is designed to expand the options available for **Heroes Unlimited** players who wish to play a "Super-Soldier" type of character. Currently, the Super-Soldier is little more than an add on to the Experiment power category, and a relatively underpowered one at that. The tables provided below provide Super-Soldiers with a wider range and diversity of abilities. Many different approaches could be taken to develop a superhuman agent; genetic engineering, cybernetics, intense training, chemicals/drug treatments, and surgery — all could all play a part in developing a human fighting machine. The Super-Soldier power category now reflects this. To further distinguish this as a stand-alone power category, abilities exclusive to Super-Soldiers are hereafter called "Enhancements," not super-abilities.

In addition to new Super-Soldier enhancements, tables have been provided for alternate educational backgrounds, the effects of damage on cybernetic/bionic implants, new side effects, and other information to help "flesh out" the character creation process. Most of this new information could also be used for other characters from the Experiment or Bionic power categories as well. All of these are optional, of course, to be used at the discretion of the Game Master.

## Step One: The Usual

Determine the eight attributes, Hit Points, alignment, and personal data as usual. The criteria for selecting a prospective Super-Soldier can vary wildly depending on the sponsoring organization, so almost any combination of personal traits can be appropriate.

## Step Two: Education and Skills

As noted, candidates for the Super-Soldier process may come from a wide variety of backgrounds, so nearly any education level, from high school to doctorate, can be appropriate. It may be wise to delay skill selection until super-abilities and side effects are determined, as proper skill selection can complement strengths or compensate for weaknesses.

**Optional:** If the Game Master feels that the organization behind the experiment would only choose one of their own agents/soldiers to become a Super-Soldier, rolling on the standard education tables may not be appropriate. Instead, have the player roll on the table below to determine education and available skills. Note: This option is most applicable when the sponsoring organization is connected to the government or military.

## Super-Soldier Background and Education (Optional)

**01-40 Military:** Basic Military Skill Program (+10%), plus one additional Military or Communications Skill Program (+10%), and one Skill Program of choice (+5%; excluding Science and Espionage), and 8 Secondary Skills.

**41-65 Military Specialist:** Basic Military Skill Program (+20%), plus one additional Military or Espionage Skill Program (+20%), one Espionage Skill Program (+15%), one Weapon Proficiency Modern Skill Program, one Skill Program of choice (+10%), and 5 Secondary Skills.

**66-80 Pilot:** Basic Military Skill Program (+10%), Pilot: Advanced Skill Program (+20%), one Communications Skill Program (+15%), one Skill Program of choice (+10%), and 5 Secondary Skills.

**81-95 Espionage Agent:** Basic Espionage Skill Program (+20%), plus one additional Espionage or Criminal Skill Program (+20%), one Criminal Skill Program (+10%), one Skill Program of choice (+10%), and 5 Secondary Skills.

**96-00 Special Forces Training:** Basic Military Skill Program (+20%), Basic Espionage Skill Program (+10%), one additional Military or Wilderness Skill Program (+10%), one Physical Skill Program, one Ancient or Modern Weapon Proficiency Skill Program, and 5 Secondary Skills.

## Step Three: The Experiment and Powers

In most respects, the Super-Soldier creation process is not unlike that of other super-humans created through experimentation. Most of the information presented in **Heroes Unlimited** regarding the Experiment Power Category applies. As stated on page 118, the player does not roll on Tables B or C, as the experiment was in all cases a deliberate attempt to create a superhuman, focusing on expanding inherent human capabilities and potentials. Rolling on Table A (Nature of Experiment) is appropriate unless all the character's abilities derive from Super-Soldier enhancements alone (see below). Table D (Side Effects) is appropriate, and the list of possible side effects has actually been expanded upon in the table below. There is a 25% chance the Super-Soldier is an active agent for the organization that created him (though he may not be aware of organization's actual intentions or motives); if not, proceed to roll on tables E and F.

To determine the number of super abilities and enhancements, roll on following table:

## Category and Number of Super-Soldier Abilities Table

**Note:** For Super-Soldiers, this replaces Table C of the Experiment section.

**01-15:** One Minor Super Ability and three Enhancements; also gain Hand to Hand: Martial Artist.

**16-30:** One Minor Super Ability and four Enhancements.

**31-50:** Two Minor Super Abilities and three Enhancements.

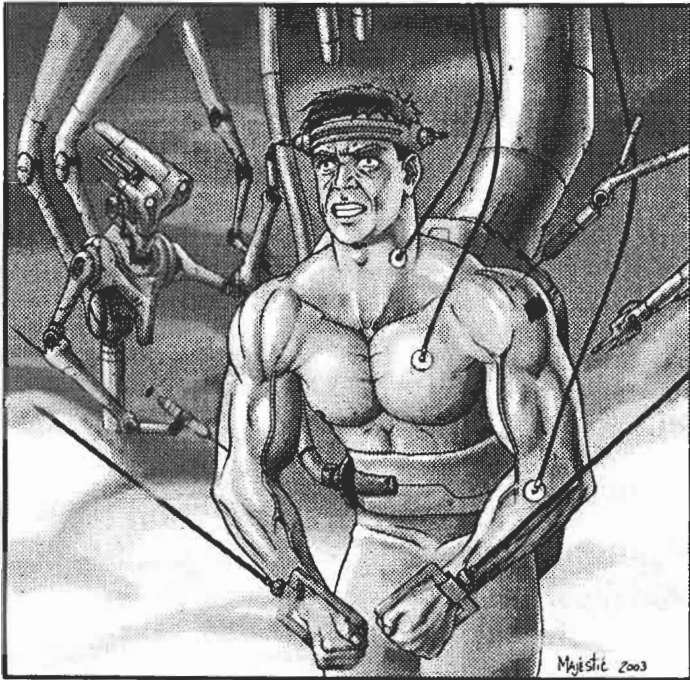


**51-70:** Five Enhancements (no Super Abilities); also gain Hand to Hand: Martial Artist.

**71-90:** Five Enhancements (no Super Abilities); also gain +1 P.P., +1D4 P.S., and +1D4 Speed (a weak form of the Physical Transformation enhancement).

**91-00:** Six Enhancements (no Super Abilities).

Note: Obviously, random rolls cannot guarantee a cohesive or viable set of abilities. Game Masters who wish to retain the random element present in most super-powered heroes' origins while still allowing player input should permit players to choose half their super abilities and enhancements (round down), rolling randomly for the rest.



## Super-Soldier Enhancements Table:

**01-04 Attempted to Increase Physical Attractiveness and Sex Appeal:** Super-Soldiers enhanced in this manner were usually designed to function as spies or undercover agents. Simple cosmetic surgery is combined with more esoteric means to create great beauty and magnetism. Life-like synthetics replace natural skin and hair, and the character's pheromones (chemical scents that influence others' reactions) are enhanced. Raise Physical Beauty to 20 (if already 20 or higher, add 1D4 points) and increase Mental Affinity by 2-7 (1D6+1) points. Add a +05% bonus on all skills that involve deception, persuasion, or seduction. This bonus is doubled against members of the opposite sex, but is ineffective against most aliens, full conversion cyborgs, mutated animals, etc. The one drawback is that the character's pheromones make him easy to recognize or track by scent, and all attempts to do (by the Heightened Smell ability, bloodhounds, chemical sensors, etc.) are at +30%.

**05-08 Attempted to Increase Physical Agility and Dexterity:** As described in *Heroes Unlimited*, page 118.

**09-12 Attempted to Make the Character Invulnerable:** As described in *Heroes Unlimited*, page 118, but add the following: Additional muscle mass adds 1D4+1 to P.S., but makes

character a bit bulkier and less agile; subtract 05% from Acrobatics, Gymnastics, Escape Artist, and Prowl skills.

**13-16 Attempted to Increase Memory and Learning Capacity:** Special learning techniques and delicate neurosurgery have greatly enhanced memory. The character may select an additional two skill programs and 5 additional secondary skills. The character also gains Speed Reading and Total Recall (identical to the psionic powers of the same names, but at no I.S.P. cost — useable at will).

**17-20 Attempted to Increase Physical Speed:** As described in *Heroes Unlimited*, page 118, but add the following: Character's superhumanly powerful leg muscles increase damage from kick attacks by 1D6+4. Unfortunately, the character is often restless and slightly tired, resulting in a -1 penalty to Mental Endurance and a -05% penalty to any skills that require long-term concentration, such as Cryptography or Research.

**21-24 Attempted to Make the Character Undetectable:** The Super-Soldier was designed to act as a spy, scout, or infiltrator, and was given bio-feedback training and suitable enhancements. The character automatically gains the prowl skill, or adds +10% to the skill if it is already possessed. Character may also choose four of the following:

Heat signature is masked: Invisible to IR sensors and the Minor Super Ability of IR Vision.

Cannot be detected by motion sensors or radar: The character may pass through such sensors without setting off alarms.

Heartbeat and breathing are muffled: Special training and built-in sound suppressors make the character very difficult to detect by parabolic listening devices or enhanced hearing (-15% chance).

Scent is masked: Subtract -30% to detect or track character by smell.

Image cannot be recorded: Implants beneath skin emits low-level radiation that distorts image on electronic recording devices. Appears as a blurry outline on video cameras, photographs, etc.

Light of foot: Footprints barely visible, even in snow or mud (-10% to tracking attempts), and can pass over security sensors in floors without triggering them.

Skin color changes to deep blue/black in darkness or heavy shadows: Special light sensitive sensors trigger change in skin. Add +15% to prowl at night/in darkness.

Untraceable: Character leaves no fingerprints, and DNA samples taken from character (blood, hair, skin, etc.) quickly degrade, becoming unidentifiable within an hour.

**25-28 Attempted to Increase Willpower:** Achieved through psychological conditioning. Raises M.E. attribute to 20, but will not increase an M.E. score that is already 20 or higher. Standard M.E. saving throw bonuses apply, and the character is also +3 to save vs mind-altering drugs, Horror Factor, and possession. Character needs only a 12 or higher (plus bonuses) to save vs psychic attack. The character gains +05% to save vs coma/death, +10 S.D.C., requires only 4 hours of sleep per night, and may exert himself twice as long before becoming fatigued.

**29-32 Augmented Nervous System:** Cybernetic implants in the central nervous system greatly enhance speed of nerve impulses, allowing the character to react almost instantly to dan-

ger. The Super-Soldier gains automatic dodge, +2 to dodge, +2 (or +10%) to maintain balance, +4 to roll with punch, and +4 to initiative. Reflexes are so fast that even sneak attacks can be dodged or parried, although no special bonuses apply (only natural dice rolls, plus P.P. bonus, if any). Character can even dodge energy blasts, gunfire, and the like, but all dodge bonuses are reduced by half. Unfortunately, the character is always somewhat edgy and distracted, resulting in a -1 penalty to Mental Affinity and a -2 penalty to pull punch.

**33-36 Augmented Skeletal System:** The Super-Soldier's bones have been reinforced with metal alloys, high-tech plastics, or the like. This increases Hit Points by 4D6. The character takes only ½ damage from blunt weapons (including fists and feet), collisions, crushing, falls, and sonic/vibration attacks. Character's punches and kicks do an extra four points of damage, as fists and feet become the equivalent of clubs/truncheons. Only attacks made with Supernatural Strength, Sonic Speed rams, missiles, heavy explosives, or the like have any chance of causing broken bones. Drawbacks: weight is increased by 20%, Speed is reduced by 10%, and swimming is difficult due to reduced buoyancy (-10% to swimming skill). Also, if character's bones are ever broken, they cannot mend normally; they must be surgically repaired.

**37-40 Bionic Implants in Brain:** As described in *Heroes Unlimited*, page 118, but add the following: Each day there is a 20% chance that the character suffers migraine headaches, causing -1 strike and a -05% penalty to all skills. The character's enhanced metabolism allows him to go twice as long without rest or sleep as a normal human, but only half as long without food or water.

**41-44 Bionic Sensor Systems:** As described in *Heroes Unlimited*, page 119, but add the following additional choices:

**Chemical Sensor:** Can pick up and identify poison gases or other unusual chemicals in air. Range is 30 feet (9.1 meters).

**Gyro Compass:** Accurately identifies direction and location.

**Radiation Detector:** Range is 100 feet (30 meters).

**45-48 Bionic Weapon Systems:** As described in *Heroes Unlimited*, page 118.

**49-52 Brain Boost:** As described in *Heroes Unlimited*, page 118, but add the following: Add an additional +05% to engineering skills, and a +10% bonus to science skills (normal I.Q. bonus applies as well). Unfortunately, due to imperfections in the process there is a 50% chance the character develops a random Affective Disorder, Neurosis, or Phobia (roll on appropriate tables, found on pages 29 and 31 of *Heroes Unlimited*).

**53-56 Combat Computer:** Sophisticated micro-computer is linked to brain/nervous system, allowing the character to quickly analyze combat variables and generate tactics. The character may choose three of the following:

**Calculate trajectories of incoming attacks:** Character is +2 to dodge ranged attacks, and can attempt to dodge arrows, gunfire, energy blasts, and missiles without penalty (but without any bonuses either).

**Determine weak points:** The Super-Soldier gets a +1 to strike, and delivers a critical strike on a natural 18, 19, or 20.

**Track opponents' positions:** Can dodge and/or parry hand to hand attacks of up to four opponents who are outside character's line of sight.

**Anticipate opponents' movements:** Gives character a +2 to initiative bonus.

**Analyze opponents' responses:** Opponents suffer a -2 penalty on attempts to dodge or parry the character's hand to hand attacks (no penalty to automatic dodge, however).

**Breach defenses:** Character's attacks have a greater chance of penetrating armor; the A.R. of targets is effectively reduced by two points against character's attacks (but no bonus to strike vs unarmored targets).

**57-60 Engineered to Survive Biological and Chemical Warfare:** The Super-Soldier was designed to fight on bio-warfare battlefields. Add +5 to save vs diseases, magical potions, poisons, toxins, viruses, and parasites (only +2 to save vs poison gas, however). Even if the character succumbs / fails to save, he suffers only ½ damage and recovers twice as quickly as normal. Parasites and symbiotic organisms of any type are rejected from the body within 1D6 + 4 hours. The character is actually immune to lycanthropy and vampirism! Damage from acids and caustic chemicals is reduced by 25% (round down). The character has no special defenses against heat/fire, smoke inhalation, blister agents such as mustard gas (which actually burn the lungs, eyes, and internal organs), or tear gas, but can hold his breath up to ten minutes. Unfortunately, the effects/duration of anesthetics, beneficial drugs, magical potions, etc., are reduced by half as well.

**61-64 Mind and Body More Attuned:** As described in *Heroes Unlimited*, page 118.

**65-68 Nanites in Bloodstream:** The Super-Soldier's blood is infused with nanites, microscopic machines that close wounds, coagulate blood, and mend tissue, resulting in a very rapid healing rate.

Character heals 1 Hit Point every four minutes (15 per hour), and 1 S.D.C. point every two minutes (30/hour). Once per day the character can instantly heal nearly all damage, no matter how badly hurt, regaining all but 1D4 Hit Points and 2D6 points of S.D.C. (this costs one melee attack, however). Add +1 to save vs knockout/stun, +2D6 to Hit Points, and +20% to save vs coma/death. The Super-Soldier recovers from disease, radiation sickness, paralysis, poisoning, unconsciousness, and other injuries at twice the rate (broken bones heal 10 times more quickly!) of a normal human. Lost limbs, missing eyes, ears, etc., can be regenerated, but this requires 1D4+4 weeks.

**69-72 Pain Suppressors:** Bio-feedback training, cybernetic implants, and neurosurgery suppress pain, slow blood loss and prevent shock, allowing the character to shrug off damage that would incapacitate normal humans. Increase S.D.C. by 100 points, add +2 to save vs knockout/stun, +3 to save vs insanity, +3 to save against psionics or spells that affect emotions, +5 to rolls to resist physical torture/pain and +10% to survive coma/death. The character can remain conscious and active at up to -15 Hit Points, but speed and number of attacks are halved, and all combat/skill bonuses are lost (only natural, unmodified dice rolls). Unfortunately, reflexes are slightly dulled, resulting in penalties of -1 to dodge and -2 to initiative.

**73-76 Physical Transformation:** As described in *Heroes Unlimited*, page 118.

**77-80 Stimulated Psionic Potential:** The character's psychic powers have been awakened through psycho-active drugs and surgery. M.E. is increased by 1D4 points, and the Super-Soldier gains 2-5 Minor Psionic Powers. Psionic powers may be selected from any **one** category (Healing, Physical, or Sensitive). The character is considered a Latent Psychic for saving throw purposes, and I.S.P. is equal to the character's new M.E. plus the roll of 3D4x10. The character's I.S.P. is fixed and does not increase as the character gains levels, nor does the character gain new psionic abilities with experience. Unfortunately the process causes minor brain damage; reduce I.Q. by one point and the character develops a random Affective Disorder, Neurosis, or Phobia (roll on appropriate tables, found on pages 29 and 31 of **Heroes Unlimited**).

**81-84 Psychic Shields:** The Super-Soldier was designed to be impervious to psychic attack. Psionic scramblers implanted in the brain grant the character +8 to save vs psychic attack (the M.E. bonus, if any, also applies), mental scans, and telepathy. The character gains an automatic save vs psychic effects; the save applies even if the character is unaware he is being psychically targeted. Unfortunately, the psychic shields cannot be dropped to allow psychic aid or communication by allies, and the character can never himself possess psychic abilities (re-roll if indicated). Note: This enhancement provides no defense against psionic powers that are physical in nature, such as Psi-Sword, or Telekinesis.

**85-88 Radiation Resistance:** The Super-Soldier has been genetically engineered to survive in the aftermath of a nuclear war or accident. Add +5 to save vs radiation sickness, and even if the character succumbs, he suffers only ½ normal effects and recovers twice as quickly as normal. Reduce damage from fire/heat, lasers, microwave weapons, and radiation attacks by ½. The character will never contract cancer or genetic defects from radiation exposure. Character heals at three times the normal rate, as cellular repair rate is enhanced. However, necessary alterations to the character's skin surface make it 50% likely he has the Odd Skin Texture side effect, reducing P.B. by 2.

**89-92 Uncanny Sense of Balance:** Operations to the inner ear result in a superhuman sense of balance. The character automatically gains Back Flip (at 90% skill level), Body Block/Tackle attack (1D4 damage and opponent is knocked down), +2 roll with punch, +4/+20% to maintain balance. Add +10% to climb, walk tightrope, and prowl. Takes only ½ damage from falls of 30 feet (9.1 meters) or less.

**93-96 Uncanny Senses:** All of the character's senses have been increased to a slightly superhuman level, granting the following bonuses: +1 to dodge, +1 initiative, +2 to hit, +15% to detect ambush, detect concealment, and tracking skills. Only suffers ½ normal penalties when fighting an unseen/invisible opponent or fighting in darkness. All senses have twice normal human range and sensitivity.

**97-00 Uncanny Targeting and Throwing Ability:** As described in **Heroes Unlimited**, page 119.

## Success Level Of Experiment (Optional)

**01-65** Character is only successful Super-Soldier; other test subjects unharmed but unchanged. Some "X" factor in character's makeup caused the success.

**66-85** Character is only successful Super-Soldier created; all other subjects killed or disabled by process. There is a 50% chance that friends/relatives of unsuccessful test subjects will seek revenge on the character and/or organization.

**86-00** Process created 1D4 other Super-Soldiers with similar abilities, but all were driven insane! It is 80% likely these flawed super-humans escaped and are at large. Each possesses 1D4+3 random insanities, and harbors deep hatred for the organization that created them and anyone associated with it, including the character!

## Organization Safeguards (Optional)

Given the money, time, and resources devoted to creating the Super-Soldier, it is reasonable that the organization responsible may take measures to ensure the Super-Soldier's loyalty. This is especially true of government, military, or criminal organizations. The character is 85% unlikely to know about any safeguards that have been taken with him.

**01-40** No safeguards taken.

**41-65** Surveillance implants placed in character; organization can monitor position and physical condition.

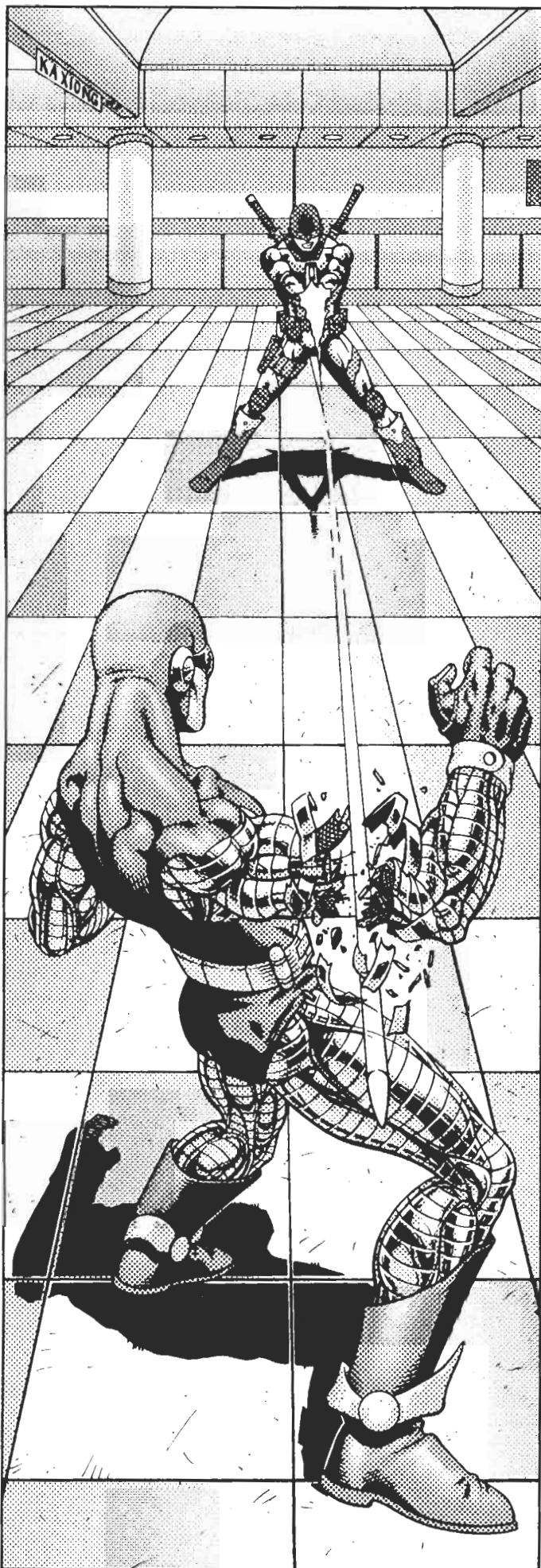
**66-75** Surveillance implants; can not only monitor position, but can record everything character sees and hears, as well!

**76-90** Psychological Conditioning: Subconscious brainwashing to prevent character acting against the organization's members or interests. The character's combat bonuses, skill bonuses, and number of attacks are halved whenever he knowingly does so. Character can overcome conditioning for 1D4 melee rounds by rolling a save of 15 or higher, but only M.E. bonuses are allowed, and even these are halved. Once character becomes aware of conditioning, he may seek treatment. Treat this as an Affective Disorder or Neurosis for purposes of overcoming its effects.

**91-00** Kill-Switch! The organization has placed a failsafe in the character that either (01-70) shuts off all super-abilities for 1D6 hours or (71-00) delivers a massive shock to the system, causing 6D6 damage *directly to Hit Points!* The kill-switch is usually only known to top personnel in the organization, although it might be possible for others to discover it. The kill-switch could be electronically activated or triggered by a code word, at the Game Master's discretion, and can only be activated at close range (within 100 feet/30 m or so).

## Effects of Damage on Cybernetic/Bionic Systems (Optional)

Many Super-Soldier enhancements depend on cybernetic/bionic implants; the Brain Implants, Combat Computer, and Pain Suppressors enhancements among others. While these systems are sturdy and well shielded, they are potentially subject to damage and resulting malfunction. Every time the char-



acter takes **Hit Point** damage from electricity, radiation, or explosions (grenades, missiles, etc.) there is a 01% chance per point of damage that **one** of the character's enhancement systems is damaged (determine which one randomly). If damage is indicated, roll on the following table:

**01-40** Enhancement functions normally for next 1D4 rounds, then goes off-line for 2D4 minutes; all abilities from the enhancement unuseable during this time.

**41-60** Enhancement off-line for 1D6+1 hours; all related abilities unuseable during this time.

**61-75** Enhancement operates at 150% efficiency for 1D4+2 rounds (all combat and saving throw bonuses increased by half, an additional 1D6+1 added to all increased attributes), then goes off-line for 5D6+30 minutes.

**76-85** Enhancement operates at 150% efficiency, but every time abilities are used, there is a 20% chance the character goes into a Frenzy (described on pages 33-35 of *Heroes Unlimited*). This condition persists for 2-5 days.

**86-95** Enhancement operates at 200% efficiency (all combat and saving throw bonuses doubled, an additional 2D6+2 added to all increased attributes), but character suffers 2D6+3 damage from feedback every time abilities are used. This lasts for 3D4+3 days (01-70) or until repaired (71-00).

**96-00** Enhancement permanently damaged — all abilities and bonuses derived from enhancement are at ½ strength until repairs are effected (which usually requires the services of scientific or medical personnel, and laboratory facilities).

Note: Game Masters may wish to use this table for Bionic and/or Robotic characters as well.

## Table D: Side Effects (Permanent)

Note: This is an expanded/revised version of Table D, found on page 116 of *Heroes Unlimited*. While intended to be used for Super-Soldiers, it is completely suitable for all experiment-type characters, and could also be used for mutated animals as well.

**01-05 Accelerated Metabolism:** All of the character's biological processes are speeded up; add +1 to dodge, +2 initiative, +1 attack per melee round, 5D6+20 to Speed, and character heals at twice the normal rate. Unfortunately, the boosted metabolism initially caused rapid aging, though this has since been halted (character now ages at normal rate). Character appears 5D4+10 years older than actual age (appears at least 45), -1 to strike, -1 P.B., -1D4 P.S., and reduce S.D.C. 10%.

**06-10 Albinism:** Skin and hair are very pale, veins nearly visible through skin, eyes become pink and very sensitive to light; reduce P.B. by one point, and character suffers -1 initiative and -2 to strike when in bright light unless protective glasses/visor is worn. On the positive side, the character gains excellent night vision, with a range of 300 feet (91.4 meters).

**11-15 Breathe Without Air:** As described in *Heroes Unlimited*, page 116.

**16-20 Chemical Resistance:** As described in *Heroes Unlimited*, page 116.



**21-25 Chronic Pain:** As described in *Heroes Unlimited*, page 116.

**26-30 Hair Growth Stimulated:** As described in *Heroes Unlimited*, page 116.

**31-35 Hair Permanently Falls Out:** As described in *Heroes Unlimited*, page 116.

**36-40 Hyper-Intellect:** Increase I.Q. by 1D6+6 (minimum of 18) and M.E. by 1D4 +2 (minimum of 16), and add +10% to all medical, science, and engineering skills. Sadly, increased intellect comes at the cost of mental stability; reduce M.A. by 2-5 points and roll for one random neurosis and either one random obsession or one phobia (*Heroes Unlimited*, page 29 and 31).

**41-45 Increased Mass:** As described in *Heroes Unlimited*, page 116.

**46-50 Must Physically Transform:** As described in *Heroes Unlimited*, page 116.

**51-55 No Facial Features:** As described in *Heroes Unlimited*, page 116.

**56-60 No Pain Receptors:** Character cannot accurately judge when he is hurt, and may not even realize it when he is attacked from behind or long range! Reduced sense of touch causes -10% to manual dexterity skills such as concealment, palming, pick pockets, and so forth. The character does gain 2D4x10 S.D.C. and +2 to save vs knockout/stun.

**61-65 Odd Skin Pigmentation:** As described in *Heroes Unlimited*, page 116.

**66-70 Odd Skin Texture:** As described in *Heroes Unlimited*, page 116.

**71-75 Radio Hearing:** Character becomes so sensitive to electromagnetic waves that he can pick up/listen in on radio broadcasts (AM, FM, police bands, etc.) across the communications spectrum. The character automatically senses radar scans, and can detect bugs/listening devices within 10 feet (3 meters). On the downside, this power can never be completely turned off; -1 penalty to initiative due to constant, low-level radio "noise."

**76-80 Regressed to Youth:** Character appears to be no more than 16 years old; -1D4 to P.S., subtract 2-5 inches from height, reduce S.D.C. by 10%, and reduce weight by 20%. This also causes various legal and social problems for the character, as most people will assume he should be in high school, should not be allowed to live alone, etc. On the positive side, add +1 to save vs disease, 1D4 to P.E., and 1D6 to Speed. Character aging is now slowed; ages only one year for every three that passes.

**81-85 Requires Energy for Nourishment:** As described in *Heroes Unlimited*, page 116.

**86-90 Uncontrollable Shape-shifting:** Character's body undergoes a radical change every thirty days, completely altering

appearance and physique. Every time change occurs, re-roll character's P.B. attribute and assign new eye color, hair color, height, weight, and body build (the tables on page 25 of *Heroes Unlimited* may be useful). The new form is basically human, but may be completely normal in appearance or utterly odd.

Roll on table below each time change occurs.

01-50: Normal human in appearance/abilities. Race and sex remain the same.

51-70: Human appearance, but race (60%), sex (30%), or both (10%) change.

71-80: One unusual trait; roll on Mutant Unusual Characteristics Table (*Heroes Unlimited*, page 159), re-rolling if no unusual trait is indicated.

81-95: Odd appearance. Roll three times on Unusual Characteristics table.

96-00: Very odd appearance. Roll 1D4+3 times on Unusual Characteristics table.

The character also gains a +2 bonus to save vs any other sort of transformation (spell, magic potion, petrification etc.). Even if the save fails, the effects will only last until the character's body changes shape again.

**91-95 Vulnerable to Radiation:** As described in *Heroes Unlimited*, page 116. Character is vulnerable within a range of 50 feet/15.2 m (or fewer, depending on intensity).

**96-00 Whole Body Glows:** As described in *Heroes Unlimited*, page 116.

## Other Stuff

**Hand to Hand Combat:** Combat skills are not automatic; they must normally be selected as skills.

**Weapons and Armor:** Only conventional weaponry and body armor are available, unless character possesses exceptional wealth. If the character is on good terms with the organization responsible for turning him into a Super-Soldier, he may be loaned equipment suitable for a particular mission. Game Masters should use discretion when deciding the type and amount of equipment the organization is likely to loan. A good rule of thumb might be \$500.00x character's level.

**Alignment:** Any, but heroic characters should usually choose a good alignment.

**Structural Damage Capacity:** Super-Soldiers have a base S.D.C. of 20+1D4x10, plus any obtained from physical skills and/or side effects from the experiment.

**Available Financial Resources:** 5D6x100 dollars in ready cash, and possible life savings. 85% likely that character has car worth 2D4x1000 dollars. Character can be presumed to have standard possessions, clothing, and apartment.

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# New Ludicrous Magic

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## Optional Material for Rifts®

By Daniel Denis

**Author's Note:** It's been a few years since I created the *Ludicrous Mage* and *Ludicrous Magic*, and I hope you've had as much fun playing with the O.C.C. as I had putting it all together. I've now managed to bring together a variety of other spells that are here to supplement your gaming experience with more *Ludicrous Magic*. Have fun and enjoy these new and twisted spells. Also, for simplicity of reading, I will be using the "he" pronouns when referring to male and female characters. The "he/she" format was a bit annoying. Do note that I am *not* excluding female players, as I've said, it's to simplify the reading experience.

## Ludicrous Mage O.C.C. Modification:

The following is a modification to the original Ludicrous Mage O.C.C. description. I have decided that the text had to be modified for the following reason: precision. The original text mentioned some invocation spells that may be learned beyond Wizard Spells of level three (like transformation spells), without really specifying which ones. To resolve this, I have added these transformation spells and a few other specific spells in this new Ludicrous Spell list. I have also made these spells more unique to the Ludicrous Mage by "modifying" the original Wizard Spell (i.e. P.P.E. cost, duration, range, or level, etc.). The text explaining the additional types of magic should read as the following...

### 6. Spell Knowledge:

**Additional Types of Available Spell Magic:** The Ludicrous Mage can NOT learn or perform *ritual magic*, only spell magic, and even then the types of magic he can learn are limited to Ludicrous Magic (all levels) and Wizard spells levels 1-3. They never study or use Card Magic.

## Ludicrous Magic

Ludicrous Mage Spells are based on humor as a form of defense and offense. Some casters also use the magic to get a laugh or to entertain people. Only the *Trickster* and *Ludicrous Mage* can learn this form of magic, while all the other more serious practitioners of magic consider this magic art as a waste of time, and not a "true" form of magic. The bulk of the Ludicrous Spells and the history of the *Ludicrous Mage* and *Trickster* are described in **The Rifter #9½**. The following list contains all Ludicrous Magic Spells but only those marked with "new" are described in the following pages.

## Ludicrous Magic Spell List:

### Level One

*Boo!* (1) (New!)  
Cloud of Laughter (4)  
Alter Physical Features (4)  
Funny Bone (3)  
Hand Buzzer (3)  
*Identify Theme Song* (2) (New!)  
Never Ending Handkerchief (2)  
Scents Evil (2)  
Scents Magic (2)  
Fart Blossom (2)  
*Laugh of Death* (3) (New!)

### Level Two

Alter Physical Color (5)  
Aura of Feebleness (6)  
*Butter Fingers* (3) (New!)  
Candy Smell (4)  
*Color Blind* (4) (New!)  
Cotton Candy (6)  
Create Candy (5)  
*Diarrhea* (4, 6) (New!)  
*Enhanced Self-Image* (5) (New!)  
*Play/Replay Theme Song* (2,3) (New!)  
Water Flower (Varies)

### Level Three

Animal Characteristics (Physical) (6)  
*Balloon Flight* (6) (New!)  
Bouncy Balls (5 per set)  
*Caught With Your Pants Down* (4) (New!)  
*Hold Breath* (6) (New!)  
*I'm Too Sexy* (5) (New!)  
*Long-Range Slap* (5) (New!)  
*Lost for Words* (6) (New!)  
Pies (Varies)  
Red Nose (5)  
*Scaredy Cat* (7) (New!)  
*Turn Water to Beer* (6, 10) (New!)  
Uncontrollable Laughter (8)  
Water Dump (8)



## Level Four

*Alter Physical Clothing (8) (New!)*  
 Blissful Confusion (7)  
 Bubble Gum Rope (8)  
 Bubble Gum Stick-Um (10)  
*Crazy Look (10) (New!)*  
 Create & Animate Balloons (10, 15, 20)  
*Depth Perception (10) (New!)*  
*Disbelief (8) (New!)*  
*Drunken Master (10) (New!)*  
*Fool's Gold (12) (New!)*  
 Funny Glasses (10)  
 Imaginary Quartet (9)  
*Itchy, Itchy, Scratchy (8) (New!)*  
*Monolingual (12) (New!)*  
 Moron I.Q. (10)  
 Rail Thin (10)  
*Rapid Weed Growth — Minor (8) (New!)*  
 Trampoline (6)  
 Water Balloon (Varies)

## Level Five

*Animal Speech (15) (New!)*  
*Bounce (12) (New!)*  
 Bubble Gum Flight (12)  
*Descriptive Combat (12) (New!)*  
 Enhance Humor Factor (10)  
*Fat Man In A Little Suit (10) (New!)*  
 Feeble Voice (8)  
*Gullible (15) (New!)*  
*Heads-Up (12) (New!)*  
*Mask of Deceit (16) (New!)*  
*They're all Gonna Laugh At You! (10) (New!)*  
*Toy Guns (16) (New!)*  
 Trick Rings (8)  
*Turn Foods into Candy and Sweets (10) (New!)*  
*Turn Water to Pop (12, 15) (New!)*  
*Ugly Kid Joe (10) (New!)*  
 Voice of Fear (12)

## Level Six

Animate Balloon Monster (30, 45, 60)  
*Bigger Guns (16) (New!)*  
 Candy Cane of Doom (22)  
*Curse: Tourette Syndrome (18) (New!)*  
 Giant Circus Ball (15)  
 Keel Over (20)  
 Giant Protective Bubble (20)  
 Laughter of Weakness (17)  
 Magical Boxing Gloves (20)  
 Mystic Juggling (16)

*Paint Ball Gun (20) (New!)*  
*Passive Resistance (16) (New!)*  
*Reduce Self (6 inches) (18) (New!)*  
Slip n' Slide (18)  
*Spring Action Boots (20) (New!)*  
*Talk Back (17) (New!)*  
*Thinking Out Loud (16) (New!)*

### Level Seven

Animal Behavior (20)  
Animate Clothing (5)  
*Cat Got Your Tongue (20) (New!)*  
*Create Tar Pit (30) (New!)*  
*Curse: Dirty Goat (25) (New!)*  
Healing Power of Laughter (25)  
*Magnetic Personality (22) (New!)*  
*Metamorphosis: Animal (30) (New!)*  
*Play It Again, Sam (25) (New!)*  
Potato Head (8)  
*Summon Personalized Rain Storm (25) (New!)*  
Tied with Rope (25)  
*Turn Water to Liquor (15, 25) (New!)*  
*Unlimited Ammo (24) (New!)*

### Level Eight

*Create Dough-Boy Golem (200) (New!)*  
*Create Mini-Me (or Mini-You) (50) (New!)*  
Funny Monster (25)  
Curse: Forget About It (25)  
*Look Cool Factor (22) (New!)*  
*Metamorphosis: Human (45) (New!)*  
*Metamorphosis: Insect (50) (New!)*  
*Metamorphosis: Pink Fluffy Bunny (40) (New!)*  
*Miniaturize Weapon (40) (New!)*  
Obsess Much? (32)  
Quick Teleportation (50)  
Shrink Body Parts (varies)  
Tied with Chains (35)

### Level Nine

*Balloon Flight (Superior) (40, 60) (New!)*  
Blubber Boy (32)  
Clacking Teeth (45)  
Curse of Laughter (30)  
*Curse: Theme Song (50) (New!)*  
Metamorphosis: Doll/Puppet (60)  
Metamorphosis: Opposite Sex (45)  
Metamorphosis: Pig/Boar (50)  
*Rapid Weed Growth — Superior (45) (New!)*  
*Remove Theme Song (40) (New!)*

### Level Ten

*Create Theme Song (80, 32) (New!)*  
Laughter That Can Cure Phobias (70)  
*Metamorphosis: Animation (60, 85) (New!)*  
Metamorphosis: Clown (70)  
*Metamorphosis: Monster (90) (New!)*

### Level Eleven

*Metamorphosis: Giant (100) (New!)*  
Metamorphosis: Toad/Frog (60)  
Multiplicity (150)

### Level Twelve

Create Clown Golem (500)  
*Create Marshmallow Golem (700) (New!)*  
*Metamorphosis: Mist (200) (New!)*

### Spells of Legend

*Call Upon Backsmack (246) (New!)*  
\*Create Carnies (150)  
*Enhance Carnie (75) (New!)*  
*Laugh of Exorcism (300) (New!)*  
Laugh of Resurrection (500)  
*\*Same old spell, but with new carnies to create.*

## New Ludicrous Magic Spell Descriptions

### Level One

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#### Boo!

**Range:** Up to 90 feet (27.4 m) away, +30 feet (9.1 m) per level of experience.

**Duration:** Instantaneously.

**Saving Throw:** None.

**P.P.E.:** 1

This spell permits the caster to startle his victim. The affected character will hear a loud “Boo” coming from just behind his right or left shoulder. The character suffers loss of initiative as he looks around for a few seconds to find the origin of the yell, and must roll against his P.P. to determine if he/she dropped whatever items were in his hands.

#### Identify Theme Song

**Range:** Up to 120 feet (36.6 m), plus 15 feet (4.6 m) per level of experience.

**Duration:** Instantaneously.

**Saving Throw:** None.

**P.P.E.:** 2



This spell has two applications:

1. It permits the caster to determine if his target possesses a theme song or not. The caster will know what the theme is, whether it is a curse or not, and will want to play it or convince the target to play it.

2. If a theme song is heard, this spell permits the caster to identify the exact origin of theme song, its meaning, to whom it belongs and where the person is located.

**Note:** See the *Create Theme Song* spell for an in-depth description of the so-called “theme song” phenomenon.

## Laugh of Death

**Range:** Touch, or up to 50 feet away (15.2 m).

**Duration:** Three minutes per level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** Standard.

**P.P.E.:** 3

The spell will make a person appear to laugh himself to death. The affected character will start to laugh uncontrollably, making a racket, and then suddenly drop dead. At least he will appear dead. The affected character will be under a death trance as per the *Death Trance* spell found on page 168 of the *Rifts* main book, or on page 91 of the *Rifts Book of Magic*. All vital signs will be gone, and anybody who examines him will be convinced that the character is, in fact, dead. Only the caster can stop the spell at any time.

## Level Two

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### Butter Fingers

**Range:** Any character up to 60 feet (18.3 m) away, plus 15 feet (4.6 m) per level of experience.

**Duration:** 30 seconds (two melee actions) per level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** Standard.

**P.P.E.:** 3

The affected character’s hands become coated with some sort of grease. This grease is irremovable until the duration of the spell elapses. As a result, the character becomes extremely clumsy when working with his hands. Every time he grabs something, tries to use a tool, or work with his hands, he risks dropping it. The character has a 40% chance (+8% per level of experience of the spell caster) minus the affected character’s P.P. to drop the item. This means a character with a P.P. attribute of 16 whom is affected by the spell from a third level Ludicrous Mage will have a 48% chance of dropping any item in his hands (40% + 24% - 16%). A successful roll means the character held on to the item, otherwise the dropped item will fall 2D4 feet away. Skills that require the use of tools or one’s hands will suffer a -30%.

**Note:** Maximum percentage to determine if a character drops an item is 98% *minus* the affected character’s P.P. attribute.

### Color Blind

**Range:** Self or others up to 90 feet (27.4 m) away, or two targets by touch.

**Duration:** 5 minutes per level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** Standard.

**P.P.E.:** 4

The affected character will no longer be able to see in the visible spectrum as per normal, but just the different intensities. As a result, the character sees in multiple shades of gray. Hence, he will become color blind. But on the plus side, he or she will be able to see, limitedly, in the night up to 30 feet away. This is more of a night vision, needing dim sources of light (like the moon) to see. The character will be blind in complete darkness.

### Diarrhea

**Range:** Self or others up to 60 feet (18.3 m) away, plus 5 feet (1.5 m) per level of experience.

**Duration:** 30 seconds or two melee rounds.

**Saving Throw:** Standard, but sick characters have a -2 to save.

**P.P.E.:** 4, or 6 to affect those in power armor.

The affected character suddenly has a great need to go to the bathroom to... hmmm... relieve himself. The character has 30 seconds before he can no longer hold “it” in. After that period of time, that’s it. It all comes out. Those in armor are easily affected; even those in power armor can also be affected by the spell (at the cost of more P.P.E.). If the affected character is unsuccessful in removing the armor or exiting the power armor, the equipment will find itself very messy and the most awful smell a human (or humanoid) can ever be released will “live” in the armor, requiring at least a week of cleaning to fully remove the odor. A very disgusting spell when used right.

### Enhanced Self-Image

**Range:** Any character up to 90 feet (27.4 m) away, plus 10 feet (3.0 m) per level of experience.

**Duration:** 1 minute per level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** Standard.

**P.P.E.:** 5

The affected character is convinced he is someone else or a creature of another race. For example, the character believes he is really a robot, or a dragon, or even Emperor Prosek. The new identity is up to the caster and the affected character will attempt to act, behave, and perform the powers or skills of his new identity. If the character thinks he’s a dragon, he might try to change his form. But since he isn’t one, he will come up with an excuse that “I have no need to change into my true form now” or “now isn’t the time to reveal my true nature.” If the character has no knowledge of the person or creature of the new identity, then the spell has no effect on the character. Otherwise, “I am Zeus, the god of gods...”

### Play/Replay Theme Song

**Range:** Self or others up to 60 feet (18.3 m) away, plus 5 feet (1.5 m) per level of experience.

**Duration:** 4 minutes per level of experience upon creation.

**Saving Throw:** None.

**P.P.E.:** 2 P.P.E. to hear one’s own theme song, 3 P.P.E. to hear someone else’s.

This spell permits the caster to have his theme song played at any time he wishes. He may also play another character's song, but must know that the target has one before being able to hear it.

For the duration of the spell, the character's "tune" will automatically play when the main man enters a room, leaves a room, walks down a street, is about to enter a "combat" situation, does something interesting, or speaks for the first time. Just think of a movie where the hero's theme song plays whenever the character does something interesting. Like in any action flick, when do you hear the "Hero's theme"?

**Bonuses:** Those that know the character will automatically recognize the mage when hearing his theme song. Well-respected mages will find himself attracting people who just want to get a look at the "hero." The people's spirit will rise and hope is found. Also, any foe hearing the tune will be worried, knowing that the mage is nearby (or basically annoyed that yahoo came back). When the character hears his theme song, he will be cocky, arrogant, and walk with a "yes, that's *my* theme song playing" attitude. In combat, he will be more daring and impulsive, receiving a +2 to initiative and +1 to parry and dodge. Prowl is impossible while the theme song is playing.

**Note for others:** As described in the *Create Theme Song* spell, unless the Ludicrous Mage already knows the *Play/Replay Theme Song* spell, the enchanted character will "instinctually" know how to use it. But only characters that are in tune with their own P.P.E. (i.e. magic O.C.C.s and creatures that can use magic) will know the *Play/Replay Theme Song* spell after receiving their own theme song. But, the "instinctive" version of the spell costs twice the normal P.P.E., with half the normal duration, and the mage won't be able to play another character's theme song.

## Level Three

### Balloon Flight

**Range:** Self, or others by handing the balloon to them.

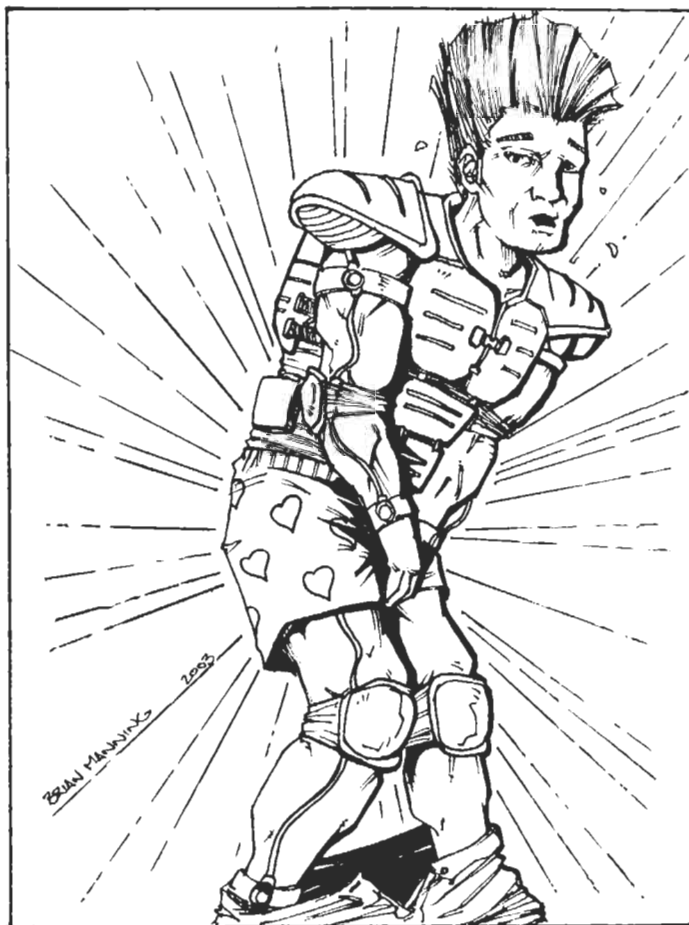
**Duration:** Four minutes per level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** None.

**P.P.E.:** 6

Similar to the *Bubble Gum Bubble Flight* spell (found in *The Rifter #9½*, page 83) and the *Levitation* spell (found in the *Rifts* main book, page 170, and the *Rifts Book of Magic*, page 94), the *Balloon Flight* spell permits the caster to create a balloon that can carry the weight of a person or similar size object. The balloon magically takes form from the caster's hand. When the balloon is fully blown up (roughly 3 feet/0.9 m, in diameter), a string of 6 feet (1.8 m) long is available to hold on to or to attach an object onto it. The movement is limited to straight up or down, not horizontally, unless there is a wind, which will push the balloon at half the speed of the wind. The balloon will have an S.D.C. of 6 plus 1 per each level of experience, but will have 1 M.D.C. plus 1 M.D.C. per each *other* level of experience in a Mega-Damage environment. The maximum height is 60 feet (18.3 m) plus 10 feet (3.0 m) per level of experience. Maximum weight is 200 lbs (90 kg) plus 25 lbs (11.25 kg) per level of experience. The caster can add to the lifting power by having mul-

tiple balloons tied together to levitate a larger load. The second balloon will add 100 lbs (45 kg) plus 10 lbs per level of experience, a third balloon will add 50 lbs (22.5 kg) plus 5 lbs (2.25 kg) per level of experience, the fourth will add 25 lbs (11.25 kg) to the total load. Any additional balloons will only add 5 lbs (2.25 kg) to the total load. For example, a 5<sup>th</sup> level Ludicrous Mage will lift 300 lbs (135 kg) with one balloon; two balloons will lift 440 lbs (198 kg; 300 from the first plus 140 from the second); three balloons will lift 510 lbs/230 kg (300+140+70); four balloons will lift 535 lbs/241 kg (300+140+70+25); and a fifth will lift 540 lbs (243 kg).



### Caught With Your Pants Down

**Range:** One target up to 90 feet (27.4 m) away, +10 feet (3.0 m) per level of experience.

**Duration:** One melee round (15 seconds) per every other level of experience; or half a melee round (7.5 seconds) per level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** Standard.

**P.P.E.:** 4

The effect of this spell will cause the target's pants to fall to his ankles, revealing a pair of white boxer shorts with red dots or hearts. The pants will magically stay down at the ankles for the duration of the spell. A successful save means the spell will last for 1D4 melee actions only, but completely removing the pants will undo the spell. Affected characters will get a -4 to dodge, -1 to strike and parry, and speed attribute will be reduced to 4.

## Hold Breath

**Range:** One character up to 40 feet (12.2 m) away, plus 5 feet (1.5 m) per level of experience.

**Duration:** Varies.

**Saving Throw:** Standard.

**P.P.E.:** 6

The affected character will decide to hold his breath until he passes out. Typically, a person can hold one's breath a few minutes, but for game simplicity, we will assume that a person can hold his breath up to 1 minute plus 1D6 melee rounds (unless otherwise mentioned in the character's description) or use the suggested rule explained in **The Rifter #17**, on page 16. After that period of time, the character will feel woozy, and then fall unconscious for 3D4+4 minutes. After waking up, the character will have a mild headache for the next half hour, suffering a -15% to all skills.

## I'm Too Sexy

**Range:** One target up to 60 feet (18.3 m) away, plus 10 feet (3.0 m) per level of experience.

**Duration:** 2 minutes per every level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** Standard.

**P.P.E.:** 5

The affected character suddenly believes himself to be the most gorgeous person on the face of the planet. The character will be arrogant, stuck up, and inconsiderate towards others. He will think everyone is attracted to him. Even his or her friends "want" him. In addition, the character will think that he is a model, and will walk around making random "poses" as if for a commercial shoot. "*Strike a pose!*"

## Long-Range Slap

**Range:** Onto one target up to 1,000 feet (304.8 m) away, +200 feet (61.0 m) per level of experience.

**Damage:** One point of damage, period.

**Duration:** Instantaneous.

**Saving Throw:** None!

**P.P.E.:** 5

This spell was designed to anger one's enemy, or just to joke around. The caster can slap another person, or thing, from long distances. The slapped character will be embarrassed from being slapped and will be bitter towards the closest person around, thinking it was that person whom slapped him. The spell causes one point of S.D.C. damage, or one point of Mega-Damage against an M.D.C. creature!

## Lost for Words

**Range:** One target up to 45 feet (13.7 m) away, plus 15 feet (4.6 m) per level of experience, or two by touch.

**Duration:** 3 minutes per every level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** Standard.

**P.P.E.:** 6

The character will suffer a momentary loss of vocabulary. He'll forget the names of common objects (and places) and must

describe them each time he's talking about it. When someone actually names the object, the character will agree to the name ("yes, that's it"), but will immediately forget the name of it. He will refer to everything as: "it," "the thing," "the thingy," etc.

*Example:* "So you've seen the robber. Can you describe him to me?" asks the policeman.

"Sure thing," replies the witness. "The guy came in wearing one of those things that covers your face, just like in hockey, but different. He was dressed like in that movie there... with the computer reality? The one where the guy has that cool coat made out of cow skin or something. They entered the lobby... with the guards and the shooting and the jumping around... Ring any bells? Well, the guy was dressed like that. He also had this big thing that shoots out these projectiles that can kill people at a distance. You know what I mean. It's like the one you have, just a lot bigger. Yeah... that's what I saw officer."

The officer replies, "Thank you for wasting my time, Sir."

## Scaredy Cat

**Range:** One character up to 90 feet (27.4 m) away, plus 5 feet (1.5 m) per level of experience; or an 8 foot (2.4 m) area up to 30 feet (9.1 m) away plus 3 feet (0.9 m) per level of experience.

**Duration:** 2 minutes per level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** Individual characters have a standard save at -2, while a group has a standard save.

**P.P.E.:** 7

The affected character (or group of people) grows a yellow streak on his back, and becomes afraid of everything. All living creatures possess a Horror Factor of 8 (especially children and kittens), while buildings, caverns, tunnels, etc., will have a Horror Factor of 6. Power armor and robot vehicle will have an H.F. of 10. All characters that currently have a Horror Factor will act as if its Horror Factor was worse (+3 to the current H.F.) The affected character must roll versus H.F. each time he encounters a new person, place, or whatever. He must make a saving throw versus H.F. at -4! The affected character has become a chicken sh... I mean a scaredy cat...

## Turn Water into Beer

**Range:** 15 feet (4.6 m).

**Duration:** Instant/permanent.

**Saving Throw:** None.

**P.P.E.:** 6, or 10 for a specific type.

"Beer, the cause of *and* solution to all the world's problems!"

This transformation spell permits the Ludicrous Mage to change ordinary fresh water into a refreshing, great, loving drink called beer! The caster can affect twenty gallons (75.7 liters) per level of experience. The beer can be of any generic type as per the caster's request (light, white, dark, etc.). But to create a particular type of beer (like Molson's Canadian, Blue, or other great Canadian beers), the caster must spend more P.P.E. and must have tasted the liquor within the last 8 hours (plus two hours per level of experience) to create it.

## Level Four

### Alter Physical Clothing

**Range:** Self or others up to 90 feet (27.4 m) away, plus 15 feet (4.6 m) per level of experience.

**Duration:** 3 minutes per level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** Standard.

**P.P.E.:** 8

The caster can alter what a person is wearing by magically changing the entire ensemble to something completely different. This can vary from changing the basic colors to changing the actual clothes. For example, changing a character's traveling clothes into a business suit, a French maid's uniform, or even a pink tutu. The "new" clothes fit the character perfectly and he or she suffers no movement penalties, as per the original clothes. **Note:** This spell does not affect armor or M.D.C. clothing.



### Crazy Look

**Range:** Self or others up to 20 feet (6.1 m) away.

**Duration:** One minute per level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** Standard.

**P.P.E.:** 10

The affected character will suddenly look like he's about to lose it! His appearance will alter to having his eyes wide open and bloodshot, his face will become pale, he'll get a tick on his neck, and he'll occasionally drool. The character's speech will sound like the guy is holding himself back, and he seems to be clattering his teeth. Anyone near the character will feel ex-

remely uncomfortable and children will run away screaming. The affected character won't have any idea of what's going on.

### Depth Perception

**Range:** Others up to 30 feet (9.1 m) away, plus 2 feet (0.6 m) per level of experience.

**Duration:** Two melee rounds (30 seconds) per level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** Standard.

**P.P.E.:** 10

The affected character loses the ability to determine distances and depth. As a result, the character will not be able to tell how far an object or person is when it is further than 15 feet (4.6 m) away. This effectively causes the character to misjudge distances by a long shot, and makes aimed shots nearly impossible. The character suffers a -4 to aimed shots, -2 to burst and wild shots, -4 to strike with any thrown objects, and a -3 to dodge any projectile attacks.

### Disbelief

**Range:** Self or others up to 50 feet (15.2 m) away.

**Duration:** 15 minutes per level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** Standard, but evil characters have a -2 to save.

**P.P.E.:** 8

A special mind effect spell that causes the affected character to absolutely believe in NOTHING that anybody tells him. Even if the proof is right in front of him, like an I.D. card, he will still not believe it.

### Drunken Master

**Range:** Self, or others up to 30 feet (9.1 m) away.

**Duration:** 3 minutes per level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** Standard.

**P.P.E.:** 10

The affected character will become impaired or drunk. Penalties include a -4 to initiative, -2 to strike, parry and dodge, the speed attribute will be reduced by half, and all skills will be reduced by 12%. The drunken character will have difficulty walking (staggering everywhere) and has slurred speech (-25% to Language skills, and just to be able to speak properly). Since everyone acts differently while drunk, the character will have a particular side effect from his drunken state. Roll once under the *Effects of Alcoholism* table on page 21 of the **Rifts RPG**. These side effects are in addition to the base penalties of the spell. In some cases, they will cancel out.

### Fool's Gold

**Range:** Up to 10 feet (3.0 m) away.

**Duration:** 25 minutes per level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** Standard.

**P.P.E.:** 12.

As per the *Fool's Gold* spell described in the **Rifts** main book, page 172, or the **Rifts Book of Magic**, page 101.



## Itchy, Itchy, Scratchy

**Range:** Self or others up to 60 feet (18.3 m) away, plus 10 feet (3 m) per level of experience.

**Duration:** One minute (4 melee rounds) per level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** Standard.

**P.P.E.:** 8.

The victim of this spell will feel the uncontrollable urge to scratch himself. This itchiness will prevent the character from concentrating on any skill that requires the focus of the mind. As a result, skills will suffer a -35%. Other penalties consist of losing 2 melee actions to scratch himself, suffers a -2 to all melee actions, and making aimed shots are nearly impossible (suffers a -4).

## Monolingual

**Range:** Affects a 40 foot (12.2 m) area.

**Duration:** One minute per level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** None.

**P.P.E.:** 12

Everyone in the affected area will find himself speaking a language chosen by the spell caster, like French, German, Italian, etc. The person may not know the language, or understand those who speak it, just that whenever the person tries to say anything, it comes out in the chosen language. "*Pardon monsieur, je ne vous comprends pas! Qu'est-ce que vous voulez me dire?*"

## Rapid Weed Growth — Minor

**Range:** Up to 60 feet (18.3 m) away, plus 10 feet (3.0 m) per level of experience.

**Duration:** 2 minutes per level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** Special.

**P.P.E.:** 8.

The caster will cause multiple weeds to suddenly grow from the ground, the wall, the cement floor, the deck of a ship, or anywhere he chooses. These weeds grow at a rate that seems instantaneous, but actually takes a second or two to fully grow. They will also cover an area of 20 square feet (1.85 meters square). The shape and size is at the discretion of the caster, but typically, a 4x5 foot (1.2x1.5 m) area, or even a 20x1 foot (6.1x0.3 m) area, but must be an equivalent to 20 square feet (1.85 meters square). The weeds appear to be a mixture of grass, vines, and actual weeds, with all being a dark green color. The weed patch also has colorful flowers. These flowers smell superb and are of bright and attractive colors. If a character attempts to walk through the patch of weeds, he will find himself entangled by them. A P.S. of 10 (plus one per level of experience of the caster) is necessary to free oneself from the weeds (using up 3 melee actions); otherwise, the character is caught for the duration if the spell. When the spell duration elapses, the weeds will disintegrate and disappear, leaving no marks or evidence of their existence behind.

**Note:** If using a knife or other bladed weapon, the character will free himself within 1D4 melee rounds.

## Level Five

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### Animal Speech

**Range:** Self or others by touch or up to 30 feet (9.1 m) away.

**Duration:** 4 minutes per level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** Standard.

**P.P.E.:** 15

This spell permits the caster to temporarily affect the voice box and vocal cords of another, preventing any "words" to be uttered but the sound of animals. Each time the character attempts to speak, a different animal sound comes out.

### Bounce

**Range:** Self, or others by touch.

**Duration:** 6 melee actions (1 minute and a half) per level of experience.

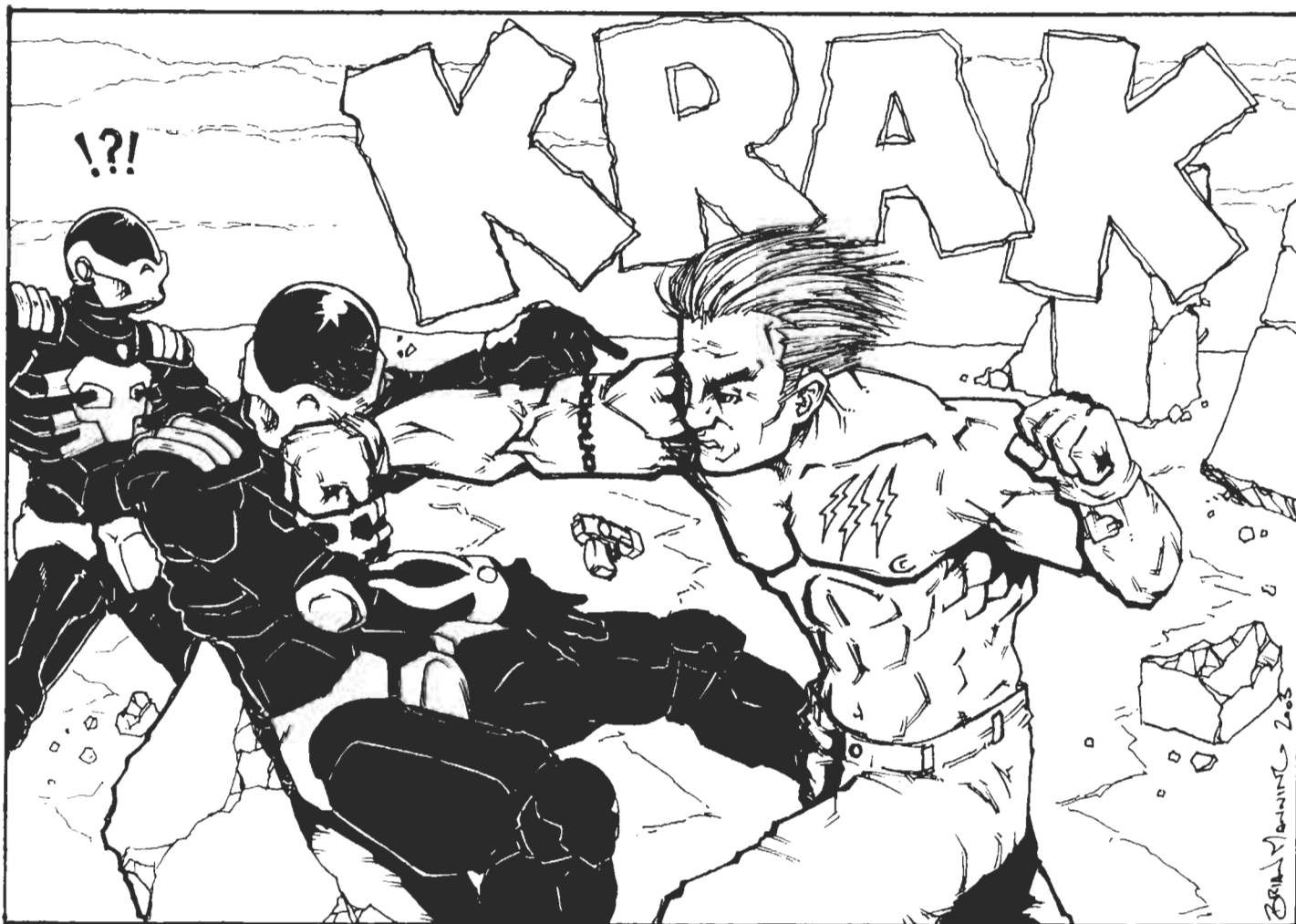
**Saving Throw:** None.

**P.P.E.:** 12

The spell creates a field around the affected character that is very reactant to physical contact. This being said, with each step the character makes, he begins to bounce like a super ball. The character can bounce faster and faster, to a speed of 25 and to a maximum height of 25 feet (7.6 m), plus 3 feet (0.9 m) per level of experience of the spell caster. The mage will have a 60% (+2% per level) chance to gain control of his movements, while another character will only have a 40% chance of getting the hang of it, and bounce in control. A failed roll means a character will bounce uncontrollably for 1D6+1 melee actions before *attempting* to gain control again (i.e. rolling again to gain control).

While bouncing, the character can direct his movement upon contact with a wall, ground, or obstacle (another person, a vehicle, a tree, etc.) in any direction. This is very strange, since he can direct his movement in a way that would defy physics. The act of bouncing makes him a difficult target. Characters attempting to shoot him suffer a -4 to their attack rolls, while physical attacks may only be done when the bouncing character is within melee combat, but the attacker will still suffer a -6 to his attack roll. The bouncing character can't attack accurately with a gun from the obvious constant movement, and will suffer a -10 (a wild shot with a -4 added to it). Physical attacks are nearly impossible (-6 and must be within melee combat range). But the character can perform a body hit or ram into other people. In this case, the character will have a +3 to hit plus the character's P.P. bonus.

If the character is hit by a physical attack or by a projectile (kinetic weapon, like a rail gun or a gun that fires slugs, a bullet, etc.) he will take the normal damage, but the attack will cause him to bounce uncontrollably, losing one melee attack to attempt to gain control of his movement (roll as per mentioned earlier). Typically, bouncing "away" involves flying backwards at a distance of 3 feet (0.9 m) per point of damage taken.



## Descriptive Combat

**Range:** Can be cast up to 60 feet (18.3 m) away, plus 5 feet (1.5 m) per level of experience; the spell affects a 30 foot (9.1 m) area +2 feet (0.6 m) per level of experience.

**Duration:** 2 minutes per level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** None.

**P.P.E.:** 12

All those within the affected area will notice something very different in the way that everyone fights. Bubbles appear momentarily describing each attack with a word or saying like, "Whack!" "Ouuuf!" "Zap!" "Ka-plow!" etc. The bubbles appear in convenient angles so that everyone can see and read them. The words also magically appear in a person's mother tongue. This spell doesn't alter anything in a battle, except confusing some combatants. The spell seems very popular in arenas or rings to "add" to the entertainment of the crowd.

## Fat Man In A Little Suit

**Range:** By touch or up to 30 feet (9.1 m) away +3 feet (0.9 m) per level of experience.

**Duration:** Two melee rounds (30 seconds) per level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** Standard, -3 if by touch.

**P.P.E.:** 10

The targeted character's clothing suddenly shrinks till it becomes very tight and uncomfortable. The character's movements will be limited from the tightness and he or she will walk funny. The character will suffer the following penalties: -1 melee action, -2 to parry and strike, -3 to dodge, the speed attribute is reduced by 6 to a minimum of 3 (from the wedgy), and -30% to prowl. The character can rip his clothes off to end the spell quicker, or may "tough" it out. This spell only affects normal clothing and won't affect armor, but will affect the clothes underneath the armor...

## Gullible

**Range:** Up to 25 feet (7.6 m) away, or within "normal" talking distance.

**Duration:** 2 minutes per level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** Standard.

**P.P.E.:** 15

*"You can't handle the truth!"*

The affected character becomes the most gullible person on the planet. Whatever he is told, he believes it. No matter how far-fetched it sounds, or unbelievable, he takes it as fact. If another character tries to correct him, this will only confuse him since everyone tells the truth.

## Heads-Up

**Range:** Any character up to 90 feet (27.4 m) away.

**Duration:** 1 minute per level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** Standard.

**P.P.E.:** 12

The affected character will inform his opponent (and anyone else nearby) of his next move, just before doing it, by yelling out a brief description of his intentions. The affected character does this without noticing it. In combat, this gives an opponent a bonus of +2 to parry and dodge. The character also informs whomever about the skills, task, or simple action he is doing. This WILL get annoying, especially when the affected character goes behind the bushes to do his business.

## Mask of Deceit

**Range:** Self only.

**Duration:** 12 minutes per level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** Everyone who encounters the disguised character gets a save vs magic, but is -4 to succeed. A successful save means the true features are seen, not the mask. However, those who don't really pay attention or care who the character might be, are automatically fooled by the deception (no chance to save).

**P.P.E.:** 16.

As per the *Mask of Deceit* spell described in the **Rifts** main book, page 176, or the **Rifts Book of Magic**, page 113, but the Ludicrous Mage can attempt to imitate a specific person's face at a mere 30% +5% chance per level of experience.

## They're all Gonna Laugh At You!

**Range:** One target up to 90 feet (27.4 m) away, plus 10 feet (3.0 m) per level of experience.

**Duration:** 30 seconds per every level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** Standard.

**P.P.E.:** 10

The affected target will suddenly become convinced that everyone around him will start to laugh at him when he attempts to do anything. This includes making a speech, talking in front of a group, performing a skill in the presence of others, whatever. The character will be so caught up with the fear of being laughed at that he will suffer a -10% at performing skills, loses initiative, -3 to strike with a gun or other firearm, -1 to strike (hand to hand), parry and dodge. The character will also refuse to speak in front of a crowd or give orders. The effects of the spell will only take place when there are at least three people present, otherwise the spell does not work.

## Toy Guns

**Range:** Any firearm up to 30 feet (9.1 m) away, plus 5 (1.5 m) feet per level of experience.

**Duration:** 1 minute per level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** None.

**P.P.E.:** 16

This spell permits the caster to turn a normal gun into a toy! The weapon will no longer fire but will do one/some of the following: cool sound effects when the trigger is pressed, a flag with the word "BANG!" comes out of the barrel, a harmless multi-color laser beam is fired instead, paint balls, water, or simply nothing happens. The weapon will retain its S.D.C. (or M.D.C.) But will have a plastic toy look to it. The spell will also affect any firearm that is part of a power armor, 'Borg, robot or robot vehicle. It will affect the missile launcher, but won't affect the missile itself since the missile is a different component (the toy missile launcher just won't fire the missile).

**Note:** If the gun shoots water, it can cause 1D4 point of damage to vampires or other similar creatures, but with the vampire's rapid regeneration, it will just make it angry.

## Turn Foods into Candy and Sweets

**Range:** 12 feet (3.7 m).

**Duration:** Instant/permanent.

**Saving Throw:** None.

**P.P.E.:** 10.

This transformation spell permits the Ludicrous Mage to change ordinary foods into candy, dessert, and other sweets. He can affect fifteen pounds of food (6.8 kilograms) per level of experience. The sweets can be anything from cakes to pies, lollipops, chocolate bars, whatever the mage desires. **Note:** Over use of the spell can cause characters to become a little more massive than originally created.

## Turn Water into Soda Pop

**Range:** 12 feet (3.7 m).

**Duration:** Instant/permanent.

**Saving Throw:** None.

**P.P.E.:** 12, or 15 for a specific type.

This transformation spell permits the Ludicrous Mage to change ordinary fresh water into soda pop. He can affect fifteen gallons (56.8 liters) per level of experience. The pop is of any type of flavor or type as per the caster's request (ginger ale, cook, cream soda, etc.). But to create a particular type of pop (like the popular Aunt Ginger's Strawberry Root Beer), the caster must spend more P.P.E. and must have tasted the pop within the last 6 hours (plus one hour per level of experience) to create it.

## Ugly Kid Joe

**Range:** Up to 60 feet (18.3 m) away.

**Duration:** 4 minutes per level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** Standard, but characters with a P.B. over 20 have a -3 to save.

**P.P.E.:** 10.

The affected character becomes basically... ugly! His or her P.B. is reduced to 1D4+2. This will shock people, since they were so beautiful not too long ago. Characters with a P.B. over 15 will be traumatized from the change, feeling useless and unwanted by anybody. "I'm just too ugly!" This spell has no effect on characters with a P.B. of 6 or lower.

**Note:** The god Backsmack once cast this spell on the Greek goddess of lust, Aphrodite, right before she met her blind date. I don't think I need to tell you what happened afterwards.

## Level Six

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### Bigger Guns

**Range:** Self only; but the fear of the weapon will be felt by those within 50 feet (15.2 m), plus 10 feet (3.0 m) per level, of the caster.

**Duration:** Two melee rounds per level of experience (30 seconds), plus one melee round (15 seconds) per level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** Special.

**P.P.E.:** 16.

The ultimate spell in weapon combat! Well, at least in intimidation... But it's a cool illusion spell. This spell will permit the caster to "draw" a much larger weapon, or multiple weapons, to outgun his opponent. From the character's back, or pocket, or underneath his jacket, he or she will reveal a super large weapon that looks evil and threatening. The sight of the weapon will cause people to fear the wielder of the weapon. Anyone within 50 feet (15.2 m), plus 10 feet (3.0 m) per level, must make a same versus a Horror Factor of 16 (plus 1 to H.F. at levels 3, 7, 11 and 14). With the caster's new armament, he will look like a living tank! Even Rambo would avoid the caster. The character can possess as many as 5 weapons, plus 3 weapons per level of experience. They will be held with both hands, strapped on his back, or anywhere. The Ludicrous Mage will give the illusion of out-gunning ANYBODY!

### Curse: Tourette Syndrome

**Range:** Others by touch only.

**Duration:** 15 minutes per level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** Standard.

**P.P.E.:** 18

The affected character suddenly suffers from Tourette Syndrome. He feels the need to express oneself with vulgar language. Basically, the character can't stop cursing or saying the worst possible insults. He can attempt to hold it back but for each attempt, he must make a standard saving throw and the longest period of time one can hold back is 1D4 melee rounds (and suffers a -5% to skills and -2 to actions since he is concentrating on not speaking). Failing means the character screams out his thoughts.

### Paint Ball Gun

**Range:** One weapon up to 20 feet (6.1 m) away, or two by touch; range on the enchanted weapons varies by type.

**Duration:** The weapon enchantment will last one minute per level of experience, the paint ball will last 3 minutes per level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** None for enchanting the weapons; targets may dodge the paint balls.

**P.P.E.:** 20

The caster can enchant any normal gun (including projectile weapons, energy weapons, military weapons, etc.). The enchantment will prevent the weapon from firing as per normal, but will shoot an alternative form of ammunition. The weapon will fire paint balls! Each paint ball pellet will pinch, causing some damage which will vary by weapon type. A target hit by a pellet will find himself covered by a highly reflective paint substance. Each paint ball covers a 5 foot (1.5 m) area, and can't be washed off by any means until the effects of the paint wears out (3 minutes per level of the caster). Colors vary from red, blue, or yellow, to other fluorescent colors.

#### Pistols:

**Range:** 50 feet (15.2 m) +15 feet (4.6 m) per level of experience.

**Damage:** One paint pellet causes 1 point of damage.

**Payload:** 4 shots +1 shot per level of experience.

#### Rifles:

**Range:** 100 feet (30.5 m) +50 feet (15.2 m) per level of experience.

**Damage:** One paint ball causes 1 point of damage, bursts of 5 causes 1D4 damage.

**Payload:** 15 shots +5 shots per level of experience.

#### Machine-Guns:

**Range:** 100 feet (30.5 m) +25 feet (7.6 m) per level of experience.

**Damage:** One paint pellet causes 1 point of damage, bursts of 5 causes 1D4 damage, bursts of 10 causes 1D6+2 damage, and a burst of 20 causes 3D6 damage.

**Payload:** 20 shots +10 shots per level of experience.

**Note:** Bonuses to use the weapon remain unchanged; it's as per W.P. skill.

### Passive Resistance

**Range:** Any creature up to 30 feet (9.1 m) away.

**Duration:** 5 minutes per level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** Standard, but demons and supernatural creatures have a -3 to save.

**P.P.E.:** 16

This spell was designed to make giant, ugly, mean creatures to become cuddly monsters that won't harm a fly. Any character affected by this spell will not attack another person for any reason, but if in a battle, he will gain a +7 to parry and dodge. The character is most likely to talk, chitchat, or discuss the situation with his opponent, but never strike back

### Reduce Self (6 inches)

**Range:** Self only.

**Duration:** 15 minutes per level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** None.

**P.P.E.:** 18.

As per the *Reduce Self (6 inches)* spell described in the *Rifts* main book, page 177, or the *Rifts Book of Magic*, page 113.



## Spring Action Boots

**Range:** Self, or others up to 30 feet (9.1 m) away.

**Duration:** 30 seconds (two melee actions) per level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** None.

**P.P.E.:** 20

Under the character's feet, a set of springs will appear. This will permit the character to leap higher, as well as to leap across obstacles. The character can leap a maximum height of 30 feet (9.1 m) plus 3 feet (0.9 m) per level of experience, and a maximum distance of 60 feet (18.3 m) plus 5 feet (1.5 m) per level.

## Talk Back

**Range:** Mechanical or electronic equipment up to 10 feet (3.0 m) away per level of experience.

**Duration:** One melee round per level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** None.

**P.P.E.:** 17

The caster can cause normal mechanical or electronic equipment to gain a mind of its own. The instrument becomes conscious, but very argumentative and uncooperative. It will refuse to give into the demands of the user, and it will not perform as requested. The spell affects computers, high-tech weapons that use electronic parts (such as lasers, energy guns, etc.), vehicles, power armor, and robot vehicles. It affects normal robots, but not those that have developed a "consciousness" such as ARCHIE 3 or his creations.

**Note:** Characters who can mentally link oneself with a computer or electrical equipment (as per the *Telemechanics* psionic or other similar abilities) will have difficulty to maintain control of the electronic equipment and therefore suffer a -30% to use it.

## Thinking Out Loud

**Range:** Self or others by touch or up to 30 feet (9.1 m) away +3 feet (0.9 m) per level of experience.

**Duration:** 4 minutes per level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** Standard.

**P.P.E.:** 16

The affected character may no longer think in his mind. All inner monologue is said out loud and without holding back anything. The character may attempt to lower his volume to a murmur, but that requires concentration (-5% to skills and -2 to actions). Other magic users that require chanting to perform a spell will find this annoying and obnoxious since their incantation is said out loud.

## Level Seven

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### Cat Got Your Tongue

**Range:** Self or others by touch or up to 30 feet (9.1 m) away.

**Duration:** 4 minutes per level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** Standard.

**P.P.E.:** 20

This spell permits the caster to temporarily remove the tongue of another, preventing any words to be pronounced. The character is incomprehensible, even though he may still utter sounds.

### Create Tar

**Range:** Up to 60 feet (18.3 m) away; affects an area of 10 feet (3.0 m) in radius +3 feet (0.9 m) per level of experience.

**Duration:** One minute per level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** Special.

**P.P.E.:** 30

The ground will be coated with tar! The tar will be about two feet (0.6 m) deep (plus 3 inches/7.6 cm per level of experience), impairing all movement if anyone is in it. Reduce speed by  $\frac{3}{4}$  and -4 to all actions involving movement (strike, parry and dodge, but not those using a firearm or energy weapon). If a character falls into the tar, it will take one full melee round to get back up. If someone sets fire onto the tar, it will burst into an S.D.C. flame causing 2D6 damage per melee round.

**Note:** Hover vehicles are unaffected; levitation spells and psionics can remove a character from the tar. Giants, robot vehicles, and other large characters of over 25 feet (7.6 m) tall suffer half the penalties. Smaller characters, less than 4 feet (1.2 m) tall, are fully impaired by the spell.

### Curse: Dirty Goat

**Range:** Self or others by touch.

**Duration:** 30 minutes per level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** Standard.

**P.P.E.:** 25

The affected character will be cursed to be dirty and smelly for the duration of the spell. We aren't just talking about a bad smell here; this is *beyond* B.O. This is the worst odor one can ever smell or has ever smelled before. It's so strong you could almost taste it... There is no way to wash off the filth, nor can the character hide the smell with perfumes. Whatever clothes or armor or other article of clothing the character wears for more than 5 minutes, he will transmit the awful smell to it and it will also give off the smell for two days. Those within 10 feet (3.0 m) of the infected character must roll against their P.E. attribute to determine if they get sick. Saving successfully means they haven't thrown-up their lunch, but it's only a matter of time. Failing means the character loses control and it all comes out. No matter what, the affected character will be avoided at all cost!

## Magnetic Personality

**Range:** One target up to 120 feet (36.6 m) away.

**Duration:** One minute per level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** Standard.

**P.P.E.:** 22.

The affected character will find himself surrounded by a strong magnetic force field. This field seems to be generated from the character's skin. As a result, any metallic item will be attracted to him. This means that any small item less than one pound/0.45 kg (such as glasses, utensils, paper clips, etc.) within 30 feet (9.1 m) from the character will be attracted towards the character to the point that the items will literally fly through the air to "connect" themselves onto the character. If the character touches any metallic item, he will be permanently connected to the object, until the spell duration elapses. The magnetic force is too strong to separate the two. The character can attempt it, but putting too much force will harm him. It requires a combined P.S. of 50 to separate from the metallic object, plus the character will suffer 3D6 points of damage from having the items "ripped" off (not recommended). In addition, the magnetic field will attract metallic projectiles fired towards the character. This affects all metallic bullets, arrows, throwing knives, etc., but has no effect on lasers or accelerated particles. Any "shot" directed at the character will have a +4 to hit; although any shot directed to another target within 30 feet (9.1 m) of the magnetized character will suffer a -5 to hit. This is because the projectile was deviated from its path by the "magnetic anomaly." There is a 20% chance that the shot will deviate enough to actually hit the affected character.

## Metamorphosis: Animal

**Range:** Self or others by touch.

**Duration:** 25 minutes per level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** None.

**P.P.E.:** 30

As per the *Metamorphosis: Animal* spell described in the *Rifts* main book, page 179, or the *Rifts Book of Magic*, page 117.

## Play It Again, Sam

**Range:** Up to 50 feet (15.2 m) away.

**Duration:** One song per every other level of experience; typically one song is between 2 to 5 minutes, but some are longer.

**Saving Throw:** None.

**P.P.E.:** 25

At the caster's request, a band will appear to play a song chosen by the caster. This band is usually a small group of 3 to 8 individuals (1D6+2 members) that will play the requested song. The song is limited to the mage's knowledge, they will not play a song which the caster does not know or has never heard of. The band will appear anywhere, coming from around a corner, an alleyway, come out of a nearby building, out of the top of a garbage bin, coming out of a taxi or bus, or even in a puff of smoke. They appear *anywhere*. The band will also follow the

caster and stay at a distance limited by the spell (up to 50 feet/15.2 m away). The band members will be of any appearance chosen by the caster (you could have a group of Elvies performing). All band members are a magical incarnation, making them invulnerable to psionic attacks, strong versus spells (take half damage only), and they will seem to be protected by a force field surrounding them (75 S.D.C. or 50 M.D.C.). Once the field is down and the band members are hit (each member having 6 S.D.C.), they will disappear. The group won't leave until they've played all the requested songs. You just can't get rid of them! They will play one song for every other level of the caster, 1 song at level one, 2 songs at level three, 3 songs at level five, etc. Ludicrous Mages love this spell when they're performing or at a karaoke bar.

## Summon Personalized Rain Storm

**Range:** Others up to 120 feet (36.6 m) away, plus 10 feet (3.0 m) per level of experience.

**Duration:** 2 minutes per level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** Standard, at -2.

**P.P.E.:** 25

The affected character will find that a thundercloud will hover between 4 to 12 feet (1.2 to 3.7 m) over his head. The cloud will send a cold rain pouring down onto the character and will follow him everywhere he goes (even indoors or inside a vehicle) and will make some thundering noise, but to a lower tone compared to the real thing. Whatever the character is wearing *will* be drenched and the character will look sad or depressed like if he just received the worst news anybody can ever receive. A successful save means the small cloud doesn't stay with the target and can easily be avoided by taking a step or two.

**Note:** This spell can be cast onto a vampire, but the Ludicrous Mage will have no enjoyment by doing so. If cast onto a vampire (or a similar creature), it will suffer 5D6 points of damage per melee round.

## Turn Water into Liquor

**Range:** 12 feet (3.7 m).

**Duration:** Instant/permanent.

**Saving Throw:** None.

**P.P.E.:** 15, or 25 for a specific type.

This transformation spell permits the Ludicrous Mage to change ordinary fresh water into good old liquor. He can affect up to ten gallons (37.9 liters) per level of experience. The liquor can be of any generic type as per the caster's request (whisky, gin, etc.). But to create a particular type of liquor (like Bob's Great Vodka), the caster must spend more P.P.E. and must have tasted the liquor within the last 3 hours (plus one hour per level of experience) to create it.

## Unlimited Ammo

**Range:** One weapon by touch.

**Duration:** Two melee rounds (30 seconds) per level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** Standard at -2, all shots are dodged as normal.

**P.P.E.:** 24

This fun illusion spell will permit the caster to turn his normal firearm or energy gun into a weapon with unlimited ammunition! The character will be able to fire the shots of the weapon faster to the point that he'll be able to fire the equivalent of an entire clip in one melee action. All shots are believed to be real and cause imaginary damage. Characters hit by these shots will believe to have been hit and will fall unconscious when they have taken enough damage. Those that save versus the illusion will know that the shots are false, but will still be weirded out by the heavy firing and explosions. The caster can fire one actual shot from the weapon, with a number of "fake" additional shots, which will confuse the hell of the guy that got hit by "imaginary" shots. The spell affects any firearm, energy gun, rail guns, bazookas, grenade launchers, and even mini-missile launchers, but can't be used on larger missile launchers or bows and crossbows.

## Level Eight

### Create Dough-Boy Golem

**Range:** Touch.

**Duration:** Two years per level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** None.

**P.P.E.:** 200

The spell caster can create a Dough-Boy Golem that will obey his every command. Similar to the Create Clown Golem, this spell technically isn't a ritual, but requires components. Thus, the Dough-Boy Golem has a limited life span rather than living until destroyed.

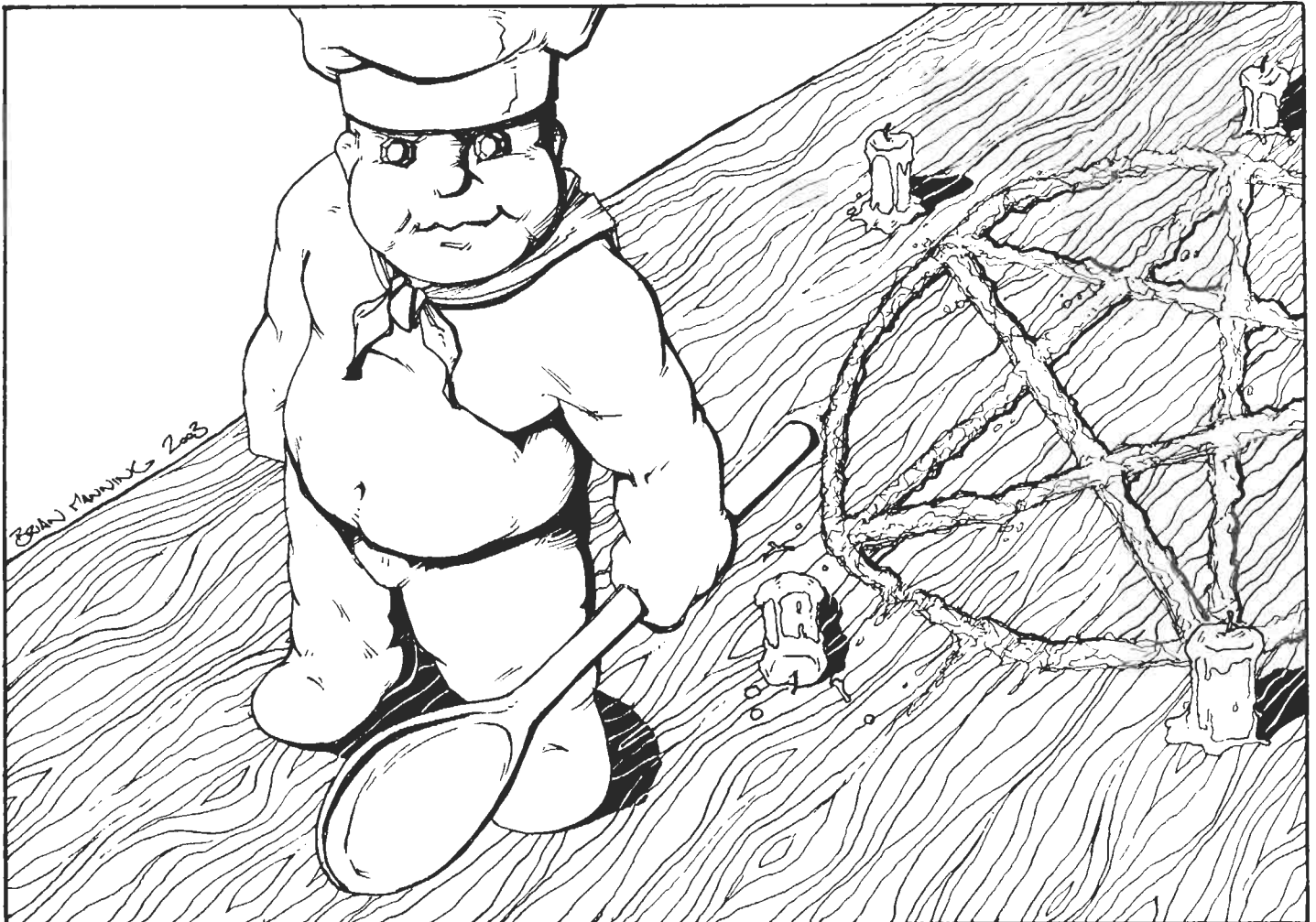
For the spell caster to have his own Dough-Boy creation, he must follow the following steps: First, the mage must draw a pentagram in whip cream. Secondly, he/she sculpts the golem's humanoid shape from 2 eggs, 4 cups of flour (white or brown), 3 tablespoons of sugar, 4 cups of water, one teaspoon of vanilla, a handful of sweets (can be any, like sprinkles, jujubes, M&M's, cookie crumbs, etc.). The hole must be well mixed either by hand, or with a mixer. Thirdly, he/she must place two small gems for eyes (the gems must have a minimum value of 100 credits or more). Fourth, the caster must place the heart into the "body." The heart is a silver teaspoon about 3 inches long, and with a value of 75 credits or more. Finally, the mage casts the spell to bring his creation to life! The Dough-Boy Golem will obey the Ludicrous Mage's every command. It will also be a loud talker and will find philosophical debates interesting and gratifying.

#### Dough-Boy Golem Stats:

**Humor Factor:** 8, it's cute, walks funny, and is made out of dough!

**Height:** Between 6 inches and one foot (15 to 30 cm).

**Weight:** Roughly one pound (0.45 kg).



**Attributes:** I.Q.: equal to the mage's attribute, M.E. 9, M.A. 6, P.S.: 4, P.P.: 20, P.E.: 8, P.B.: 9, Spd: 4, but can reach a top speed of 12 for 10 minutes.

**S.D.C.:** 15+2 per level of its maker (it can't become M.D.C., it's made out of dough!).

**P.P.E.:** 30 (but the golem can't use it.)

**Skills and Special Abilities:** Knows all languages at 80%, literate in all at 68%, can also write in all at 45%, Interrogation Techniques (45%), Intelligence (42%), Escape Artist (60%), Lore: Religion 45%, Mythology (45%), Art (50%), History (45%), and it can cook, gourmet style, at 97% (including multiple exotic meals). The Dough-Boy Golem does not need to breathe nor does it require nourishment. It is also very agile for its size.

**Combat:** Three attacks per melee round. Physical damage does 1 S.D.C. of damage, but can use forks, knives, and other utensils as spears or lances. Very quick and agile, +5 to dodge (this includes P.P. bonus) and +4 to initiative.

**Vulnerabilities:** Takes double damage from fire (unless it was cooked first, then it will take ½ damage from fire and double damage from cold)! Also, it loves to talk. It doesn't shut up! If challenged in philosophical debates, it will go on forever. Even if it means it must ignore its current duties...

## Create Mini-Me (or Mini-You)

**Range:** Up to 20 feet (6.1 m) away, but must touch the person if making miniatures of another.

**Duration:** 12 hours per level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** None.

**P.P.E.:** 50

The caster can create a replica (or a magical clone) of himself or of another person. The miniature will have every resemblance, every power, and all abilities of the original, but only one third the size and strength. The miniature will also be at one third the level of the character, and will have every skill, magic and power at 1/3 the level. The mini version will also have 1/3 the Hit Points, S.D.C., P.P.E., I.S.P., or M.D.C. if in a Mega-Damage environment. Often, the miniature is mistaken for the mage's child, or younger brother.

## Look Cool Factor

**Range:** Self or other up to 90 feet (27.4 m) away.

**Duration:** One melee "action" per each three levels of experience and the caster can hold his LCF action up to one melee round per level of experience. Thus, a 3<sup>rd</sup> level Ludicrous Mage can perform 2 LCF actions anytime during the next 3 melee rounds. A 7<sup>th</sup> level mage can perform 3 LCF actions within the next 7 melee rounds. Each LCF action is used in conjunction with a strike, parry, dodge, or other action.

**Saving Throw:** Standard to those seeing the LCF action.

**P.P.E.:** 22

The LCF spell permits the caster, or another character, to perform an LCF action. This "Look Cool Factor" action is a gesture that causes everyone who sees it to stop for a second to admire the feat by saying, "cool!" or "amazing!" This action can be an impressive strike, a slick parry, a fabulous dodge, or any other

action that just looks cool. All characters within 15 feet (4.6 m) of the caster, friend or foe, must make a save versus magic roll, and failure means the character stopped to admire the stunning feat, losing his next melee action. A successful save means the feat just wasn't impressive enough.

**Note:** The player must declare that his next "action" is an LCF action. He then performs it as usual, with no modifications to bonuses. Only if the action was successful will the LCF go into effect, otherwise, the character uses up one LCF action for nothing.

## Metamorphosis: Human

**Range:** Self or others by touch.

**Duration:** 25 minutes per level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** None.

**P.P.E.:** 45.

As per the *Metamorphosis: Human* spell described in the *Rifts* main book, page 180, or the *Rifts Book of Magic*, page 122.

## Metamorphosis: Insect

**Range:** Self or others by touch.

**Duration:** 25 minutes per level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** None.

**P.P.E.:** 50.

As per the *Metamorphosis: Insect* spell described in the *Rifts* main book, page 182, or the *Rifts Book of Magic*, page 129.

## Metamorphosis: Pink, Fluffy Bunny

**Range:** Self, or others by touch.

**Duration:** 30 minutes per level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** Standard save at -3.

**P.P.E.:** 40

The Ludicrous Mage can turn himself or others into a pink, fluffy bunny. The transformed character will retain all Hit Points and S.D.C. (M.D.C. if a Mega-Damage creature), powers, skills, and abilities. Even movement, speech, and psionics are retained. But **any** physical damage cause by the character will be S.D.C. as per a P.S. of 6 (even for M.D. creatures). This, on the other hand, does not affect the lifting capabilities of the character, only physical damage. All equipment, clothes, and armor the character originally had on him will still retain their properties, but will have toy-like appearance. Once the items are removed from the character or dropped, they will instantly be turned back to normal. The affected character will look completely harmless, since he's now a pink fluffy bunny. (**Note:** I don't believe an actual physical description is needed to describe a pink fluffy bunny, just look in your youngest sister's room for a more visual description.)

On the bad side, performing skills that require the use of one's hands is done at a -20% penalty, since the character's hands no longer have functional fingers (just look at any bunny, tell me if you were turned into one of them you'd be able to easily use a keyboard!). This being said, the character will suffer a -2 to use ancient weapons and a -4 for modern weapons. Once

the character is turned, children will be attracted to this big toy just so they can play with it. Roll the following to find out how many children rush to play with the transformed character: 1D6 if in a village, 3D6 if in a town, 1D4x10 if in a city. G.M.s are free to augment or lower the amount of children as needed. This spell doesn't affect characters in power armor and robot vehicles, nor will it affect robots.



## Miniaturize Weapon

**Range:** One weapon by touch only.

**Duration:** One minute per level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** None.

**P.P.E.:** 40

This powerful enchantment will reduce the size of any weapon! The final miniaturized size will be useful for any 6- to 8-inch (15 to 20 cm) characters (like some Faeries or used in conjunction with the *Reduce Self* spell). The enchanted weapon will retain all of its abilities and powers, but damage and range will be affected. Reduce the weapon's range by a factor of 10. This means a gun that fires up to 300 feet (91.4 m) away will now have a range of 30 feet (9.1 m). The same is with rune or magic weapons that cast spells. Damage is a bit different. In an S.D.C. world, with or S.D.C. weapons, damage is reduced by a factor of 20! This means that some weapons will not cause any damage to some structures. For example, a rifle that causes 4D6 damage will do a mere 4D6/20 (or 2D6/10). Thus, to cause at least one point of damage, the character must roll a 20 and above (round downwards in the case of fractions). In an M.D.C. environment or with M.D. weapons, the weapon will cause the same damage, but in S.D.C. The high energy will still be lethal,

but at a smaller scale. For example, an M.D. rifle that causes 4D6 M.D. damage will only cause 4D6 S.D.C. damage.

## Level Nine

### Balloon Flight (Superior)

**Range:** Up to 30 feet (9.1 m) away.

**Duration:** Five minutes per level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** None.

**P.P.E.:** 40, 60 for double the duration.

Similar to the *Balloon Flight* spell, this more powerful version will permit the caster to create a giant hot-air balloon. The balloon is magically formed up to 30 feet (9.1 m) away, and will hover 3 feet (0.9 m) above the ground before lift-off. The caster can mentally direct it as he sees fit, but must be on the balloon, otherwise, it's all up to the wind. The maximum speed without a slight wind or going against the wind is 40 mph (64 km/h) or as fast as the wind is blowing, but in the latter case the flyer must go in the direction the wind is blowing. Maximum altitude is 9,000 feet (2,743 m). The hot-air balloon will have an S.D.C. of 35 plus 3 S.D.C. per level of experience, or 14 M.D.C. plus 2 M.D.C. per level of experience, and a maximum lift of 400 lbs (180 kg) plus 50 lbs (22.5 kg) per level of experience.

**Note:** The caster will instinctively know when the duration will elapse. As a result, he can re-cast the spell to prolong the hot-air balloon's flight time and this technique will repair any damage done to the balloon.

### Curse: Theme Song

**Range:** Others by touch only.

**Duration:** 24 hours per level of experience upon creation.

**Saving Throw:** Standard, but evil characters have a -2 to save.

**P.P.E.:** 50

Very similar to the *Create Theme Song* spell, but the cursed version has a more deviant application. An affected character suffers from hearing a theme song play all the time. Each time the character enters a room, leaves a room, walks down a street, is about to enter a "combat" situation, does something interesting, speaks for the first time, or at the beginning of any action sequence, the theme song will begin to play. The theme song itself is very similar to the *Create Theme Song* spell, but has been imposed by the caster to do the following: to make the person stand out. Anyone hearing this dark and treacherous music will immediately doubt, distrust, and dislike the affected character. The common reaction is: "Listen to the music... He's evil!"

### Rapid Weed Growth — Superior

**Range:** Up to 30 feet (9.1 m) away.

**Duration:** 3 minutes per level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** None.

**P.P.E.:** 45.

Similar to the *Rapid Weed Growth — Minor* spell, only a more powerful version of the spell. In this case, the caster creates one giant weed, or beanstalk, of immense size. The caster



may only cast this spell onto the actual ground. Cement, rock, or desert sands will not permit the spell to work. Moments after the Ludicrous Mage casts the spell, the weed will begin to grow. It will take two melee rounds, plus one melee round per each level of experience before, it reaches “full maturity.” Its maximum height is 60 feet (18.3 m) plus 15 feet (4.6 m) per level of experience. The giant weed also possesses multiple leaves that make it fairly simple to climb it, granting those with the Climbing skill a +20% (and those without the skill can climb the weed at 40%). The stem is rather resilient, possessing 100 S.D.C. plus 20 S.D.C. per level of experience; or 75 M.D.C., plus 15 M.D.C. per level of experience. The stem is also strong enough to support the weight of power armor and robot vehicles, but will snap when the weed is supporting a total weight of 2,500 pounds (1,125 kg), plus 300 pounds (135 kg) per level of experience.

## Remove Theme Song

**Range:** Self or others by touch.

**Duration:** Permanent.

**Saving Throw:** Standard to those not willing to lose their theme song.

**P.P.E.:** 40

This spell permits the character to remove any traces of a theme song from a person affected by the *Create Theme Song* spell. If the caster is removing a theme song which he has put onto a target, this spell will automatically remove it. To remove a theme song implanted by another Ludicrous Mage, this spell will have a success ratio of 60% +2% per level of the spell caster. A failed roll means the theme song was not removed and no second attempt can be performed for the next 12 hours.

This spell can also remove the effects of the *Curse: Theme Song* spell at a success ratio of 30% +3% per level of the spell caster -1% per level of the curse spell (rounded down). For example, a 5<sup>th</sup> level Ludicrous Mage attempts to remove the theme song spell put on his comrade by a 7<sup>th</sup> level mage. The success ratio is 38%; 30% +15% (5x3%) -7% (7x1%). A failed roll means that the theme song is not removed and no second attempt can be performed for the next 24 hours. In addition, the curse is extended by five days!

## Level Ten

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### Create Theme Song

**Range:** Self or others by touch.

**Duration:** The theme song will permanently be part of the character, as if it was injected as part of his or her genes.

**Saving Throw:** None, the targeted character **must** be willing to receive the theme song or else the spell will have no effect.

**P.P.E.:** 80, 32 to alter an existing theme song.

This is the most wanted spell among Ludicrous Mages. For a small price, the spell permits its caster to create a theme song unto a target (self or another) that will follow him around wherever the mage goes. The targeted character must be willing to receive a theme song, otherwise the spell won't work. To impose a theme song onto someone, see the *Curse: Theme Song*

spell. The song is magically played so that everyone can enjoy it. The volume is the equivalent of a hand radio (stereo surround sound), which can be clearly heard up to 200 feet (61 m) away (outside) or the immediate room next to the one the enchanted character is in. The typical length of the song is at least 5 seconds long, but can range up to 45 seconds to two minutes. Popular theme songs are taken from old TV shows (like the original “Batman”) or others from the 70's or 80's (like “The A-Team,” or even “Shaft”). Generally, the theme songs are TV or movie oriented (like the “Alfred Hitchcock Theme”). Ultimately, the style or particular song will be up to the caster to decide, which can range from comical to uplifting, dark to evil, fast paced to action oriented, mysterious to tense, catchy to *you can't get it out of your mind* kind of deal.

As mentioned before, the theme song comes with a price. The targeted character will lose a small amount of P.P.E., which is believed to be the cause of why the theme song is “permanently” part of the character. Ludicrous Mages will temporarily lose 3 P.P.E. per theme song while non-Ludicrous Mages will lose 4 P.P.E. per theme song. This amount of P.P.E. is put aside and the character has no access to. But, when the theme song is removed by the *Remove Theme Song* spell, the character will gain access to his lost P.P.E.

When the spell is cast, the mage will select the appropriate song for himself or another. The song will now become a permanent part of that person. The spell leaves a magical trace or signature (some say it's an addition to the character's genes) that permits him or others to play the theme song. See the spell *Play/Replay Theme Song* for a description on how to hear one's song.

If the caster so wishes, the mage can alter or change the theme song by re-casting the spell but the P.P.E. cost is almost half. It is harder to first create a theme song than to change or edit it. A mage can always have multiple theme songs to fit the appropriate situation, like a roaming theme, a combat theme, or a victory theme. In these situations, the caster will need to cast the spell at full P.P.E. cost to “add” new theme songs and most sacrifice additional P.P.E.

**Note:** To fully remove a theme song from a target, see the *Remove Theme Song* spell description. Also, see the *Play/Replay Theme Song* spell for a list on when, how and bonuses a character gets from hearing his (or other) theme songs. In addition, any character intoned with his own P.P.E. (i.e. magic O.C.C.'s and creatures that can use magic) will “instinctually” know how to use the *Play/Replay Theme Song* spell until he/she loses their theme song (see spell for description).

### Metamorphosis: Animation

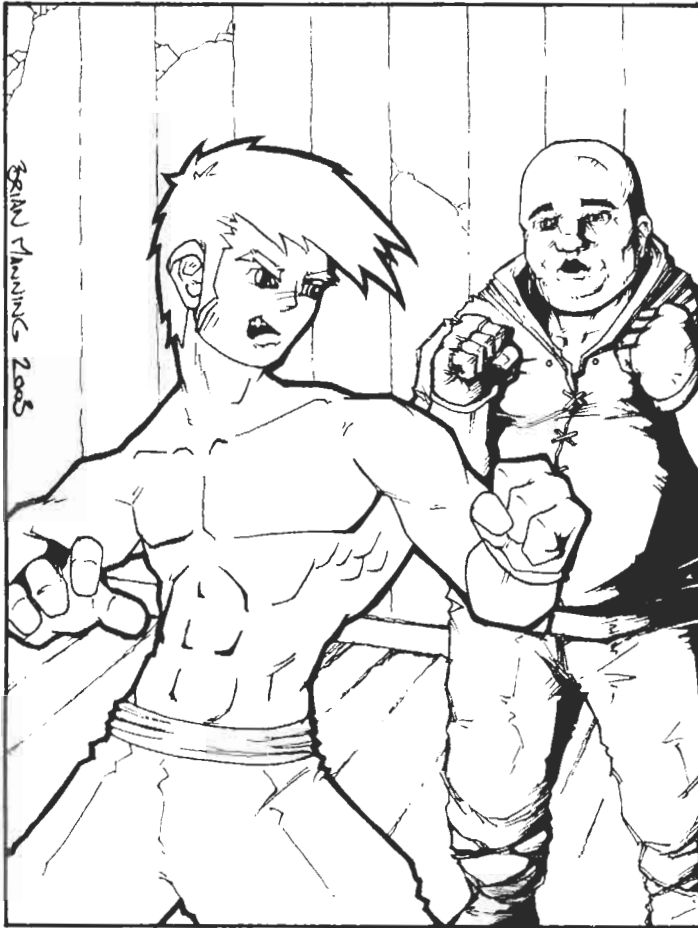
**Range:** Self, or others by touch at a higher P.P.E. cost.

**Duration:** 25 minutes per level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** None.

**P.P.E.:** 60 (85 to affect others)

The character will be transformed from flesh and blood to a cartoon version of himself. This can be confusing when others see the transformed character, since it isn't a common occurrence to see a “live” animated character in front of your eyes. The transformed character can interact as normal, but might not know he has been transformed. If you need a better idea of how



## Metamorphosis: Monster

**Range:** Self or others by touch.

**Duration:** 25 minutes per level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** None.

**P.P.E.:** 90.

Similar to the *Metamorphosis: Superior* spell described in the *Rifts* main book, page 183, or the *Rifts Book of Magic*, page 135, but has some differences. First, the spell enables the caster to transform himself into any real (or imagined), living monster, D-Bee, supernatural creature or demon. The mage does not possess any of its powers or abilities (other than Horror Factor) and only retains his own normal human abilities (I.Q., memory, attributes, Hit Points, S.D.C., skills, etc.). A character other than the practitioner of magic can be transformed, but will remain as a monstrosity until the spell's duration elapses or the mage who invoked it cancels it.

## Level Eleven

### Metamorphosis: Giant

**Range:** Self or others by touch.

**Duration:** 20 minutes per level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** None.

**P.P.E.:** 100.

The spell is similar to the *Giant* spell described in *Rifts Federation of Magic*, page 150, or the *Rifts Book of Magic*, page 133, but has multiple differences. The character becomes a larger version of himself, increasing his size till he's 25 feet (7.6 m) tall! All of the character's normal clothing also grows to fit his new build, but armor, equipment and weapons will remain the same. The character's strength will increase from the size change, but he will become slower from being bigger. The Ludicrous Mage will use the spell to make himself or others really stand out, or just want to make a point. When the spell time elapses, the character is returned to his normal size, and suffers from dizziness for 2D4 minutes.

**Note:** The spell *only* affects humanoids that are naturally less than 10 feet (3.0 m) in height. It has no effect on giants, supernatural creatures, demons, and characters in full body or heavy armor (or environmental armor).

#### Bonuses:

- Hit Points and S.D.C. are increased by x3 (x2 and becomes M.D.C. in a Mega-Damage environment; or add 50% if already an M.D.C. creature).
- P.S. is increased by 50%! But remains normal (does not become supernatural) and the P.P. is reduced by 25% and Spd. by 20%.
- Attacks per melee round are reduced by two since the character is much larger and slower then before.
- +1 to strike and +3 to parry.
- Add 2000 pounds (900 kg) to weight.
- (-2) to dodge, and opponents have a +1 to strike from character's the huge size.

the result of the spell looks like, think of the movie "*Who framed Roger Rabbit?*" or "*Space Jam.*" All weapons, armor and equipment being held or worn by the character will also become a cartoon version of itself. This is a rare metamorphosis spells since it can still affect those who possess innate transformation abilities (dragons, vampires, etc.) who are normally unaffected by metamorphosis spells. The transformed character retains ALL of his innate powers and skills, and the only difference is that he looks like a cartoon character. The animated style is left to the discretion of the spell caster, but here are some ideas:

**Basic Animation:** The character only looks like an animation, but all features are drawn to the exact detail.

**Black and White:** The character has no colors, except different shades of grays.

**Bright Colors:** The character is made out of vibrant colors that really stand out.

**Toony:** The animation exaggerates the character's features, i.e. large head, hands, feet, small body, etc.

**Japanimation:** Basically the animation makes the character look like if he has long legs and a slightly larger head. Female characters will have exaggerated... upper body muscles (yes... that sounds about right!).

**Note:** This spell doesn't affect characters in power armor, robots and robot vehicles.

## Level Twelve

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### Create Marshmallow Golem

**Range:** Touch.

**Duration:** Six months per level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** None.

**P.P.E.:** 700

The spell caster can create a Marshmallow Golem that will obey his every command. Similar to the Create Clown Golem, this spell technically *isn't* a ritual, but requires components. Thus, the Marshmallow Golem has a limited life span rather than living until destroyed.

For the spell caster to have his own Marshmallow creation, he must follow the following steps: First, the mage must draw a pentagram in white icing sugar. Secondly, he sculpts the golem's humanoid shape from 50 pounds (22.5 kg) of marshmallows. Thirdly, he must place two gems for eyes (the gems must have a minimum value of 1,000 credits or more). Fourth, the caster must give the golem an article of clothing. This could be a scarf, a jacket, pair of pants, something that will make the golem stand out (it's not like a giant marshmallow creature doesn't already stand out). Fifthly, he must place the heart into the "body." The heart is basically a stick. Any stick. Just like the ones used to cook marshmallows on top of a fire. But the stick must be decorated with necklaces and pearls. These decorations must have a value of no less than 1,000 credits. Finally, the mage casts the spell to bring his creation to life.

After the caster has finished casting the spell, the enchantment will cause the small marshmallow sculpture to grow until reaching its appropriate size. The sculpture grows because the magic energizes the marshmallows which suddenly mutate and double till the marshmallow sculpture becomes a giant. Once the golem is fully formed, it will fist burp, or cry (like every newborn), then call for his mother, the Ludicrous Mage that created it. The golem will then stand and is now a new giant pet ready to play and explore the world, as per the caster's request. **Note:** Only one Ludicrous Mage may be identified as "mother," even if multiple mages participated in the spell.

#### Marshmallow Golem Stats:

**Horror Factor:** 16 (consider this a Horror Factor if the golem is approaching a character in anger, or perhaps just approaching).

**Height:** Anywhere between 18 feet (5.5 m) and a maximum of 20 feet (6.1 m), plus 3 feet (0.9 m) per level of experience, but most casters always maximize the size. It's more fun that way!

**Note:** If the golem's heart (that decorated stick) has a value of 56,000 credits or more, add 18 feet (5.5 m) to the creature's height.

**Weight:** 2 to 12 tons. Now that's a lot of marshmallows!

**Attributes:** I.Q.: 5, P.S.: 30, P.P.: 6, P.E.: 13, Spd: 16 (it can't run, but has large strides); all others are standard.

**S.D.C.:** 150 +18 per level of its maker (or 70 M.D.C. +10 per level of experience). If the golem's heart (that decorated stick) has a value of 38,000 credits or more, double the creature's normal S.D.C./M.D.C.

**P.P.E.:** 85 (but the golem can't use it).

**Skills and Special Abilities:** None whatsoever! It basically walks around with a smile on its face. It doesn't really know why people run away when he's walking into the streets. It doesn't talk, other than calling his creator "mommy," but does giggle, laughs and burps from time to time. Although you could say that not needing to breathe or nourishment is an ability.

**Combat:** Four attacks per melee round. Physical damage as per supernatural P.S. damage, but a stomp attack does 1D4x10 S.D.C. (or 4D6 M.D.). Sitting on someone is futile for any S.D.C. or minor M.D.C. creature, and I don't care who it is!!

**Vulnerabilities:** Takes double damage from fire! In addition, due to its huge size, attackers will have a +1 to strike while using a firearm (gun, laser, etc.) Also, when all S.D.C. or M.D.C. have been depleted, the Marshmallow golem explodes, sending marshmallow debris everywhere. All within a 50 foot (15.2 m) radius will be covered by marshmallow (a good 6 inches of the stuff)!

**Note Two:** The god Backsmack can create the Marshmallow Golem at twice the normal spell's height (76 feet/23.2 m tall), S.D.C./M.D.C. (516 S.D.C./260 M.D.C.) and three times the splattering radius (150 feet/45.7 m) when the golem is destroyed!

**Note Three:** Backsmack is described in *The Rifter* #9½, on page 62.

### Metamorphosis: Mist

**Range:** Self or others by touch.

**Duration:** 25 minutes per level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** None.

**P.P.E.:** 200.

As per the *Metamorphosis: Mist* spell described in the *Rifts* main book, page 187, or the *Rifts Book of Magic*, page 145.

## Spells of Legend

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### Call Upon Backsmack

**Range:** Anywhere.

**Duration:** Instantaneously.

**Saving Throw:** None.

**P.P.E.:** 246

This special spell will permit any Ludicrous Mage to send a message to Backsmack, inviting him to the caster's world. In essence, it will summon the god for a visit. (**Note:** Backsmack is described in *The Rifter* #9½, on page 62.)

To perform the spell, the caster must be within 50 feet (15.2 m) from a nexus. The message is magically sent through the nexus and across the Megaverse directly to Backsmack. Within 1D6x10+10 minutes, the god will come through the nexus to visit the caster. The god will generally stay a few minutes to a few hours, or he won't even bother to leave. All depends on his mood and the fun he has on his visit.

Backsmack will always visit the Ludicrous Mage who summons him. Hey, if the character was able to learn this summon-

ing spell, the mage *must* be important. If the caster wastes the god's time, or ditches the god, or attempts to harm the god, the caster will be added to the IGNORE LIST, which means the god will not come by the next time the caster attempts to summon him.

There are only a few ways to learn this spell. The first is from Backsmack himself. The god will give the spell to fellow Ludicrous Mages who are worthy of it. Multiple scrolls have been left around the Megaverse. These scrolls have "false" titles just as a joke. Nothing appeals to the god more than when a group of power-hungry mages thinks they are summoning a being of great power and Backsmack arrives to pull a few pranks. The look on their faces is priceless!

## Enhance Carnie

**Range:** One carnie by touch.

**Duration:** Until the carnie is destroyed.

**Saving Throw:** None.

**P.P.E.:** 75

This spell of legend was created by a powerful Ludicrous Mage who specialized in the creation and manipulation of carnival minions conjured by the *Create Carnie* spell described in **The Rifter #9½: April Fools' Special**. The Mage was able to create a spell that will enhance a carnie in different ways. The caster may add one enhancement to one carnie only! Attempting to give a second enhancement will cancel the spell and destroy the carnival minion. The caster can choose one of the following:

- **Longevity:** The carnie will remain intact for the equivalent of five times the normal duration of the *Create Carnie* spell, not including the duration modification from the proximity of a ley line and/or a nexus point.
- **Toughness:** The carnie will have twice its normal S.D.C./M.D.C. plus an additional +2 S.D.C. (+1 M.D.C.) per level of experience of the spell caster.
- **Quickness:** The carnie will be faster and more agile, gaining a +1 melee action, +2 on initiative, a +3 to P.P. and a +6 to Spd.
- **Aggressiveness:** The carnie is violent and hot tempered. It will gain a +3 to strike, -1 to parry and dodge, and a +5 S.D.C. (+3 M.D.C.).
- **Gifted:** The carnie will be gifted to use three (3) Ludicrous Spells from levels one to five. The caster will intuitively "insert" the knowledge, and the carnie can cast each spell two times (plus one additional time per every second level of experience) in a 24-hour period.

## Laugh of Exorcism

**Range:** By touch only.

**Duration:** The spell lasts 5 minutes, results last 6 months or longer.

**Saving Throw:** Standard.

**P.P.E.:** 200

The caster can perform an exorcism as per the *Exorcism* spell described on page 180 of the **Rifts** main book, or on page 119 of the **Rifts Book of Magic**. Since this spell is outside the expertise of the Ludicrous Mage, the spell cost is much greater than the normal invocation. The spell applications are slightly differ-

ent too. The caster will first cast the spoken words of the spell, and then start tickling the possessed victim. The demon or spirit will be *laughed out!* The effects on the demon are the same as the original spell, as for the bonuses against being possessed. (See the original spell for more on the exorcism.)

## Create Carnies

**Range:** 10 feet (3.0 m) away, but the carnies must stay within one mile (1.6 km) of the spell caster.

**Duration:** Exists for 24 hours per level of experience, or until destroyed. If the carnie is created within one mile from a ley line, it will exist twice the normal spell duration (48 hours). If the carnie is created within one mile of a nexus point, it will exist 3 times the normal spell duration (72 hours). If the carnie is created at a nexus point, it will exist 5 times the normal spell duration (120 hours/5 days).

**Saving Throw:** None.

**P.P.E.:** 150 per carnie.

This spell is fully described in **The Rifter #9½: April Fools' Special**, on page 92. The following is additional types of carnival minions which the caster can create. The carnie types include: Animal Tamers, the British Explorer, Krazy Klowns, the Fat Lady, Fire Eater, Flower Power, French Cook, Genius, Idiot, Jack in the Box, Knife Thrower, Muscle Man, the Mutant, Role-Player, and Tumblers.

### Animal Tamers

See **The Rifter #9½** for full description.

### The British Explorer

**Attributes:** P.E. 16, all others average.

**S.D.C.:** 18+2D6 (or M.D.C.: 12+2D4)

**Size:** Either a tall lad of about 6 feet and a half (2.0 m), or a short stocky fellow of five feet (1.5 m) nothing.

**Appearance:** A male or female with a thick British accent. The character wears beige jungle gear which includes the short sleeve shirt, the shorts, the hiking boots with the wool socks that reach the knees, and a utility belt that includes 20 feet (6.1 m) of rope, a small hammer, and some archaeologist equipment.

**Abilities and Powers:** An expert archaeologist (90%), knows many myths and legends (at 65%), and knows jungle/wilderness survival at 70%. He is also very curious of new people and creatures.

**Combat:** Three attacks per melee round. Musket Pistol: Damage: 1D6, Range: 30 feet (9.1 m); Musket Rifle: Damage: 3D6, Range: 150 feet (45.7 m). But requires one melee action to reload after firing. The explorer also has a sabre that does 2D4 points of damage.

**Bonuses:** +2 to fire with the pistol, +3 with the rifle, and +2 to strike, parry, and dodge with the sabre.

### Krazy Klowns

See **The Rifter #9 ½** for full description.

## The Fat Lady

See **The Rifter #9** ½ for full description.

## Fire Eater

**Attributes:** I.Q. 8, M.A. 4, P.S. 18, all others average.

**S.D.C.:** 30 (or M.D.C.: 28)

**Size:** Humanoid, between 5 and 7 feet (1.5 and 2.1 m) tall.

**Appearance:** A dark skinned humanoid with tattoos covering his or her body, wearing only a pair of used shorts and sandals.

**Abilities and Powers:** Takes no damage from fire and heat, but takes double damage from cold and ice. Can eat any type of fire! He possesses two sticks that are three feet (1 meter) long and have a flame at the end. By placing the two fire-sticks in front of him and blowing a volatile gas between them, the carnie can spit a small fireball the size of a spitball or create a giant fireball.

**Combat:** Four attacks per melee round. Fire sticks do 2D6 points of damage; a fire spit does 1D4 with a range of 15 feet (4.6 m); a fireball does 4D4 with a range of 60 feet (18.3 m) (counts as two attacks); or by hand to hand as per supernatural P.S.

**Bonuses:** +2 to strike, -1 to dodge.

## Flower Power

**Attributes:** All attributes are 2 points below average.

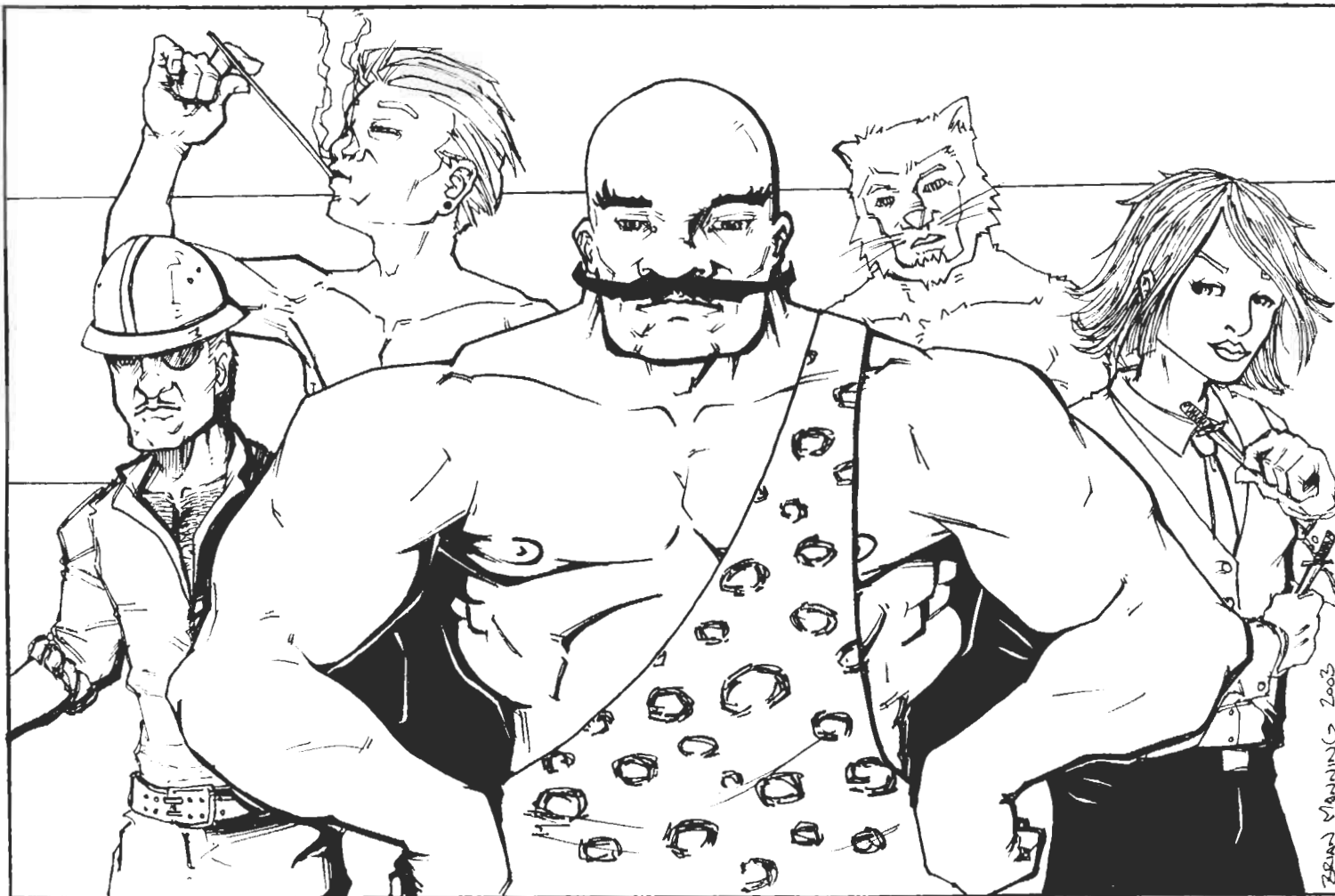
**S.D.C.:** 10 S.D.C. (or M.D.C.: 6)

**Size:** Human sized.

**Appearance:** Basically a hippie. This includes the long hair (braded or in a ponytail), the colored shirt with brown leather jacket, bell-bottomed pants, and a baseball cap or one of those handkerchief thingies. The hippie will have a glazed look with bloodshot eyes and will have great difficulty at paying attention to whatever is going on.

**Abilities and Powers:** The Flower Power *thinks* it has the ability to communicate with the animals and the Earth, but is right only 49% of the time. They have a sweet smell and if eaten by a monster or creature, the creature will be drugged as per the *Drugging Flower* for the next 15+2D6 minutes. They do have a slingshot that fires flowers that can do one of the following effects:

- **Bad Flower:** A flower with thorns that causes 1D4 points of damage.
- **Drugging Flower:** Saving throw of 13. A failed roll means the character is drugged, baked, high, or whatever term you want to call it. The character can't perform any skills and combat bonuses and melee attacks are reduced by half. Monsters and creatures that eat the hippie will also suffer these effects for 15+2D6 minutes without any saving throws.
- **Peace Flower:** Saving throw of 12. The affected character will feel at peace with himself and those around him. All anger will be lifted from his spirit. The character will only attack once per melee round, but the remaining melee ac-





tions can be used to perform non-combat actions.

- *Sleeping Flower*: Saving throw of 13. The affected character will fall asleep for 2D4 minutes and can't be wakened (unless actual damage has been implemented).

**Combat**: Two attacks per melee. Can attack with slingshot or by hand to hand, but hand to hand is more of a slapping style of combat than actually punching. Each slap does 1 point of damage.

**Bonuses**: +3 to fire with slingshot and +5 to save versus mind control and possession.

## French Cook

**Attributes**: P.P. 12 (18 when cooking), all others average.

**S.D.C.**: 20 (or M.D.C.: 12)

**Size**: Human size, typically 5 and a half feet (1.7 m) tall.

**Appearance**: A French cook, very French to the point that he can't speak or understand any other languages, but makes one heck of a meal. He wears a pair of white pants and shirt with an apron. He never goes anywhere without his large cook's hat.

**Abilities and Powers**: Can cook any type of meal at 95%! He will naturally know *all* recipes but will never share them with anyone. Having two or more French Cooks in one kitchen at the same time will result in them arguing or even fighting about how to prepare the meal.

**Combat**: Three attacks per melee round. Normally he doesn't enter combat, but will if insulted about his meal. Knives do 1D6, and other cooking utensils (like forks and pans) do 1D4.

**Bonuses**: The French Cook will have a +4 to strike using cooking utensils, +3 to strike while using a knife.

## Genius

See **The Rifter #9 ½** for full description.

## Idiot

See **The Rifter #9 ½** for full description.

## Jack in the Box

See **The Rifter #9 ½** for full description.

## Knife Thrower

**Attributes**: P.S. 8, P.P. 16, Spd. 20, P.B. 16, all others average.

**S.D.C.**: 25 (or M.D.C.: 15)

**Size**: Around 6 feet (1.8 m) tall.

**Appearance**: A good-looking male or female that wears a black ensemble with a red shirt and a black jacket.

**Abilities and Powers**: An expert at throwing knives, throwing axes, and other small, hand-sized stabbing weapons.

**Combat**: Two attacks per melee round, or five when using knives and other small, hand-sized stabbing weapons. Throwing knives and throwing axes do 1D6 points of damage, ninja star and similar small stabbing weapons do 1D4 points of damage, and needles (and others) do 1 point of damage.

**Bonuses**: When throwing any stabbing weapon (like knives and small axes), the character has a +8 to hit a non-living target (the apple on top of the assistant's head) or a +3 to hit a living target (the assistant).

## Muscle Man

See **The Rifter #9 ½** for full description.

## The Mutant

**Attributes**: P.E. 16, P.P. 12, all others average.

**S.D.C.**: 30 (or M.D.C.: 26)

**Size**: Normal human size, but may be between 5 and 6½ feet (1.5 and 2.0 m).

**Appearance**: The so-called mutant looks like a person in an animal costume (and a strange one when it comes down to it). The mutant will act like the animal it's supposed to be, but will still seem to be very human.

**Abilities and Powers**: Imitate animals (badly though). Can run, leap, and prance around similar to the animal it's supposed to be. It can talk, but does it with a great attempt to sound animalistic by adding growls, snorts, or whatever. The strange thing is that the animals are completely convinced they are genuine members of their race. They will even communicate and understand each other. The mutant will also be affected by any summoning spell or animal related spells.

**Combat**: Three attacks per melee round. Damage from claws (1D4), bite (1 point of damage), punch (1D6), pounding (2D4), or other similar animal defensives.

**Bonuses**: +2 to strike.

## The Role-Player

**Attributes**: I.Q. 18, M.A. 16, M.E. 15, all others average.

**S.D.C.**: 12 (or M.C.D.: 8)

**Size**: 5 feet, 8 inches tall (1.6 m).

**Appearance**: A young lad between his early teens to late 30's (may be older). Majority males (65%), they wear glasses, a t-shirt, old pair of jeans with joggers and non-matching socks. Also carries a bag that holds all of their role-playing accessories. Or, may have a *similar* appearance as your G.M. (G.M.s are free to alter their appearance as they see fit.)

**Abilities and Powers**: A fantastic storyteller. Anyone who hears the Role-Player tell a story must make a saving throw against magic (of 13). A failed roll means the character is caught up in the story and can't get enough of it. The Role-Player also has an excellent memory (can use the *Total Recall* psionic power without any cost) and possesses an amazing imagination. He can imitate any voice, accent, and personality at extreme precision (79%). The Role Player also carries a bag that holds all his role-playing accessories.

**Combat**: Two attacks per melee round, and has no combat experience.

**Bonuses**: +4 to save versus magic and psionics. The Role-Player is also immune to intimidation and Horror Factor.

## Tumblers

**Attributes:** P.S. 15, P.P. 20, P.E. 15, Spd. 18, all others average.

**S.D.C.:** 18 +2D4 (or M.D.C: 12 +1D6).

**Size:** Normal human size.

**Appearance:** A humanoid in shiny skintight tights. The ensemble is always colorful, may have reflecting material (sparkles) on it or may even be fluorescent. Some have a mask or decorations on the arms and legs that make their stunts seem more stunning.

**Abilities and Powers:** As their name suggests, they are excellent tumblers and acrobats. They can perform impressive stunts,

flips, jumps, etc. They can jump up to 20 feet (6.1 m) high, and 15 feet (4.6 m) in length. They can perform the following skills: acrobatics (85%), gymnastics (90%), prowl (68%). They are also extremely flexible and double jointed, able to fit into a small 2.5x2.5 foot (0.76x0.76 m) box!

**Combat:** Three attacks per melee round, and fights as if they were martial artists. Punch does 1D6 points of damage while a kick does 2D4. They can perform most martial arts as a fifth level martial artist master (plus one level per each other level of experience of the caster)!

**Bonuses:** +8 to fall/roll with impact, +6 to dodge, and +4 to initiative, plus bonuses from *Hand to Hand: Martial Arts*.

# Palladium Fantasy RPG<sup>®</sup>

## Medieval Army Combat Rules

### Optional Rules for the Palladium Fantasy RPG<sup>®</sup>

By Dan Felkins

*Darian gripped his spear as if afraid to let go. His heart was racing and he knew he was on the verge of panic. The fact that the riders slowed their mounts to a slow trot as they approached the palisade did little to soothe his nerves. They were all large men, as broad in shoulder and thick in the arms as Adrian the smith. Their armor glistened wetly in the cool spring drizzle, and their weapons seem to hang from shoulder to spur. They were raiders, Darian was certain of that, but why did they approach so callously? Had they no fear whatsoever from the town militia? Did they even expect a challenge?*

*"Easy, lads," Mayor Stephano called out to his men. He had never even drawn his sword, but his hand never strayed from the hilt. "If they will talk, let us hear what they have to say."*

*Darian wanted to sigh with relief. Talking meant no fighting—for now. But what of later?*

*The lead rider held out his hand, palm forward, and his companions all halted their advance. The leader rode on, leaving his hand up until he was ten paces from the palisade. He was every bit the hardened warrior, but his devil-may-care smile was almost reassuring as he surveyed his opposition with an amused interest. Finally, he fixed his gaze upon the mayor, and in a show of respect, bowed his head.*

*"I am Lord Talon of House Anges and I am here on the Emperor's business."*

*The mayor tightened his grip around the hilt of his sword but he otherwise made no show of his nervousness. "I am Mayor Stephano, Lord Talon. State your business."*

*"Orcish warlords are gathering an army within the Old Kingdom. The word is that when they are ready, they will cross into the frontier and lay waste to every settlement between here and the Tarldet Plains. I will accept five men between the ages of fifteen and thirty for every twenty you house within your walls to fill the levy. I will also accept ten head of cattle for every hundred, five stout horses for every twenty, twenty pounds of grain for every horse, and two each of your smiths, fletchers, brewers, and carpenters. You may choose or draw lots, however, you must be quick. Tomorrow we ride east and we will ride hard."*

*The mayor was about to reply when one of the militia yelled out from within the ranks. "And if we refuse?"*

*The challenge or the uncertain mumblings that followed from the others had no impact upon the warrior. He made no attempt to even see who had addressed him so.*

*"If you choose not to stand against the Orcs, then they may overwhelm me. If that happens, all you will have with you to face thousands of Orcs when they get here, is what you see beside you today." The devil-may-care smile suddenly vanished, replaced with a sinister and dangerous look that froze Darian's heart. "Pray that that is the case, for if I do manage to drive them back to the Old Kingdom, I will then return and hang every man over the age of twelve for treason."*

*The mayor turned ghostly white and looked as if he was going to sick up. Darian knew how he felt. He himself nearly soiled himself. He had just turned thirteen.*

*Talon lost the dangerous glint in his eye and took on a pleading look toward the mayor. "Time is short, Stephano. House Clynn can no longer protect you — if they ever had. The Orcs are coming, and we are the only ones who can stop them."*

Raising an army, or even taking command of an existing army, is the source for all kinds of grand adventures in the sword and sorcery setting. Great leaders have often made their names in both history and mythology when at a certain point in their adventuring career, they gathered a force of men to face unstoppable odds and restore freedom to the land. Such are the epic tales of King Arthur, William Wallace, Conan the Barbarian and many more.

In fantasy gaming, what is it that keeps worthy heroes from donning the crown of leadership, organizing a formidable force of men and marching forth to quell the gathering horde of monsters that threaten the sanctity of a peaceful land in need? A simple combat system for large-scale warfare, that's what.

Until now.

Below is a simple set of rules to create an army that could number in the hundreds to the thousands, but can be portrayed in the game as a handful of N.P.C.'s in terms of combat. It is a system that allows players to decide the fate of entire legions while still centering on individual Player Characters, allowing them to make the command decisions, cast their magic, and even participate in the battle.

## Creating an Army Unit

A unit in this context is a large body of troops with one common function. The reasons for this are twofold: First, units are trained to act as a team to accomplish their missions. As a unit, they fight together toward a common goal. Archers will soften the enemy while cavalry units attack the flanks, all so the infantry can close in and finish the job. Secondly, it keeps a simplicity required for players to manage large groups, allowing combat to resolve as quickly as possible while maintaining a sense of realism.

Players and Game Masters can use a variety of ways to introduce large scale combat into their campaigns. A hero may inadvertently stumble into leadership or he/she may intentionally gather forces for any number of reasons. It is a logical avenue to pursue for high level characters with a fat treasure vault, or a great plot twist for inexperienced characters who must reluctantly become the leader of those who turned to him or her for their salvation.

## Step 1: Determine S.D.C.

### Determine the S.D.C. of an Army in Accordance to Size & Orientation.

The S.D.C. of an army is no different than the S.D.C. of a structure. It is used as a means to determine how strong the body of troops is and how much damage it can sustain before becoming ineffective. In large scale combat, the S.D.C. of an army represents Hit Points, S.D.C., the A.R. and S.D.C. of armor, and the possible addition of mounts, chariots, and anything else that

would factor into combat. Once the S.D.C. of an army is reduced to zero, the army has been soundly defeated and unable to fight anymore.



To determine the S.D.C. of an army, players must determine several factors about their army. The factors include the pre-dominate race of the unit, what kind of armor they are issued, and if they are mounted or within fortifications. Each of these factors is assigned an S.D.C. bonus point. The bonus points are then added together and the result is multiplied by the number of troops in the unit. These numbers may seem high at first, but keep in mind that this whole system was designed to keep things simple, so don't fear that a high S.D.C. will indicate drawn out combat. Another thing to keep in mind is that armies rarely fight to the last man, so it is not always expected for these numbers to be reduced to zero.

**A. Establish the size of your army.** Determine the number of units and their primary role (archers, infantry, cavalry etc.). Then determine the number of bodies within each separate unit. A good system in creating an army unit can be found in *Rifts® Mercenaries* with little alteration or you can use your own method.

**Example:** Lord Talon has decided to raise an army to quell the barbarian uprisings in the Old Kingdom Frontier. He has the intention and the resources to recruit or press into service about 5,000 men (roughly the size of a modern division). He will attempt to hire 500 long bowmen, 3,000 infantrymen, and 1,500 cavalry.

**B. Determine the type of soldier that will be prevalent in each unit.** Race and/or Occupational Character Class determine the types of soldiers. Assign the appropriate S.D.C. Bonus to that unit from the following table:

1. Armies primarily composed of Gnome, Goblin, Kobold or other small races have an S.D.C. bonus of +1 (so a unit of 800 Kobolds will have 800 S.D.C.).
2. Armies primarily composed of Human, Elf, Dwarf, Orc, Hob-Goblin and other medium-sized races have an S.D.C. bonus of +2. (So a unit of 200 humans will have 400 S.D.C.)
3. +3 S.D.C. bonus for Wolfen, Ogre, Gromek, Bearmen and other large races.
4. +4 S.D.C. bonus for giant races\*.
5. +5 S.D.C. bonus for supernatural & Demon/Deevil races\*.
6. +1D4+1 for armies with armies of mixed races. Roll before every battle.

**Example:** Lord Talon decides to concentrate his recruiting from the Western Empire itself. He hires mostly humans with some warriors from both the Elven community as well as the Dwarven strongholds to the east. When all is said and done, he manages to fill his levy. He successfully recruited 3,000 infantrymen, 500 long bowmen, and 1,500 cavalry. Since all of his troops are either human or elven, each unit has the following S.D.C.: The infantry have 6,000 S.D.C., the archers have 1,000 S.D.C., and the cavalry (without mounts) has 3,000 S.D.C.

\*NOTE: it is rare (but not impossible) for Demons, Deevils and even giants to gather in large numbers. These beings are not as common as normal humanoids and because of their size and power, they are often designated as leaders of so-called "lesser" beings. When they do gather in force, they rarely exceed 500. (More is hardly needed and the presence of so many power-houses tends to cause power struggles.)

The same can be said for Paladins, Rangers, Thieves, Assassins, Priests, and other specialty O.C.C.'s. Not that these types can never join an army, quite the contrary. However, a good commander would disperse his knights or paladins to command cavalry units, using their expertise in controlling green horsemen and keeping them alive as an effective unit. Assassins have much better uses away from the battlefield and if they were to get caught up in a battle, they would more than likely become one of the many swordsmen engaging in the fight. Rangers, on the other hand, would lead scouting expeditions or work within much smaller groups, while priests and wizards would serve as healers, diviners, and advisors. You get the idea.

This is not to say that such cases never happen. A knightly order may call for a crusade, resulting in hundreds of paladins, knights, nobles, and squires to ban together under one flag to stop a menacing force gathering beyond the forests. They would still hire, recruit or even press into service other soldiers, mercenaries and even peasants to fill the levy. Just remember that specialty O.C.C.'s, supernatural beings, and creatures of magic are the cream of the crop, whereas the *common* soldier is just that—common.

**C. Determine what kind of armor (if any) is being issued for each unit.** Normal A.R.s and Armor S.D.C. are factored into the overall S.D.C. of the army.

1. +1 S.D.C. bonus for units wearing leather style armors or for races with a natural A.R. of 10 or less.
2. +2 S.D.C. bonus for units wearing chain & double mail armors or for races with a natural A.R. of 11 to 12.
3. +3 S.D.C. bonus for units wearing scale & splint armors or for races with a natural A.R. of 13 to 15.
4. +4 S.D.C. bonus for units wearing plate armors or for races with a natural A.R. of 16 or higher.

**Example:** Lord Talon puts the word out that he is looking for arms and armor. (Here is a great chance for some role-playing.) He hires several Dwarven smiths to be used as armorers and have them create the armor he needs (with a nice 20% discount since he is buying in bulk). He selects chain mail for his core infantry and cavalry, plate & chain for his officers, and studded leather for his archers. This gives his infantry and cavalry an S.D.C. bonus of +2, making the total S.D.C. bonus of 4 (4x3000=12,000 which is now the S.D.C. for his infantry. 4x1500=6,000 which is now the S.D.C. of his cavalry). His archers have a bonus of +1, making the total S.D.C. bonus of 3! Their S.D.C. is 1500 (3x500=1500).

You may have noted that no additional factors were given for the officers in plate and chain mail. This is because the dominant armor in the unit is chain mail, therefore that S.D.C. Bonus is used.

**D. Add S.D.C. bonuses for the use of mounts or chariots.** To receive these S.D.C. bonuses the entire unit must be mounted. Separate units have their own S.D.C. Rating.

1. +1 S.D.C. bonus for cavalry riding mounts with no natural armor rating.
2. +2 S.D.C. bonus for cavalry riding exotic mounts with a natural A.R. of 5 to 10 or a mount wearing leather barding.
3. +3 S.D.C. bonus for cavalry riding exotic mounts with a natural A.R. of 11 to 15 or a mount wearing studded leather or chain barding. (Rare.)

4. +4 S.D.C. bonus for each chariot (requires a minimum of two soldiers) or cavalry riding exotic mounts with a natural A.R. of 16 or higher or a mount wearing plate barding. (Very rare and expensive.)

Example: Talon's cavalry are riding warhorses with studded leather barding. They currently have an S.D.C. bonus of 4 (6,000 S.D.C.) and will now get an additional +2, making the total S.D.C. bonus of 6 (6x1500=9,000), so their S.D.C. is now 9,000.

**E. Using fortifications.** The use of fortifications is very similar to the use of armor for an individual soldier. Note that fortifications of any kind are useless against airborne invaders, and armies defending or attacking from a fortified position can only use siege engines or archers (i.e. ranged combat). Fortifications do not provide an army with an S.D.C. bonus. Instead, they provide the army with an Armor Rating! This is the only way an army can obtain an A.R. and it is used as in the normal rules. Rolls to strike that are not over the fortification's A.R. inflict damage to the fortification itself — just like armor. Furthermore, only siege weapons can damage any kind of fortification (the exception to this is fire against wooden constructs but more on this later). To penetrate the fortification, an attacking army must reduce the fortification's S.D.C. to zero or bypass the fortification altogether (see "Breaching Enemy Defenses" under Step 2).

1. A.R. of 11 and 1 S.D.C. per soldier using light fortifications such as mantlets, siege towers, makeshift barricades, etc.
2. A.R. of 12 and 2 S.D.C. per soldier within light wooden fortifications.
3. A.R. of 13 and 3 S.D.C. per soldier within heavy wooden fortifications.
4. A.R. of 14 and 4 S.D.C. per soldier within fortifications made of stone and wood.
5. A.R. of 15 and 5 S.D.C. per soldier within stone fortifications.
6. A.R. of 16 and 6 S.D.C. per soldier may be applied to other worldly, magical, or highly advanced fortifications (G.M.'s option).

This number reflects the size of the fortification and its strength from the materials used to build it. Large armies need large fortifications so the S.D.C. of the fortification is comparable. If a small army is defending a large fortification, it will be easier to breach since the army is spread too thin or ignoring possible entry points. This is not added to the unit's S.D.C. bonus or S.D.C. and should be listed separately. Once the S.D.C. of a fort is reduced to zero, the fort has been breached (albeit the hard way), but large portions of it may still remain standing. Once the defenses are breached, the A.R. and the S.D.C. of the fortification are not applied to further combat.

Example: Lord Talon has occupied a large, heavy wooden fort with his army. While within this fort, his army has an A.R. of 13 while the fort itself has 15,000 S.D.C. If attacked by his Orcish enemies, the Orcs will have to roll a 14 or higher to inflict damage upon Talon's army. If they roll a 13 or lower, they inflict no damage with their bows, and normal damage against the fortress with their siege weapons if they had any.

## Step 2: Determine "Base" Damage

Damage is based on the type of weapon used and by how many soldiers are using it. First, determine the primary weapon of that particular unit, be it sword, arrow, or pole arm. The normal damage of that weapon is the "base" damage for that unit. Then, multiply that damage by 10 if the army is a thousand strong or more. If the army numbers between 200 and 1000, that damage is multiplied by 5. If the army is 200 or less, then multiply that damage by 2. If the army has less than 50 soldiers, then use the straight damage. For real serious combat, multiply the base damage by 100 if the army numbers 10,000 or more.

Example: Lord Talon's Elven archers use long bows that normally do 2D6. When he orders for the entire unit to loose their arrows upon advancing Orc infantry, the damage is 2D6x5 (or 1D6x10 if one prefers). If the Orcs successfully dodge (seek cover, raise shields, etc.) they suffer half that damage.

Inevitably, a scenario will come about when one army with 950 soldiers is facing an enemy numbering 1100. Two closely matched armies are about to be unbalanced by the above guidelines. Never fear. That is why G.M.s have common sense and can make a ruling that both armies will stay in the same damage bracket. However, sometimes all an army needs is that extra edge to send their enemies to whatever gods they pray to or to force a peaceful settlement. G.M.s should have sole discretion, but a good rule of thumb is that the damage brackets are the same unless there is a difference of 200 or more.

Units primarily made up of giant-sized creatures, such as Wolfen or Ogres, do one additional die of damage to their hand to hand damage (so a unit of Trolls wielding large maces will do 3D6 as a base damage). Units primarily made up of creatures with supernatural strength do one extra damage dice to their hand to hand damage. This is in addition to the bonus for giant-sized creatures if this applies. So an army of gurgoyles with giant swords will inflict a base damage of 4D6.

For convenience, here is a list of common army units and the weapons they might use:

### Infantry

Light infantry commonly use swords, maces, flails, spears, hand axes, and javelins. Common tactics is to throw missile weapons, then draw hand weapons and close for battle. Light infantry can have any size shield, with larger ones used in a phalanx formation with long spears set to receive an opponent's charge. Average damage is 2D6 for melee weapons or 3D6 when using spears to receive a charge. Average damage and range for thrown weapons is 60 feet (18.2 m) for spears (1D6), 80 feet (24.3 m) for hand axes (2D4) and 100 feet (30.4 m) for javelins (2D4), depending on the type of weapon used.

Heavy Infantry are usually better armored and use two-handed swords, battle-axes, pole arms, or large clubs (such as iron staves and Hercules clubs). Average damage is 3D6 or 4D6 when set to receive a charge with pole arms. Remember, pole arms are +1 to parry due to their extended reach, preventing attacks even from cavalry.



## Archers and Slingers

Slingers are often peasant class soldiers but still a force to be reckoned with. Damage is 1D6 with an 80 foot (24.3 m) range. If armored at all they rarely exceed leather suits.

Archers can be mounted like the Saracen warriors of the crusades or on foot. Damage for a short bow is 1D6 with a 340 foot (104 m) range. Compound bows inflict 2D6 damage with a 700 foot (213 m) range. If mounted, they get all of the bonuses awarded to cavalry except the extra attack. Armor is usually restricted to leather suits or possibly chain mail. Arrows ignited with fire inflict +1D6 damage.

Crossbowmen are always foot soldiers but may have heavier suits of armor than their archer counterparts. Damage is 2D4 for light crossbows with a 340 foot (104 m) range or 2D6 with a 600 foot (182 m) range for heavy crossbows.

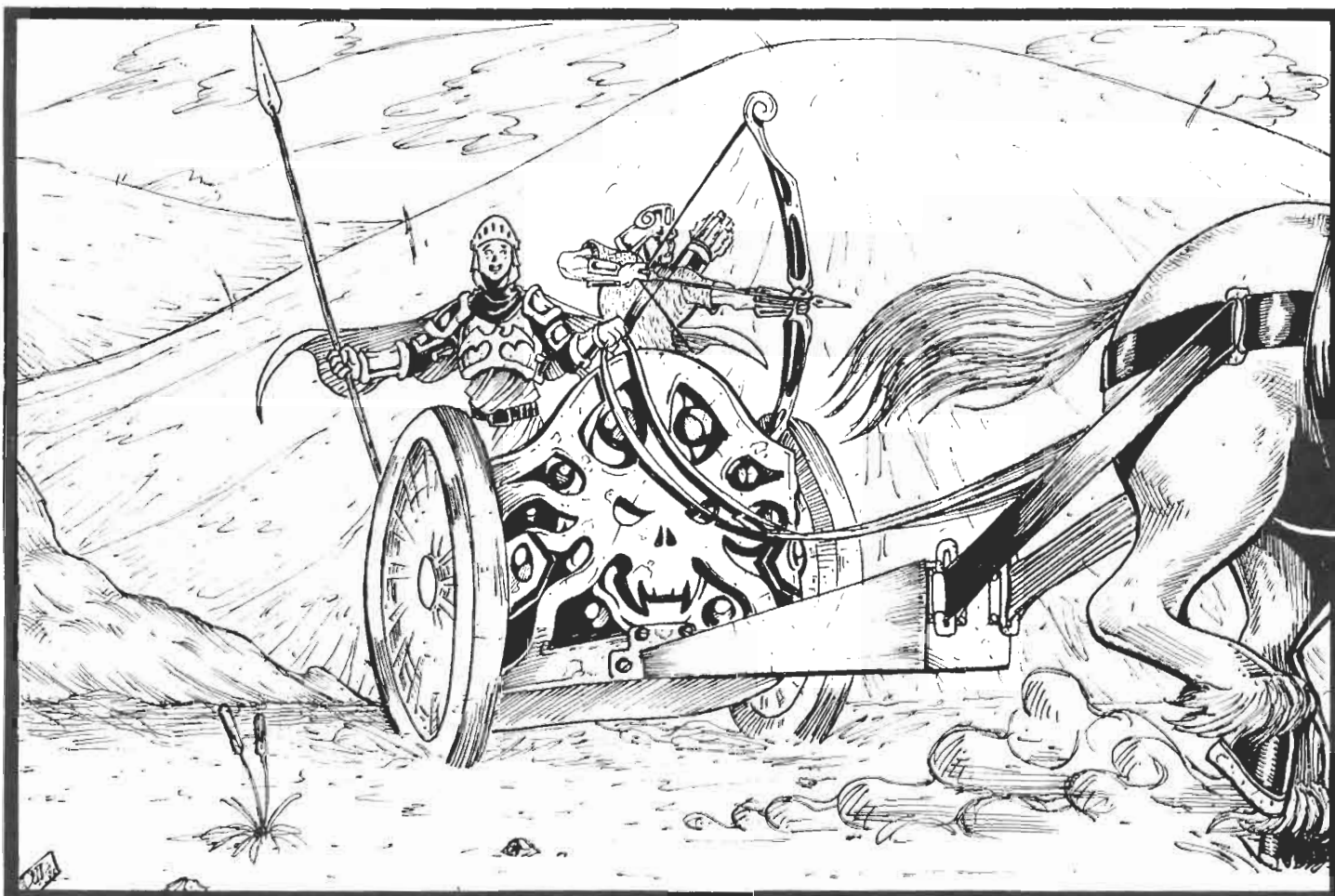
Long bowmen, like the crossbowmen, are restricted to infantry units. They are one of the few specialized O.C.C.s that gather en masse to form units hundreds strong. Damage is 2D6 with a 640 foot (213 m) range. Arrows ignited with fire inflict 3D6 damage.

Soldiers armed with slings or bows may have to resort to hand to hand combat if their position is suddenly overrun or some other change in events forces them to do so. Oftentimes these troops were armed with short swords (2D4 damage), long knives or cudgels (1D6 damage) as a back-up weapon, and sometimes they were given nothing more than their bows. Some infantry units are armed with both missile weapons and hand weapons to be more adaptable.

## Cavalry and Chariots

Cavalry has the advantage of size, speed and power behind their attacks whether they use sword, mace or lance. Although they may follow true knights or paladins, they are still soldiers and are not as skilled as their leaders. The following bonuses are given to any mounted soldier: +1 attack (for the mount), +1 to parry & dodge, +1 initiative, +1D4 damage, +1D6 for a charge (2D8 for swords, maces and other horseman weapons, 3D6 on a charge). Note that ancient cavalry is the forefather of modern day tanks. At the time they were seemingly unstoppable juggernauts of destruction when put up against infantry units. But like the modern day tank, cavalry has its drawbacks. To be used effectively, they need open ground, a running start, and lots of room to maneuver. They are ineffective in dense forests, swamps, and mountainous regions, within fortifications and at sea. Smart cavalry leaders pick their ground carefully, use hit and run tactics, and target the flanks (The Knight chess piece moves as it does to reflect a flanking maneuver of cavalry). Smart infantry units take the same advantage of terrain, pole arms, traps and other strategies to counter the effectiveness of cavalry.

Exotic Calvary is not as uncommon as one might think. It is common knowledge that Hannibal of Carthage used elephants in warfare, while in a world like Palladium, armies of Eandroth riding their Silonars is a common sight in the desert. When using exotic mounts, refer to the S.D.C. table to determine S.D.C. Note that cavalry units have an extra attack. This is for the mount itself, be it warhorse, dinosaur, or Dragondactyl. Every



round, the mount can kick, trample, bite, claw or breathe fire on its rider's enemies. Just determine the normal damage and multiply it as you would the rider's weapon.

Chariots are much like heavy cavalry in that they are fast, powerful, and fearsome to behold. The primary attacks are from the archer, slinger, or spearman who rides behind the chariot's driver. Damage from this attack is 2D6 or that of the primary weapon being used. The extra attack stems from charioteers who use their chariot for a ramming attack to inflict 4D6 S.D.C. If scythes are attached to the wheels, that damage is a whopping 6D6! Note that it requires two soldiers to effectively man a chariot. Thus, commanders who have 200 soldiers will have a maximum of 100 chariots. So the S.D.C. bonus (including armor, type of humanoid, and the +4 for the chariot) is multiplied by 100 not 200, still an impressive number.

Large animals such as elephants, dinosaurs, and other behemoths bridge the gap between cavalry and charioteers. Like cavalry, these troops are mounted. Like the chariot, the beast requires one soldier to handle it and (depending on size) from one to five other archers or spearmen. Compared to cavalry and chariots, these units may be small, but the psychological effect they have on the enemy is priceless. Combat is based on the number of soldiers riding the animals as far as attacks and damage is concerned. However, at the G.M.'s option, these units can require a save vs Horror Factor every melee round of combat. Failing to save vs Horror Factor means the loss of initiative and one attack per melee. This would symbolize the panic the enemy feels when confronted by the large beasts, causing them to scatter.

## Siege Weapons and Laying Siege

This can be a complex venture that could almost fill its own book with rules and ideas on how to play out a siege. However, the goal with these optional rules is to keep things simple so the following rules should be used.

Siege weapons are considered a support unit that provides extra firepower to an army. The advantage of siege weapons is heavy damage and superior range. It is assumed under these guidelines that a variety of siege weaponry may be used during a battle so the intricate details will be ignored. Suffice it to say that light siege weapons inflict an additional 2D4 base damage (along with the normal multipliers of that unit) and provide an extra attack every melee round. Medium siege weapons cause an additional 3D6 base damage and provide an extra attack every two melee rounds. Large siege weapons cause 6D6+6 base damage and provide an extra attack every five melee rounds. If a large mix of weapons is used, consider the volley fire to cause 5D6 base damage every third melee round. The bonus to strike for siege weapons is +1.

Example: Lord Talon has a division strength element of 5,000 men. If Talon has access to siege weapons, he would use the suggested damage for the type of weapons he had and multiply the damage by 10! If there was a mix, the Game Master can rule that the base damage is 5D6x10 every third melee round.

## Defending a Fortified Position

Defenders of a castle or fort can only use ranged attacks against their enemy until the enemy is at the foot of the castle or they breach the defenses. To keep invaders from getting over the walls, defenders can use a variety of ways to inflict casualties against their enemy aside from their bows or siege engines. Ammunition may be limited or take time to prepare.

**1. Barricades, Ditches, and Barriers:** Reduces the attacking army's speed by  $1/3^{\text{rd}}$ , exposing them further to ranged attacks. Optional penalty of -3 to dodge for armies navigating through obstacles.

**2. Dropping Stones:** Loose masonry is a handy source of ammunition to be used against one's enemy. If the defenders are mostly small humanoids, treat the base damage as 1D6, 2D6 for medium-sized humanoids, and 3D6 for large humanoids. Can be used once per melee. 6D6 uses.

**3. Booby Traps:** Here the Game Master and the Player Characters have to sort out the details of the traps. A good reference can be found in *Rifts® Game Master's Guide* under the Military Skill: Trap Construction. Be sure to multiply the base damage to be comparable to the normal hand to hand damage of the unit. Traps usually count as an extra attack and the defenders must dodge against a 14 to suffer half damage. Such attacks should only be used once per engagement depending on how they are constructed. (G.M.'s discretion.)

**4. Boiling Water or Oil:** Base damage is 3D6. Oil can then be ignited for an additional 2D6 per melee for 1D4 melee rounds. Contrary to popular belief, oil was expensive and sometimes very rare, and was not used extensively in military campaigns. Victims lose initiative and one attack per melee. Can be used once every five melees. 2D4 uses for oil, 4D4 uses for water.

**5. Hot Sand:** Base damage is 6D6 to exposed troops or 2D6 to troops under shelter. Victims lose initiative and one attack per melee. Can be used once every five melees. 5D6 uses.

**6. Greek Fire and Naphtha:** Naphtha is a flammable oil created from coal, shale or petroleum. Greek Fire may have been a product based on naphtha and quicklime and was used in naval battles since it would ignite when in contact with water. Think of either as a sort of primitive napalm. Base damage is 4D6 plus an additional 4D6 per melee for 1D4 melee rounds. Victims lose initiative and one attack per melee. Can be used once every other melee. 1D4 uses.

## Breaching Enemy Defenses

In siege warfare, the majority of combat will be exclusive to archers and siege weapons until the walls are breached. Most attacking armies will have many times the number of infantry than they will have archers or siege weapons and will try very hard to penetrate the defenses as soon as possible or risk a prolonged siege where food and ammunition may begin to run out.

Attacking armies can try a number of ways to penetrate an enemy stronghold. Engineers can be used to tunnel beneath the walls, creating an access tunnel or undermine the structure's foundation. Soldiers can charge the walls with ladders and ropes to scale the walls or bring up siege towers and battering rams to smash through the gate. All the while archers will do their best to keep the defenders busy for their comrades.

After the defenses have been breached, the defending army loses the A.R. awarded them for being within a fortification. The invaders will spend 1D4 melee rounds doing their base damage with no multipliers. Afterwards, the invaders will spend another 1D4 melee rounds doing their base damage multiplied by two. After that, they will spend another 2D4 melee rounds doing their base damage multiplied by five (provided the attackers have over 200 soldiers). After those 4D4 melee rounds are finished, the army will do their base damage multiplied by ten (provided the attackers number over a thousand men). If the attacking army or units loses all of its S.D.C. prior to this, then the attack was repelled. Other means of attack and defense are listed below:

**1. Flaming Bundles and Missiles:** The use of fire is not always recommended since it could utterly destroy a fort that might come in handy for the invaders at a future date. It also may endanger soldiers who have already breached the fortification or damage other prizes such as loot, hostages, or friendly prisoners. If it is used, it can only affect wooden fortifications, including mixed wood and stone forts. If fire is used with bows, add 1D6 to the base damage. If fire is used as ammunition for siege weapons, then that damage is increased by two damage dice (4D4 for light, 5D6 for medium, and 8D6+6 for heavy). If used against troops in stone fortifications, the siege weapon must defeat the A.R. of the fort. If used against wooden fortifications, damage is the same to either troops or walls. There is a 01-12% chance that flaming arrows will start a fire per attack and a 01-35% that siege weapons will start a fire.

To put a fire out, the army or unit must contain the fire similar to the rules found in *Adventures on the High Seas*. The unit must use one attack per melee in an attempt to contain the fire, having a 01-40% chance to do so. Three failures means the fire is out of control and will cause 4D6 damage per melee to the fort for 1D4 melees. The fire will then do 4D6x2 damage for another 1D4 melees, afterwards it will do 4D6x5 damage for another 1D4 melees, and finally do 4D6x10 until the fort's S.D.C. is reduced to zero.

**2. Siege Towers:** These constructs are valuable to a siege because they negate the enemy's A.R. received from their fortifications by placing archers above the defenders' walls. They also provide a means to cross the enemy's walls and infiltrate the compound as well as provide protection to a battering ram or mouse. Archers, crossbowmen, and slingers using siege towers have their normal attacks per melee, plus an additional attack that does their base damage x2 (maximum). This extra attack comes from the archers in the tower(s) and automatically negates the defenders' A.R. from the fortifications. If used in conjunction with ladders, it only takes one melee for soldiers to climb the wall instead of 1D4 melees as described below. To protect wooden fortifications and siege towers from fire, armies often covered the constructs with freshly skinned animal hides (reduce the chance to start a fire by half and double the chance to contain a fire if one is started).

**3. Ladders:** This method is costly to the invading force, since the soldiers are under constant fire and can do little but push forward. The invaders begin by charging the wall, raising the ladders, then climbing the ladders to engage the enemy, hoping that their ladder is not pushed from the wall. Charging infantry move 180 feet (54.8 m) per melee. Units that run and dodge

move 90 feet (27.4 m) per melee. Once the troops reach the base of the wall, it takes 1D4 melees to get enough troops to climb the ladders, cross the wall and effectively attack. During this period, the invaders cannot attack, parry or dodge. After the 1D4 melees have passed, they inflict damage in the manner described above.

**4. Engineers:** The act of tunneling is a long and arduous process, especially under siege conditions. Sappers and miners usually start from quite a distance away (at least out of bow shot), then they slowly and meticulously began to dig a tunnel toward their target in hopes to either bypass the fortification or undermine the construction. Either way, it is a long and grueling process even for subterranean races like Dwarves. This is because the tunnel usually has to be large enough to move several bodies through and it has to be supported so that it does not cave-in. Other factors such as the type of soil being excavated, water tables, the presence of a moat, and other things could make this tactic that much more difficult.

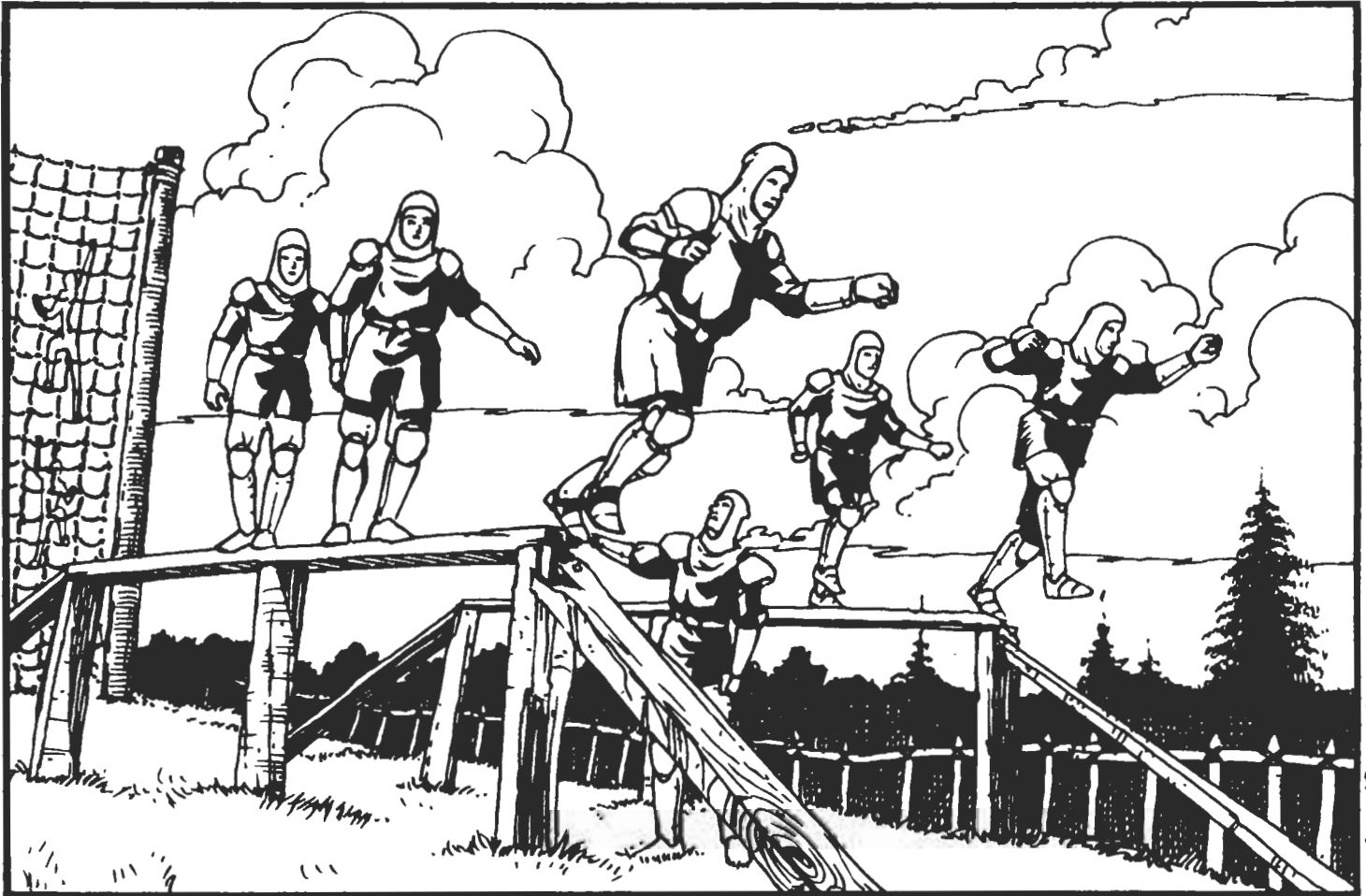
For game purposes, a brigade sized element (about 2,000 troops) will have enough support personnel to compile an engineering unit that can tunnel about 60 feet (18.2 m) a day. Half this number if the attacking army is battalion size (about 700 troops) or less. Double this number if the engineers are Dwarves, Gnomes, Kobolds, or Goblins. Triple if the engineers are Troglodytes or if earth warlocks are employed. This number is reduced by half if the engineers are digging through sand or clay (sand is more unstable and clay is difficult to excavate). This speed is reduced by 1/4<sup>th</sup> if the engineers are attempting to excavate solid rock. Once they have reached their destination, the engineers roll on their tunneling skill (30%+5%—equivalent to the level of the army) to see if their hard work was successful. If success is indicated, the fortification has been breached and troops can begin entering the fort (use the same method as described above). If the engineers failed, they are set back an additional 2D4 days before they can roll again. Failure can indicate flooding, hitting solid rock, cave-in, or other hindrance.

**5. The Use of the Ram or the Mouse:** A ram is a blunt device used to batter an opening through doors or sections of wall. The mouse functions the same way but utilizes a sharpened point, like an ice pick, to break away masonry. Since these techniques are used to breach a specific target such as an entryway or portion of a wall, no damage is given for its use. Instead, such tactics must approach the target, and then strike the target 1D4+1 times. Afterwards, a base percentage chance of breaching the target is allowed. The base percentage chance of breaching the target is then 01-10%, with +5% for every strike thereafter. The ram or mouse can strike once every two melees.

Commanders wishing to assign units to use a ram or a mouse must make a separate unit of a minimum of 10 soldiers but no more than 30. Assign the S.D.C. bonus for race and armor and multiply that by the number of troops. If a siege tower or other form of shelter is used, the attacking army has an A.R. of 11 and the fortifications have 1 S.D.C. per soldier, but remember that only fire or siege weapons can cause damage to it.

Once per melee, the defenders may attack the ram crew using the base damage for their missile weapons at x2. Or the defenders can use boiling water, hot sand, burning oil, or Greek fire. This begins as soon as the attackers attempt to use the ram. The ram/mouse crew cannot attack, parry or dodge while manning

the engine. If the S.D.C. of the crew is depleted before the target is breached, then a new crew must man the engine and they are subject to attack in the same manner. If fire was used, then the ram may have been destroyed. Once the target has been breached, the invaders may enter the fortress as described above. These actions are separate from the actions of the main armies.



KA XIONG '03

## Step 3: Average level of unit and training

Large units (company size or more) are rarely considered high level as a whole. This is because experienced soldiers attain rank, move on to other assignments or just plain retire, while recruiting brings in a constant stream of green soldiers fresh out of training. For this reason the average level of an army should rarely be higher than 4<sup>th</sup> level. 6<sup>th</sup> level troops are usually specialized units that rarely number more than 200. The following can be used as a guideline for players and G.M.s to determine the level of an army.

**A. Type 1: Mob.** This is a gaggle of people with no training and a common goal—the goal usually being senseless violence. This lot should be considered as having no HTH combat skill and just a familiarity with weapons like clubs and knives.

2 Attacks per Melee, +1 to strike, +0 to parry & dodge. -10% penalty on skills.

**B. Type 2:** A peasant army either rallied to a cause or pressed into service. Equal to HTH Basic at first level with minimal weapons training. These lads have never seen combat be-

fore and a good half of them are either having second thoughts or never wanted to be there in the first place. Note that all bonuses include weapon training.

4 Attacks per Melee, +1 to strike, +0 to parry & dodge. No bonus to skills.

**C. Type 3:** An army with at least 3 months of basic training and experienced NCOs. They are just a step above a type 2 army but they are still a force to be reckoned with. The Imperial Soldier O.C.C. is one of the few specialized O.C.C.'s that can be recruited in large numbers and is never less than a Type 3 unit. The average soldier is equal to a 2<sup>nd</sup> level soldier with HTH Basic.

4 Attacks per Melee, +1 to strike, +3 to parry, & +2 to dodge. +10% bonus to skills.

**D. Type 4:** As a Type 3 except these troops have already had their baptism by fire. The slackers and cowards have been weeded out and the survivors have already bonded into an effective fighting force. If a Type 4 or higher army is recruited, they



may be considered an independent mercenary “free” company with no loyalties to the recruiter and will demand good to excellent salary. The Long bowman O.C.C. is one of the few specialized O.C.C.’s that can be recruited in large numbers and are never less than a Type 4 unit. Equal to 3<sup>rd</sup> level HTH Basic.

4 Attacks per Melee, +2 to strike, +3 to parry & +2 to dodge.  
+15% bonus to skills.

**E. Type 5:** Something just short of a professional, combat tested army. Even the privates are veterans and they work well within their teams. These soldiers are smart and know how to stay alive and are not as prone to rush into combat without a plan. The Knight O.C.C. is one of the few specialized O.C.C.’s that can be recruited in large numbers and is never less than a Type 5 unit. The average soldier has HTH Expert at the 3<sup>rd</sup> level ability.

4 Attacks per Melee, +3 to strike, +4 to parry & +3 to dodge.  
+20% bonus to skills.

**F. Type 6:** A professional army that is tough, organized, and experienced, much like the ancient Samurai. Units that survived long campaigns are also good examples of this type of unit. The Imperial Janissary O.C.C. is one of the few specialized O.C.C.’s that can be recruited in large numbers and is never less than a Type 6 unit. The average soldier is equal to a 4<sup>th</sup> level Expert (or Martial Arts) in HTH.

4 Attacks per Melee, +4 to strike, +5 to parry, +3 to dodge.  
+25% bonus to skills.

**G. Type 7:** The best of the best. This is as high a level as a large army can get. Almost every member is a dedicated career soldier with numerous campaigns under his belt. This type of army, when recruited, is almost always a mercenary unit that demands outrageous salaries. The average soldier is equal to a 6<sup>th</sup> level HTH: Expert or Martial Arts.

5 Attacks per Melee, +5 to strike, +5 to parry & +3 to dodge.  
Critical Strike on a natural 18 or higher. +30% bonus to skills.

The combat bonuses listed are the same as HTH fighting skills plus weapon proficiency bonuses, just like any player character. The weapon used in the above examples was the sword found in the Palladium® Fantasy R.P.G. main rulebook. G.M.s should feel free to substitute the appropriate weapon if it suits their campaign.

It is important to note that not every soldier is equal to his comrades in fighting skill. Some soldiers help carry the load of others in an attempt to keep them alive, taking risks so others won’t have to. The individual soldiers contribute what they can so the army as a whole becomes the working machine that it is. Severe casualties could cause a Type 5 army to become a type 3 or 4, depending on how many veterans were lost. However, motivated would-be soldiers and experienced fighting men are attracted to units with good reputations so it is easy for armies to retain their level even with great losses. Good leaders are essential for maintaining high-level armies, while a poor leader could easily take a good army and make it a poor reflection of what it once was.

Commanders who emphasize training for their troops can also raise the level of their army. Basic training (at least three months) can turn a type 1 or a type 2 army into a type 3 army if there were enough experienced soldiers to teach the recruits.

Melding experienced units with green units is another way to heighten the effectiveness of an army. As a rule of thumb, use the difference between the two types of units combined to get the average. For example, if a Type 3 unit was combined with a Type 1 unit, the average level of the army as a whole would be a type 2. If a Type 2 was combined with a Type 6, the average would be a Type 4. A Type 4 army is as high as one can go with training. Training can only go so far, as real experience accounts for the highest level of units.

Once the level of the army unit is established, the player determines the unit’s combat bonuses based on Hand to Hand fighting skill and Weapon Proficiency bonuses for that level. The above table should be used, especially if the army is composed of a mixed group with varying specialties. If the player or G.M. wishes to create a more defined army (such as a company of Gromeks) then a “model” soldier is made up and the stats are used for the company as a whole. So if the average level of the Gromek were 3<sup>rd</sup> level, then the player would use Hand to Hand: Basic or Expert with all the appropriate bonuses for that R.C.C.

Attribute bonuses and bonuses derived from skills such as boxing should be avoided since the army is comprised of “average” soldiers. It can be argued that a particular O.C.C. or R.C.C. might have the boxing skill as standard training or a minimum P.P. attribute. Include these bonuses only if the unit is made up of 85% or more of these character classes and only if the applicable skills are in the original O.C.C. skill package (not other or secondary skills).

Example: Lord Talon was able to hire many men from his old command who are experienced soldiers. Many others are veterans from other conflicts and some stragglers are picked up from now defunct mercenary companies. The rest are aspiring men from common backgrounds. The G.M. decides that since there is large number of experienced soldiers in Talon’s army, the *average* level of the army is equal to a Type 5 unit. This may be reduced to a Type 1 or 2 if (through role-playing) Talon was only able to hire inexperienced troops.

## Resolving Combat

Now that you have the army’s S.D.C., combat bonuses, and their base damage, your unit is ready for the battlefield. Combat is resolved just like individual combat with little or no changes. If the units are small enough and individual Player Characters wish to actively participate in the battle, then it is suggested that the 15 second melee round is maintained with normal damage modifiers used for army combat. If units are larger and it is likely that combat would be dragged out too long, then higher damage (doubled or tripled) should be allocated or assume that each round of combat applies to a minute or longer. Game Masters and players should modify the system to suit their campaign.

**Determine Horror Factor:** When two armies face each other, there is an almost physical tension that forms between the two as each soldier sizes up both his opponent and the army behind him. Although counting heads is unlikely, it does not take much for each army to estimate the size and strength of their en-



emy. When they do, sometimes a save vs Horror Factor is required.

An army must make a save vs Horror Factor against a larger army if any of the below circumstances are evident:

1. The enemy obviously outnumbered the army by 3 to 1. (Does not apply to hidden troops.)
2. The enemy is primarily made up of "monster races" with natural Horror Factors such as Gromeks, Trolls or Jotan.
3. The enemy is better armed or equipped (such as heavy cavalry where the opponents have none, better armor, the obvious presence of magic users or demons, etc.).
4. Low morale or lack of desire to fight.
5. Any other circumstance where the G.M. sees fit.

When forced to save vs the Horrors of War, the army makes a collective roll against a Horror Factor of 12. If the roll is between 5 and 11, the army loses initiative and one attack for the first round only. Afterwards, they resume fighting as normal. If the roll is 4 or less, however, then the army will begin to have second thoughts and begin to disperse. If nothing is done, the army will disintegrate before the battle is even joined or will be overwhelmed within the first enemy contact. Under these circumstances, the troops will have the following penalties: Reduce any damage by half, and the army loses initiative and 2 attacks for the entire battle! Suffice to say that such an army will be easy pickings for the enemy.

A strong leader could win back the confidence of their army with just a little role-playing. Inspiring speeches, a show of courage, or a promise of great rewards could turn the morale around of any army with even half a chance of victory. On the opposite end, a row of archers behind the troops with orders to fire on deserters is another sure way to keep the men in line. Players are bound by their character's alignment, personality, and circumstances of the encounter to determine what is practical and what might work. If nothing else, it gets role-playing back into the game where a character can earn experience points for quick thinking, deductive reasoning and even daring.

If the G.M. decides the army gets a second chance, they can save vs Horror Factor again with all the normal bonuses plus any bonuses gained by high M.A. of the leader (use equivalent save vs psionics bonus), magic (such as Charismatic Aura, Aura of Power, etc.) or even good role-playing. If successful, there are no penalties and at the G.M.'s discretion, a bonus of +1 to initiative and +1 attack for the sudden surge in morale! Use the following bonuses for every Horror Factor roll.

1. Motivated/Just Cause: +2
2. Strong/Charismatic Leader: +1
3. Better Equipped: +1
4. Back to the Wall: +3 (any situation where there are no alternatives to fighting)
5. Knowledge that the enemy is walking into a trap: +1
6. Any other circumstance where the G.M. sees fit.

**Parley:** In medieval warfare, it was common for representatives of two armies to parley in hopes of resolving their differences without bloodshed. This was done to give a weaker army a chance to bow out gracefully (very important for the noble class), prevent unneeded bloodshed or make amends so that the men could return to the fields and feed the country. It is a good

opportunity to bluff, gamble, threaten, coerce or con an opposing general out of a fight or even to genuinely make peace. This could take place prior to the battle, during a pause in combat or when it is obvious that one army is about to be defeated. On the other hand, it may stir the hornets' nest up further or be ignored altogether depending on the circumstances. This step is included for another chance at role-play and is by no means required.

**Initiative:** Roll as in normal combat and use the following modifiers:

1. +1 for motivated troops (defending homeland, just cause, strong leader etc.)
2. +2 for troops that have the high ground or defending a fortified position.
3. +1 for cavalry (highly mobile).
4. +1 for the use of pole arms.
5. -1 for retreating or demoralized troops.

**Number of Attacks:** As per type of army with the following adjustments:

1. +1 for cavalry and charioteers. In the case for cavalry, this represents a natural attack for the mount, and it is not applicable to mounted archers. Charioteers get an extra attack to ram their enemies or mow them down with scythes attached to their wheels.
2. +1 for motivated troops (G.M.'s discretion but possible examples include troops defending their homeland, a just cause, popular rebellion, etc.).
3. +1 for successfully ambushing an enemy. G.M.s may restrict this bonus for the first round if desired.
4. -1 for retreating or demoralized troops.

**Strike:** Roll as in normal combat. Remember that ranged combat requires a roll of 8 or higher to strike at ranges over 60 feet (18.2 m) and a roll of 12 or higher at ranges beyond 200 feet (60.9 m).

**Parry:** Roll as in normal combat. Successful Parries in mass hand to hand combat results in ½ damage. (Someone's going to get hurt when hundreds clash.) Critical parry rolls (natural 20) results in ¼ damage. Remember that an army cannot parry ranged attacks. Use the following modifiers:

1. +1 for troops using pole arms in ranks.
2. +1 for cavalry (this reflects the Horsemanship skill).
3. +1 for holding the high ground.

**Dodge:** Possible only for defending against ranged combat providing the defenders are equipped with shields or cover. Roll as in normal combat. As in parrying, successful dodges in mass combat results in ½ damage. Critical dodge rolls (natural 20) results in ¼ damage. Remember that a dodge counts as one of the unit's attacks. If soldiers dodge while moving, they will move at half their normal speed.

1. +1 to dodge for cavalry units due to speed (this reflects the Horsemanship skill).
2. +1 for troops within fortifications.

3. Siege engines, structures, and other large constructs cannot dodge, although the troops within them can.

**Speed:** An army is as fast as its slowest man. This philosophy is as true in modern warfare as it was in ancient times. For simplicity's sake, treat infantry units with a base speed of 5 while traveling, 9 for forced march, and 12 for a charge. Cavalry units have a base speed of 7 while traveling, 11 for forced march, and 22 for a charge. Flying units have a base speed of 22 while traveling, 44 for forced march, and 66 for a charge.

**The Use of Skills.** When play demands that certain non-combat related actions be performed, the same skills offered to individual characters are also available to the army. When using these skills, use the base skill number and add the appropriate bonuses listed under each type of army.

**The Use of Magic and Psionics:** Magic and psionics are a reality in the Palladium universe and it is expected for any general to desire the edge a Wizard, Priest, or Mind Mage can give him. However, anyone foolish enough to go to the local magic guild to recruit soldiers may be in for a shock. G.M.s and players are reminded that such characters are the exception, not the rule. They have the Palladium equivalent of a Master's Degree in their chosen fields and few would waste all of that by charging a hill defended by a company of Orcs. It takes years for these learned people to master their skills just to be considered first level. After that point in their lives when they are ready to leave their master, they are hardly excited to join the army, no matter whose army it may be.

If a general had access to such characters he would be wise to keep them close to himself and headquarters rather than risk them on the field of battle. Once in his or her employ, these individuals will most likely benefit the warlord through divination, Prayers of Intervention, healing and other non-combat related tasks. Very powerful wizards, warlocks or summoners could conduct rituals and summon monsters to assist the troops in defeating their enemies, but comparatively, those efforts may not substitute for old-fashioned strategy, steel and the will to win.

Another consideration is that if one army has spell capabilities, the other army may have them as well. A Wizard may begin with assisting the front lines and later be drawn into a duel with his counterpart on the other side, effectively taking him out of the battle.

If players wish to employ such characters, they should be treated on an individual basis rather than incorporating them into the army itself. If the spell caster wishes to cast multiple Call Lightning spells into the fray, so be it, but he would only affect one soldier per spell and that is insignificant when facing an army of hundreds. Area effect spells should be used with caution since when the battle has been joined, the two armies are intermingled with no definite lines. Preemptive spells might be useful but threaten to drain the wizard of his P.P.E. quickly and the effects still might be minimal. None of this is to say that a wizard would not have his uses; it is just a reminder that even a high level mage would be limited in a campaign that lasted hours or even days.

The same line of thinking applies to psychics as well. Psychic O.C.C.s tend to be self-absorbed loners who are loath to take commands from "normal" men so it is safe to assume that they would rarely be found mixing with low-level soldiers. Even if the ranks had a few psychics among them, they would be of little use to anyone but themselves and perhaps a few comrades. Powerful psychics would be sought out by command officers for the same purposes a wizard might be. Psychics could be invaluable as advisors, negotiators, strategists, and assistants to generals and, once again, would not be risked on the battlefield.

With all of that being said, certain practitioners of magic such as summoners and high level wizards can create powerful spells and rituals that can inflict massive amounts of damage to those in a specified radius. To keep things simple, when spells like this are used against an army, they will cause 1D4 points of damage per 5 foot area of effect even if the spell incapacitates rather than causes damage (so an earthquake caused by an 8<sup>th</sup> level Earth Warlock will be in the area of 1D4x100 to the opposing army). Suffice it to say that the spell took out the number of soldiers within that radius and they are effectively out of the fight. At the G.M.'s discretion, the army may parry, dodge, or save vs magic for half damage.

## After the Battle

The battle will continue until one side sees the inevitable and makes a "tactical withdrawal" (i.e. retreats) or until the S.D.C. of one army is reduced to zero. If one army withdraws from the field, the victor can take prisoners (a number of POWs equal to 6D6% of the enemy unit) that will give a +1D4x10% bonus in future intelligence rolls if it pertains to the same enemy force. Salvage operations give a bonus of 1D4x10% to skills involving repairs. Other bonuses may be awarded at the discretion of the G.M.

If the S.D.C. rating of an army has been reduced to zero, it does not necessarily mean that everyone was killed. The unit might have been captured, incapacitated, pinned down to ineffectiveness, or demoralized to such an extent that they just gave up. Roll a 1D6 and consult the following chart:

1. Massacre! A mere 5% of the army survived and none escaped.
2. Total Rout! The army has been shattered with 80% KIA, 10% MIA, and the rest captured.
3. Beg for mercy! After 80% of these troops were killed, the rest saw no reason to keep fighting and they surrender unconditionally or retreat if they believe their enemy will show no quarter.
4. Decisive Victory! After 70% of these troops were killed, the rest saw no reason to keep fighting and retreated. A straggling 10% were taken prisoner.
5. Overrun! The army was literally overrun with no viable escape option. A full 40% of the soldiers survived and were probably captured with much of their equipment intact.
6. Complete surprise! Whatever tactics used against them in this battle, the unit was never able to gain the initiative. 50% survived with 6D6% captured while the remaining soldiers are halfway home by now.

Player characters are never included in the above results. Allow them to decide their own fate as far as surrender or retreat goes.



## Some Examples of Army Units

**Type of Unit:** Human Archers Defending a Stone Castle (a Type 4 army).

**Number of Troops:** 600

**Average Level:** 3<sup>rd</sup> level, Basic

**S.D.C. Bonus:** 3 (Medium S.D.C. beings wearing studded leather armor within stone fortifications)

**S.D.C.:** 1800 (the castle has 3000 S.D.C. and provides the archers with an A.R. of 15!)

**Attacks per Melee:** 5 hand to hand attacks.

**Bonuses:** +2 to strike, +3 to parry & +2 to dodge. +15% bonus to skills.

**Damage:** Basic Weaponry (Short Bows). 5D6. 380 foot (115.8 m) range.

**Note:** Normally archers at the 3<sup>rd</sup> level ability would have a rate of fire of 4. In this example, these troops are defending from a fortified position and the G.M. has ruled that they are very motivated since they are defending their homeland and their beloved king. This accounts for the extra attack. If the walls

of the castle are breached, the castle's S.D.C. and the A.R. are ignored and the archers will be forced to fight hand to hand.

**Type of Unit:** Wolfen Infantry Battalion (a Type 5 army).

**Number of Troops:** 640

**Average Level:** 3<sup>rd</sup> level, Expert

**S.D.C. Bonus:** 6 (Large S.D.C. beings in scale armor)

**S.D.C. Rating:** 3840

**Attacks per Melee:** 4 hand to hand attacks.

**Bonuses:** +1 on initiative, +3 to strike, +4 to parry, +5 to parry with pole arms, & +3 to dodge. +20% bonus to skills.

**Damage:** Basic Weaponry. 3D6x5 with swords, 4D6x5 with pole arms, 5D6x5 when the pole arms are set to receive a charge!

**Note:** The damage this unit can cause would be devastating to even the best protected cavalry units. An extra die of damage was added for the Wolfens' size, and the act of receiving a charge gives the soldiers an additional 1D6 base damage. Receiving a charge costs two attacks, just like the act of charging and will probably only be used once since after the enemy has closed, the fighting will be hand to hand.

**Type of Unit:** Imperial Janissary Cavalry Unit (a Type 6 army).

**Number of Troops:** 160

**Average Level:** 3<sup>rd</sup> level, Martial Arts (all Imperial Janissaries are trained in martial arts)

**S.D.C. Bonus:** 9 (S.D.C. beings in plate and chain armor, riding mounts with chain barding)

**S.D.C. Rating:** 1440

**Attacks per Melee:** 6 hand to hand attacks.

**Bonuses:** +3 on initiative, +6 to strike, +5 to parry, +3 to dodge.  
Skill bonus: +25%.

**Damage:** Elite Weaponry (Swords). 2D8+4x2, 3D6+4x2 for a charge. Their mounts will do 2D6+4x2 (front kick damage) normally or 4D6x2 on a charge (trample damage). This counts as one of the 6 attacks.

**Note:** This unit can easily stray from the norm because the Western Empire trains and equips its Janissaries well. In the above example, the Janissaries are each trained in Hand to Hand: Martial Arts. They are armed with Dwarven long swords that are +4 to damage and +1 to strike and each are issued plate and chain armor. These soldiers are truly a force to be reckoned with.

**Type of Unit:** Gromek Air Infantry (a Type 5 army).

**Number of Troops:** 210

**Average Level:** 3<sup>rd</sup> level, Expert

**S.D.C. Bonus:** 5 (Large S.D.C. beings with a natural A.R. of 12 – roughly equal to chain mail)

**S.D.C. Rating:** 1050

**Attacks per Melee:** 4 hand to hand attacks.

**Bonuses:** +2 on initiative, +5 to strike, +6 to parry, +5 to dodge, +9 to dodge while in flight. Skill bonus: +20%.

**Damage:** Basic Weaponry (Swords). 3D6x5.

**Note:** Another abnormal unit because the soldiers are much larger and tougher than humans and their allies. The S.D.C. bonus was based on the monsters' tough, fine scaled skin. The combat bonuses are equal to Hand to Hand: Expert at the 2<sup>nd</sup> level ability, plus the weapon proficiency bonuses (in this case, W.P. Sword) and the natural R.C.C. bonuses of +1 to strike and +2 to parry and dodge that all Gromek share. The damage is 3D6 instead of 2D6 because Gromeks are over 7 feet (2.1 m) tall and use larger weapons.

**Type of Unit:** A Type 4 army including infantry, archers, siege engines, magic and cavalry.

**Number of Troops:** 20,000!

**Average Level:** 3<sup>rd</sup> level, Basic

**S.D.C. Bonus:** 6 (Medium-sized beings with various armor and mounts)

**S.D.C. Rating:** 120,000

**Attacks per Melee:** 6 hand to hand attacks, +1 attack every third melee.

**Bonuses:** +2 to strike, +3 to parry & +2 to dodge. +15% bonus to skills.

**Damage:** Basic Weaponry (swords/arrows): 2D6x100. Cavalry: 2D8x100. Siege Engines: 5D6x100. Magic: 2D4x100.

**Note:** This example is to determine the outcome of a huge conflict in a short period of time. This leaves little room for tactics on the players' part, but would be interesting nevertheless. The first four attacks might be considered archers or infantry, with the fifth attack representing cavalry and the sixth attack representing magic. Every third melee, a seventh attack represents siege engines. The damage multiplier is much higher than described, and the melee round of combat could represent 1-5 minutes rather than 15 seconds.

## Using the Rules in Rifts® Mercenaries to Create Armies

The rules found in Rifts® Mercenaries to create companies of soldiers is a great system to easily construct armies in any setting. Obviously, if these rules are to be used in the Palladium Fantasy setting, then a few modifications are in order. Below is the format taken from Mercenaries with the suggested modifications necessary to create medieval-style armies. Also included is the information necessary to establish S.D.C., damage, and optional bonuses or penalties.

### Step One: Size & Orientation

There is no change to this step. Players creating an army can either use this step to create their entire army or utilize the different sizes for each individual unit. For example, the cavalry could begin as a Free Company (#3) while the infantry may begin in size equal to a Mercenary Army (#5).

An optional rule is the ability to purchase points after initial creation. If a commander wishes to improve his unit, further points may be purchased for 2000 gold pieces per point. This may seem expensive but after you buy a soldier armor, weapons, equipment, food, and pay his salary you will find that the transition is about equal. Furthermore, purchased points can only equip 500 line soldiers at a time. Larger units expend additional points for every 500 troops. It is because of such budget constraints that commanders are forced to be frugal in their spending. They save money by giving the best armor to the infantry, and leaving the archers (who generally stay in the rear) without any armor at all. Unscrupulous commanders will also spend more on favorite units and all but ignore undesirable—albeit necessary—units. This is a great way to upgrade an existing army.

### Step Two: Mercenary Company Features

#### Sponsorship

1. **None.** No change.

2. **Secret.** No change.

3. **Bandit/Merchant.** A powerful merchant, bandit, landowner, or alchemist is interested in seeing this army raised,

probably to protect his or her assets from outside threats. Add 10 points to outfits, and 10 points where desired.

**4. Guild/Church.** Any guild (merchant, assassin, thief, miner, etc.), or an active church is investing to raise this army and want the Player Characters to lead it as long as the Player Characters do the bidding of said organization. Add 20 points to criminal activity, 20 points to intelligence, and 10 points where desired.

**5. Kingdom.** No changes from Government Sponsorship as found in *Rifts*® Mercenaries.

**6. Empire.** No changes from Coalition Sponsorship as found in *Rifts*® Mercenaries.

## Experience

(The percentile number is the base chance for availability. This may also apply to every 500 soldiers.)

- 1. Type One Army:** 5 points (93%)
- 2. Type Two Army:** 15 points (77%)
- 3. Type Three Army:** 25 points (55%)
- 4. Type Four Army:** 40 points (33%)
- 5. Type Five Army:** 60 points (21%)
- 6. Type Six Army:** 80 points (12%)
- 7. Type Seven Army:** 100 points (10%)

## Outfits

(Note: per 500 soldiers or 250 mounts, point cost applies to each designated unit!)

**1. None.** No S.D.C. bonus and no identifying insignias. Cannot effectively dodge unless plenty of cover is available. 0 points.

**2. Basic Insignia.** No S.D.C. bonus, but all troops are identified by a simple armband, tunic color, standard or other insignia. Cannot effectively dodge unless plenty of cover is available. 5 points.

**3. Weak.** Leather style armors. +1 to S.D.C. bonus. 10 points.

**4. Adequate.** Chain and double mail. +2 to S.D.C. bonus. 20 points.

**5. Impressive.** Splint and scale mail. +3 to S.D.C. bonus. 30 points.

**6. Invulnerable.** Plate mail. +4 to S.D.C. bonus. 50 points.

## Equipment

(Note: per 500 soldiers, point cost applies to each designated unit!)

**1. None.** These troops live little better than animals. They have no shelter, tattered footgear, only one set of clothing, and little if any luxuries like tobacco or ale. 0 points. (Optional penalty: -2 on initiative, -3 to save vs Horror Factor due to low morale.) 0 points.

**2. Cheap Gear.** 5 points. Slightly better than #1. The gear these troops have is adequate but is often shared between entire squads. Occasionally they have a hot meal and a shot of liquor but it's nothing to write home about. (Optional penalty: -1 on

initiative, -2 to save vs Horror Factor due to low morale.) 5 points.

**3. Good Gear.** 10 points. (No bonus or penalties. Morale is average.)

**4. Surgeon/Armorer.** 15 points. (Replenishes 1D6x10 S.D.C. per week.)

**5. Hospital/Armory & Smith.** 30 points. (Replenishes 2D6x10 S.D.C. per week.)

**6. Healers (Magic/Psionic).** 50 points. (Replenishes 5D6 S.D.C. per day!)

## Mobility

**1. None.** Strictly infantry. 0 points.

**2. Basic.** Barely enough horses and wagons to carry the supplies. 3 points.

**3. Fleet.** Ample horse and tack for swifter movement of supplies (not troops). Raise the base speed from traveling to forced march equivalent. 10 points.

**4. Combat.** The minimum for cavalry units with durable riding horses (light to medium). 20 points.

**5. Specialty.** Heavy horse for the cavalry and/or war chariots. 30 points.

**6. Unlimited.** As above but the army has access to ships or magical means of transport. 50 points.

## Weapons

**1. None.** Soldiers bring their own weapons, farm tools, or scavenge the battlefield (if they survive). Maximum base damage is 1D4 for ranged weapons and 1D6 for melee weapons. 0 points.

**2. Basic Repairs.** As above but armorers are available to make repairs. Maximum base damage is 1D6 for ranged weapons and 2D4 for melee weapons. 5 points.

**3. Basic Weaponry.** No penalty for base damage. 10 points.

**4. Advanced Weaponry.** Good quality weapons, the finest human smiths can mass produce. +1 damage. (So a unit of 300 infantry with spears will do 2D6+1x5 damage.) This is also the minimum amount of points commanders must spend to issue long bows or heavy crossbows to their soldiers. 20 points.

**5. Extensive Weaponry.** Equal to Kobold make. +2 damage. This is the minimum amount of points commanders must spend for light siege weapons. 40 points.

**6. Elite Weaponry.** Equal to Dwarven make. +3 damage. This is the minimum amount of points commanders must spend for medium to heavy siege weapons. 60 points.

**Note:** Any weapon category with a damage bonus must be accompanied with #5 (Armory/Smith) under the Equipment section to maintain these weapons. If commanders have anything less, the damage bonus will be lost after 1D4 engagements. Units that receive siege weapons are armed with basic personal weapons if any at all. Commanders who wish to give their weapons crews Dwarven weapons would have to spend twice the amount of required points.



## Security

1. **None.** Optional Penalty: +20% on the enemy's Intelligence rolls against the unit. Surprise is almost always automatic. 0 points.
2. **Lax.** Optional Penalty: +10% on the enemy's Intelligence rolls. -15% to detect ambush for the unit itself. 2 points.
3. **Tight.** No penalty or bonuses. 10 points.
4. **Iron-Clad.** Optional bonus: -10% on the enemy's Intelligence rolls against the unit. 20 points.
5. **Paranoid.** Optional bonus: -20% on the enemy's Intelligence rolls against the unit. 40 points.
6. **Impregnable.** Optional bonus: -50% on the enemy's Intelligence rolls against the unit. 60 points.

## Permanent Bases

1. **None.** The army either lives in the field or they occupy conquered villages or towns. No S.D.C. bonus. 0 points.
2. **Partial Headquarters.** The army uses a piece of land such as a hidden valley, portion of a city, or other out of the way locale for training, recruitment, and rest. No S.D.C. bonus if attacked. 2 points.
3. **Headquarters.** As above but this permanent base has all the luxuries needed to keep troops happy. No S.D.C. bonus since nothing was invested in fortifications but troops will be motivated to defend it, thus giving them +1 on initiative. 10 points.
4. **Fortified Headquarters.** As above but the base is lightly fortified with fences, barricades and the occasional obstacle. +2 on initiative and +1 S.D.C. bonus to troops within the fortifications. 20 points.
5. **Fortified Town.** +2 on initiative and +2 S.D.C. bonus to troops within the fortifications. 40 points.
6. **Castle.** +2 on initiative and +3 S.D.C. bonus to troops within the fortifications. 60 points.

## Intelligence

1. **None.** -20% for intelligence rolls. 0 points.
2. **Scout detachment.** No bonus or penalty. 5 points.
3. **Special.** +5% to intelligence rolls. 10 points.
4. **Psionic/Magic.** +10% to intelligence rolls. 20 points.
5. **Unnatural.** +15% to intelligence rolls. 25 points.
6. **Supernatural.** +20% to intelligence rolls. 50 points.

## Budget

1. **None.** No change. 0 points.
2. **Mere Coppers.** 6D6x100 gold pieces are available for any one mission. 5 points.
3. **Small Potatoes.** 3D6x1000 gold pieces are available for any one mission. 15 points.
4. **Large Loans.** Up to 150,000 gold pieces are available for any one mission. 25 points.
5. **Big Bucks.** Up to 500,000 gold pieces are available for any one mission. 45 points.

6. **Large Loans.** Up to 1 million gold pieces are available for any one mission. 60 points.

## General Alignment

No change.

## Criminal Activity

1. **Con Man (1).** Optional bonus: Add 20% when selling acquired goods and loot. They are also 10% more likely to unload undesirable items such as artifacts from unpopular temples.
2. **Prostitutes (3).** Optional bonus: +1 to save vs Horror Factor due to better morale.
3. **Gang of Robbers.** No bonus or penalty.
4. **Smugglers and Sellers of Contraband.** Optional bonus: +15% to the army's streetwise rolls, +5% on intelligence rolls, and +20% to recognize weapon quality.
5. **Expert Assassin (1).** No change.
6. **Psychic Enforcer (1).** No change.
7. **Special Forces.** No change.
8. **Professional Thief (1).** No change.
9. **Forger (1).** No change.

## Reputation

Unlike other areas, points for reputation should never be "purchased." Instead, they should be awarded or confiscated after each major engagement or mission. If such a system is used, award or penalize the company 1D6 reputation points after every mission depending on the outcome. 1D4 bonus points may be awarded/penalized for brilliant strategy/huge blunders, overwhelming victories/major defeats or other factors.

1. **Hunted.** +5 for the enemy's save vs Horror Factor when facing this army.
2. **Scoundrels.** +2 for the enemy's save vs Horror Factor when facing this army.
3. **Unknown.** No bonus or penalty for the enemy's save vs Horror Factor when facing this army.
4. **Known.** -1 for the enemy's save vs Horror Factor when facing this army.
5. **Excellent Reputation.** -3 for the enemy's save vs Horror Factor when facing this army.
6. **Famous.** -5 for the enemy's save vs Horror Factor when facing this army.

## Salary

1. **None.** No change in the description. This is the kind of army that relies on pillaging and looting for their pay. Barbarian hordes, bandits, mercenaries, and monsters are great examples of this kind of army. Optional penalty or bonus would be a -3 to a +5 to save vs Horror Factor depending on the knowledge that there will be something to loot when the battle is over. G.M.'s discretion. Another type of army that gets this kind of pay is a conscript army that has been pressed into service. These guys always suffer from a -2 to save vs the Horror Factor of war.

2. **Freelance.** As above but these troops are always volunteers, never pressed into service. The penalty/bonus range is -1 to +2.

3. **Pittance.** No bonus or penalty.

4. **Good Salary.** Optional bonus of +1 to save vs Horror Factor due to good morale.

5. **Excellent Salary.** Optional bonus of +2 to save vs Horror Factor due to good morale.

6. **Outrageous Salary.** Optional bonus of +3 to save vs Horror Factor due to great morale.



# Flashing Blades: Fencing in Palladium Fantasy

By Richard Thomassen

*"Sir! This slur is too much! I demand satisfaction! The parade ground. At dawn."*

*"Very well. Rapiers, Sir . . ."*

Combat in the Palladium Fantasy Role Playing Game is heroic: Palladins rain death blows on demons, while Assassins surge through the defenses of their victims. Raw strength and speed (attributes) are often more of a determining factor than skill and experience (Level).

The same is not true of the Royal Court's duelists...

'Pure' fencing, the 'noble' skill of the blade, is normally performed under highly controlled conditions: There is little advantage to be had in strength or battlefield experience, and magical (and psionic) powers are strictly forbidden. Fencers are never heavily armed or armored.

## Royal Court Fencing

Fencing is an art to most, and a sport to a few. It allows the fencer to outsmart, outwit and hurt an opponent, possibly even

injure them, but it is not a martial art, or an effective combat form. Fencing teaches a small range of skills that are mastered and combined as the fencer's experience increases. It teaches these skills in a restricted environment with a set of rules that must be obeyed — typically, fencers will only strike to their opponent's front torso, arms and masked face, and only with a designated weapon. Fencers who find themselves cornered or in trouble can simply turn their backs on their opponent: a tactic that works if the rules of fencing are being strictly adhered to, but would be suicide in a real fight.

In Timiro, Fencing Duels will often be performed within magically warded areas and with "house blades," preventing the use of magic and enchanted blades. A Judge will often be appointed to run the fight — calling the fencers to the fight, checking the blades, and enforcing any rules such as the giving of mercy. Armed warriors, archers or even wizardry may be used to enforce a Judge's decision that one side has made the fatal mistake of cheating.

If available, a psychic will fulfill the role of Judge, watching out for the misuse of mental powers, but this is often not possible due to their rarity. The only opportunity to cheat under such circumstances is the use of poison (see below) or to buy the Judge's favor.

The person declaring the fight will "call out" his opponent, naming a location and time, limits (e.g., "to the third blow" or "to the death"), and will list the grievances which the fight is intended to settle. The opponent has the choice to decline or accept, and may specify a blade to be used. Either opponent then has the option to withdraw, publicly accepting defeat. Failing to show up at the arena is the last way a fencer may withdraw, but this is seen by some as the coward's way out.

Ladies of the court are not allowed to fight. (Openly... There have been incidents where women have been discovered training, and even fighting, behind closed doors.) A lady or lord who can not fight due to injury or illness (or cowardice) can appoint a "champion" who will fight in their stead. If the champion is not directly linked with the house of the lord or lady they are replacing, then this is considered "bad form."

Before the fight starts, weapons are chosen. The most senior noble will choose which house blade to use if the fight is on common ground, or the visiting fencer if the arena is associated with one of the fencers.

Each duelist is expected to appoint a "second," whose role is to attend to the fencer's needs — tending their wounds if they survive, or bearing witness to their death. If the fencer fails to turn up to a duel, the second has the option of taking the fencer's place. To avoid this rule allowing an unskilled fencer appointing a Master as his second and not turning up to a fight, a second can never win a fight, only draw it.

A fight may typically be "To First Strike" (the first strike landed wins — typically both fencers will be lightly armored), "To First Blood" (the first successful strike that causes damage to Hit Points, not S.D.C.), "To Mercy" (the fight continues until either side asks for mercy, which may or may not be given, depending upon the fencers' morals and the court's rules), or "To The Death."

Fights to the death are rare. The Timiro court doesn't want its floors wet with noble blood. A fight to the death must be done either with the King's permission, or in secret.

Fights to the death are typically completed ceremonially: Each fencer must carry a *misercorde* — a dagger that it is forbidden to use in the fight. The *misercorde*'s first function in a fencing duel is to deliver a killing blow if the opponent has been incapacitated. Its second function is for suicide — if a fencer is hopelessly outclassed, or has fallen out of grace with the court, suicide with a *misercorde* is seen as a sign of repentance, and will often gain the fencer's family honor.

## Fencing – Game Rules

To fence, both fighters must be fighting in a fencing style. You can not fence against somebody swinging a two-handed sword and hope to live. This is represented by the lack of bonuses presented in the *Hand to Hand: Fencing* skill. Most bonuses come from the Fencing weapon skills.

When fencing, no normal Hand to Hand or O.C.C. bonuses apply. The only skill modifiers will come from Fencing hand to hand and W.P.: Fencing Blade.

Initiative, strike and parry bonuses will come from I.Q., the bonus calculated on the P.P. scale. For example, a 16 I.Q. gives a +1 bonus, an 18 gives a +2 bonus, etc. This bonus is modified by the weapon used: the Foil is quick, the Long-sword, slow. Some weapons are easier to use than others.

Damage is based upon weapon type, modified by P.P., calculated on the P.S. scale. For example, a P.P. of 20 gives a +5 damage bonus. It is how well the attack is landed that is everything, not brute force. Strength doesn't help. Damage is done directly to Hit Points, unless armor is worn.

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## Fencing Skills

Anybody can learn to fence, but your social standing will determine how hard it is to find and adapt to the teaching. For Nobles, fencing costs one O.C.C. Related Skill, or may be taken instead of Hand to Hand: Basic. Those of the middle classes (Clergy, Land Owners, Officers) must pay two O.C.C. Related skills, while commoners pay three. W.P.: Fencing Blade costs one skill.

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## Hand to Hand: Fencing

Hand to Hand: Fencing does not provide an education of how to survive a real fight, hence the benefits it gives are fairly poor compared to basic hand to hand training. The bonuses a fencer gets come from W.P.: Fencing Blade (and optionally, W.P.: Fencing Off-hand).

The fencing form's greatest limitation in a real fight is its inability to focus on multiple opponents — the form teaches a limited auto-parry. If fighting multiple opponents who are not fencing, this limited auto-parry allows a parry roll against one opponent per two levels of experience. Several fencers can still be auto-parried though. For example, a 4th level fencer can auto-parry two "normal" opponents, or as many fencing opponents that are in his line of sight.

## Bonuses by Level

- 1 One attack per melee. +1 to parry. Limited auto-parry.
- 2 +1 initiative.
- 3 +1 dodge.
- 4 +1 attack per melee.
- 5 +1 strike.
- 6 +1 to parry.
- 7 +1 damage.
- 8 +1 attack per melee. +1 dodge.
- 9 Critical strike on a natural roll of 18-20.
- 10 +1 strike.
- 11 +1 initiative.
- 12 +1 to parry.
- 13 +1 damage.
- 14 +1 dodge.
- 15 +1 attack per melee. +1 strike.

Note that the form gives only one additional attack per melee round over the basic two all characters receive, compared to Hand to Hand: Basic, Expert and Martial Arts which provide two additional.

## W.P.: Fencing Blade

This skill provides many bonuses when fencing. These simulate the fact that fencing is only useful against another fencer. It gives no bonuses in a real fight, but a trained fencer will cut the uninitiated to ribbons.

### Bonuses by Level

- 1 +1 attack. +2 to parry. +1 to strike and initiative.
- 2 +1 attack. +1 to strike.
- 3 +1 to parry.
- 4 +1 to strike.
- 5 +1 to parry, +1 to initiative.
- 6 +1 to strike.
- 7 +1 to parry.
- 8 —
- 9 +1 to strike, +1 to parry, +1 to initiative.
- 10 —
- 11 +1 to parry. +1 attack.
- 12 +1 to strike.
- 13 +1 to parry.
- 14 +1 to initiative.
- 15 +1 to strike, +1 to parry.

## Fencing Blades

Three blades are common in the courtrooms of Timiro — the foil, the rapier and the long sword. In a melee (see below), these swords may be used with the skill W.P.: Sword.

The foil is the lightest blade, and is often considered a training weapon, or a child's toy. Its light weight makes it easy to use (+2 to initiative and parry, +1 to strike) but there is a limited target area for the foil, reducing its ability to damage (2D4).

Foils have the same dimensions as a long sword, but are only half the weight (and cost).

The rapier is the 'normal' blade of choice. It gives no modifiers to initiative, strike or parry, and does 2D6 damage. Rapiers are 2/3 the weight of long swords, and cost the same.

Of the three fencing blades, the long sword is the heaviest and most damaging. The weight makes it slower than other blades to fence with (-2 to initiative and strike, -1 to parry) but the most damaging (2D6+2). Due to its military applications, this is often the choice of officers.

While training, many fencers will favor one type of blade over another. Those fencers choosing to specialize gain one effective level in one weapon at the cost of losing two effective levels in the others, gaining no bonuses in the other blades until 3rd level is achieved. For example, Sir Fenry, a 4th level Knight of the realm, specializes in the long-sword. He is considered to be 5th level when calculating his W.P.: Fencing bonuses for the long sword, but only 2nd level for the other fencing blades.

As previously noted, damage is done direct to Hit Points, unless a blow is pulled or the fencers are wearing armor. The blows landed with these blades can not be endured or rolled with due to the fencing style.

## Dueling

Dueling is "rough and ready" fencing. It uses the same principles of courtly fencing, but has fewer constraints. This is how the royal guard resolves matters of honor.

Bonuses are still derived from the Fencing Hand to Hand and fencing weapon skills, but damage bonuses may be calculated from physical strength (P.S.), rather than physical prowess (P.P.). Other bonuses (such as O.C.C. bonuses and Boxing) may be applied.

Duels will often be fought wherever they were declared with whatever arms and armor are to hand. Full suits of heavy armor will often be stripped completely, if circumstances allow. Dwarven, Kobold and magical fencing weapons are a rarity, but may be commissioned by wealthy nobles, merchants and military officers.

Sometimes 'pure' fencing duels will degrade to common duels as combatants get more aggressive and desperate. For player characters, it is up to the player to decide when he or she is desperate enough to start slashing wildly. An NPC fencer may start dueling when his Hit Points have been reduced to his "nerve threshold": an amount equal to twenty minus his Mental Endurance (20 - M.E.). Under such conditions, roll a D20 at the end of each round. If the roll is greater than the number of Hit Points the fencer has remaining, he will start dueling.

For example, Sir Grey (M.E. 14) is fencing, and has just been reduced to 12 Hit Points by his opponent. As 12 is greater than his nerve threshold of 6 (20 minus 14), Grey continues to fence. The next round, Grey's shoulder is pierced, reducing his Hit Points to 6. Each round, a D20 is rolled: if a 7 or greater is rolled, Grey stops fighting with finesse, and starts lashing out with his blade (dueling).

It should be noted that "spoiling the noble art" in such a way would often have the dueler regarded as the loser of a fight, even if his opponent is bested.

# Melee

Attempting to use your fencing skills against a 'normal' attacker is not wise. Bonuses from the Fencing Hand to Hand skill apply, but not the fencing weapon skills. Normal weapon skills are required. It would be suicide to attempt to fence a battle-axe-wielding Troll...

It is considered 'bad form' to melee a fencer in court — the perpetrator would be considered to have lost, even if the opponent was struck down — most of the "real combat" skills are against the rules.

# Competition

In competition, stiffened leather armor and masks are worn, and blunted blades are used. Blows may sting, but no damage is taken, unless a critical strike is landed. If a critical strike lands, the blow has pierced the armor, and real damage has been taken. It is possible for a fencer to be killed this way, but it is very rare.

Judges will determine when a fatal blow has been landed — fight combat as normal, taking a note of damage. All damage is imaginary however, and is "recovered" as soon as the fight is over. This is, unfortunately, open to abuse, as a judge's favor can be purchased or biased (even unintentionally).

Competitions can either be fought using 'pure' or dueling rules.

Fencing is not a common skill amongst the people, so it is not often a public sport. It may occur at state celebrations, where nobles of differing houses and nations meet. Competition is normally "friendly" — it is not the intention of the fencer to kill the opponent, just beat him.

As blades are not 'live,' and protective armor is worn, this is often how minor matters of honor (insults, slurs, debts and wagers) are settled. After all, a king would not allow dueling at all if his court decided to cut itself to ribbons over matters of honor. Matters of family and state honor however, often warrant real duels. Some are to first blood. Some are to the death.

# Poison

In the royal courts, where the use of magic and psychic powers is not possible, poison may often be the 'villain's' last line of defense. That is if threatening, bullying and bribing the opponent, or kidnapping their loved ones and stealing their possessions doesn't work first.

Poison may also be used when the aim of a duel is to murder the opponent, or to win at any cost.

As house blades are often used, poison can only normally be applied to the blade after the start of the fight. Such chances occur when one fencer is receiving medical aid or has requested a stop for a rest, or when a blade has broken.

Alternatively, a rogue may arrange to have a particular blade envenomed, if he knows he is to choose the first blade. Failing this, the fencer may try to poison the blade within plain view of the witnesses — this requires the successful use of Palming (to conceal the application) and Use Poison (at -10% due to the rush).

The judge may make a perception check to notice the use of poison. This requires a roll of 18+ on a D20 to casually notice poison, 8+ if inspecting the blade, and an automatic pass if actively checking for blade venom.

Being found with a poisoned blade carries harsh penalties. The perpetrator automatically loses the fight. He will then be charged with assault if the venom wasn't lethal, or attempted murder if it was. When these crimes are committed against nobility, the sentence is normally torture and death for a commoner, or death or exile for a noble.

# Optional Rule: Fencing Off-Hand

When fencing a superior bladesman, many will resort to using a second weapon: Sometimes, this will be a fencing weapon, such as a main-gauche or triple dagger, or an item of opportunity, such as a cloak.

Some weapons give the opportunity to disarm or entangle the opponent's weapon. Others give the opportunity to either parry with ease, or to strike more often — the fencer has the option of whether to gain a parry bonus, or extra attacks with the off-hand weapon.

Additional attacks are still made with the "main" blade — the parrying blade frees up the main blade from having to defend.

## W.P.: Fencing Off-Hand

Disarm and Entangle: +1 at levels 1, 6, and 12.

Bonus Attacks or Parry Bonus: +1 at levels 1, 4, 9 and 15.

As these weapons are taught in conjunction with fencing blades, use the W.P.: Fencing Blade skill bonuses to strike and parry. For example, a 4th level fencer may either gain two additional attacks, or gain +2 to parry.

Fencing weapon specialization (see above) does not affect the off-hand skill.

The off-hand skill is similar to the W.P.: Paired Weapons skill. It doesn't reflect the ability to simultaneously strike an opponent — this would be cheating against a single armed opponent. Rather, it simulates the better ability to defend yourself, and the more options of striking that are gained with two weapons.

# Off-Hand Weapons

Daggers are the accepted off-hand weapon in Timiro. The bodkin is the most common (no modifiers, 1D6 damage), with variations being the poignard (a triangular stabbing blade, +1 to initiative and strike, -1 to parry, 1D6+1 damage) and the main Gauche (a parrying dagger, -1 to initiative and strike, +1 to parry, 1D4+1 damage).

The triple dagger, a blade with two spring-loaded spurs able to catch and sometimes break blades (+2 to parry, +1 to disarm and entangle, 1D4 damage), is becoming more common, but is considered by some to be bad sport.





## The Palladium Fantasy Role-Playing Game®, 2nd Edition

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## High fantasy and epic adventure

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On the street, second weapons are not always at hand. In these cases, cloaks (-2 to initiative and strike; only blinding or entangling attacks may be made), lanterns (-2 to initiative, strike and parry, 1D4 damage or a blinding attack), or anything that can get in the way of a blade are used.

## Blinding Attacks

Blinding one's opponent is a dueling move that is used by those who need or want an advantage. This can be done a number of ways, including covering the opponent's head with a cloak, shining a lantern into the opponent's eyes, or throwing sand or powder of some sort.

A blinding attack takes one action. Roll to strike as usual — a natural 12 or more is required. If the attack is dodged or parried, the opponent saw the low move coming and avoided it. If the strike hits, the opponent must make a saving throw of 14 or be blinded for 1D4 melee rounds (-5 to strike, parry and dodge).

A blinding attack made with a lantern in a dark environment will leave the victim blinded for an additional 1D4 melee rounds, as their eyes will need longer to adjust.

## Notes

During "traditional" wilderness and dungeon adventures, fencing opportunities would be few. The skills are of better use in a city based or political adventure.

That is, unless the Game Master decides to engineer situations. For example: how about an adventure where a dragon was disguised as a noble for many years? Back in his hidden lair, the party falls foul of him, and can't hope to beat him in a straight fight, but he's willing to duel for their freedom...

The point of these skills is that it allows nobles to fight, without descending to the common melee. There are much more effective ways to kill people (such as paired gladius, or claymore and full plate mail), but the nobles generally aren't interested in that — that is what the common soldiers do. In real life the most effective fighters are usually those who do whatever is necessary to win. By fencing, you are limiting the moves you practice to those that are found acceptable. If both fighters keep to these rules, the most experienced fencer will have the advantage. Take away these restrictions, and the most experienced warrior will win.

This is how fights are resolved in the courtrooms of Timiro — the form of fencing presented here is an "Eastern" thing. In future articles, fencing forms for the Southern (throwing blades and bucklers) and Western courts (knife fighting) may be considered. In the harder Northern courts, honor and arguments are settled with true skills at arms and strength.

The rules presented here are quite in-depth. If the referee wishes to simplify things, I would recommend that the differing fencing weapons do not have any effect on game mechanics, off-hand weapons are ignored, and there is no dueling — only fencing or full melee.

Optionally, Game Masters may regard fencing as training for a real fight and give bonuses to a trained fencer in normal combat, much as the Boxing skill gives melee bonuses. If so, instead

of using the fencing skills presented here, initiative, strike and parry bonuses of +1 at levels 1, 5, and 12 may be gained. Game Masters may like to remove the restrictions on fencing all together. This would make fencing more fantastical, but one could argue that the name of the game, the *Palladium Fantasy Role-Playing Game*, encourages that sort of thing.

*"Monsieur Dragon! En-guard!"*

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Nightbane® Unlimited:

# Flynn and Company

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By R.L. Newman

**Editor's Note:** The following is a short story that blends *Nightbane*® with *Heroes Unlimited*™, and is a great example of the endless possibilities within the *Palladium Megaverse*.

## Detroit, Michigan

March 6th, 2000

2:00 PM

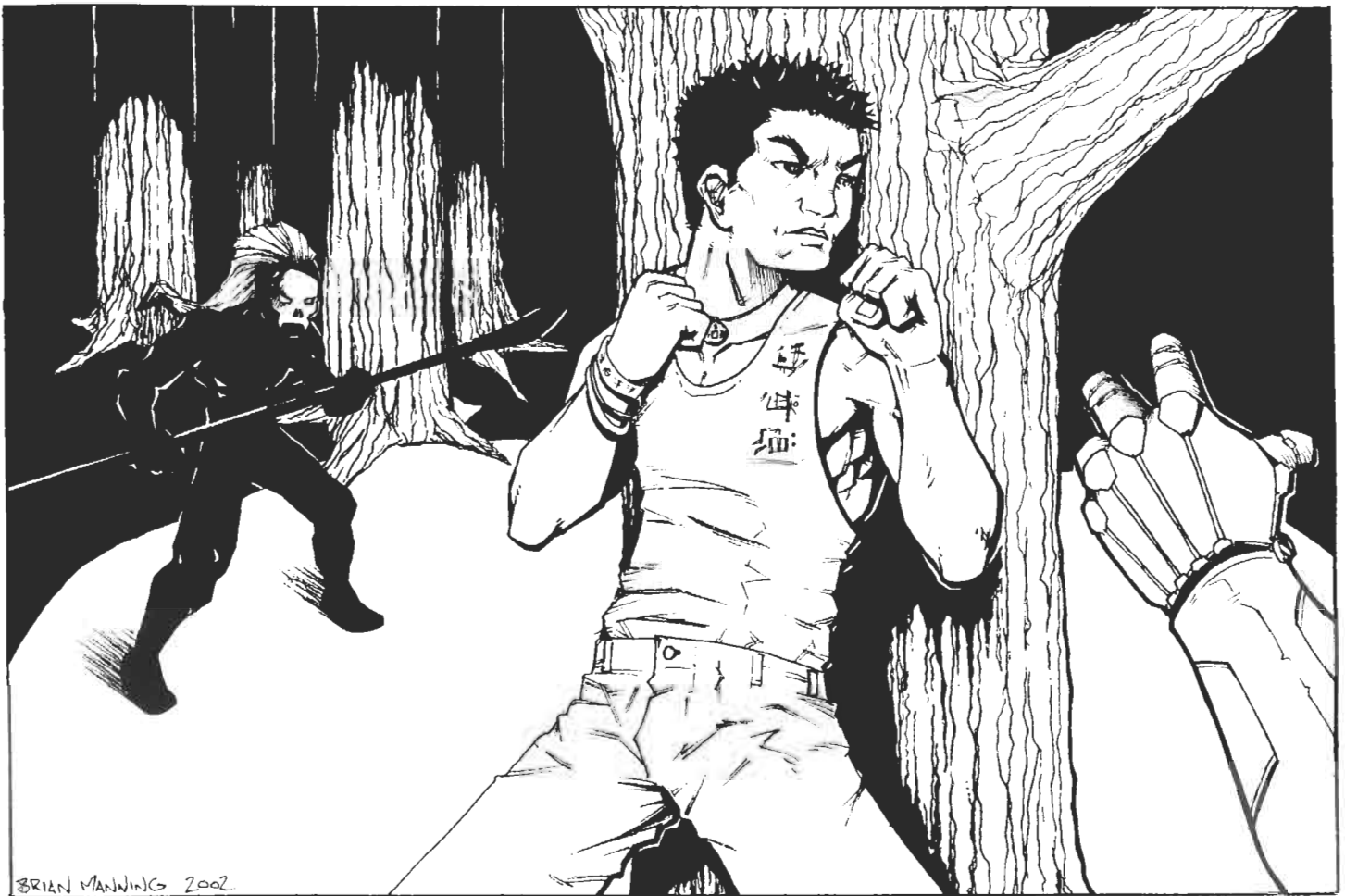
Christopher Flynn had fought many battles. Between his magic and his martial arts, his wits and his persistence, he'd come out on top more times than he could remember. He'd fought rampaging mutants and cyborgs, even rival sorcerers and, every now and then, an alien or two. On any given day, he would have thought he'd seen everything.

That was before the sun failed to rise. That was before the monsters came.

He darted between two houses, heading down something of an alley bordered with five foot tall chain link fences. Leafy vines covered them and swayed at his passing as he pumped his long legs for all they were worth. His thick-soled combat boots kicked up the gravel under them as he burst headlong out onto another side street.

Instead of turning left or right, he barreled straight ahead, into a thicket of trees and brush.

Unfortunately, the Hounds were faster than he was. They lost a few beats as they negotiated the woods and he found something that passed for a trail, but they quickly recovered any ground he'd gained. He hadn't expected that- they were taller than he was, probably almost seven feet in height- and they



looked like they were made out of metal. Even so, they moved almost silently, even at a full run, as if they were being whisked along on some hellish wind.

He ducked and rolled beneath a sword stroke aimed for his head, and when he came up, they were all around him. The black, metal skeletons grinned silently as they lunged with black swords and black spears, blades shredding the invisible armor he'd summoned with his magic. He ducked and back-flipped away, found himself against a tree.

Another blow aimed for his head whisked through the thick trunk like butter, ending a hundred years of growth.

"Red!" he screamed. Suddenly there was a flash next to him, as Red teleported into view. It took a moment for the skeletons to register the mutant.

Red lashed out with a fist, driving it deep into the chest of one of the things. He made a disgusted face at whatever was inside.

The skeletal warrior drew back a sword as it struggled to free itself, but Red unleashed a blast of flame inside the monster, causing it to fall in a smoldering heap.

One of its companions, still facing Flynn, twirled his spear, streaking sideways and skewering Red through the chest. Red's eyes blinked in shock and horror as he watched a black stain appear around the shaft of the weapon.

And then he slid to the ground, pawing weakly at the spear, even as the creature started to drag him away.

"Flynn," he could hear Red gurgling, "Don't... let them..."

And that was all.

There were still two of the demons left, slowly circling Flynn with weapons quivering, almost seeming impatient.

One of them darted forward, spear tip whistling as it cut through the air. Flynn side-stepped, spinning and shoving at the cold, metal thing as he moved.

But the other Hound had moved on him, sliced at him with a scimitar-like Darkblade. The blow sent him tumbling to the ground.

Worse, his armor ceased to exist, collapsing under the strain. Metal feet kicked at him, breaking bone, rending flesh.

He cried out. Where was Amber? Where was Carny?

Flynn lay very still, tasting blood in his mouth. They'd killed Red, probably dragged him off for dinner or something even more horrible. He couldn't summon his magic, the syllables of power and the very concentration he needed were gone.

Desperation gripped his heart, and for a second, the world was very still.

He felt his body quivering. His face itched. Muscles thickened, his body becoming even more lean and powerful than before. As he watched with equal parts horror and amusement, fur sprouted on the backs of his hands, his fingernails growing into claws. And, stranger still, a seam opened at the back of his jeans, just below his belt, allowing a six-foot tail to spring out.

And then the wounds started to close.

One of the Hounds drew back, poised to strike, but Flynn was already on the move. Using his tail for an extra boost, he launched himself upright, slamming a fist into a metal face.

If he'd had time to think about it, he would have reconsidered. But to his surprise, his hand didn't hurt at all, although there was a severe dent in the skull face.

He spun at the other Hound, who'd taken a two-handed grip on his sword, prepared to strike. Flynn ducked aside, kicking out and tripping the creature.

As fast and as strong as Flynn had been before his transformation, he was a virtual wrecking crew now. With feet and fists he battered the Hounds down, taking his time, toying with them, making them pay but also not overextending himself.

As the last Hound fell, Amber rushed into his field of view. She wore a helmet and goggles that contained a serious array of scanners and communication equipment, some of which was controlled by a panel on her weapon-gauntlet. An energy rifle, also of her own design, was expertly shouldered and trained on Flynn.

"It's me," Flynn said. Even as he did so, the fur retreated, and the tail snapped back into his pants, not even leaving the hole to note its passing. Amber's mouth hung slack, staring at him in disbelief.

"That's a heck of a spell," she finally said.

Flynn didn't say anything. He turned and rushed in the direction that Red had been taken in.

They came back out to the street, and Flynn knelt down, looking for the blood trail that he knew Red's injuries should have caused.

A cry to his left caught his attention from amongst the cramped houses and narrow yards. A short block away, Carny staggered into view. He wore a home-made suit of three-dimensional camouflage, built up with strips of burlap and moss and leafy vines. In his right hand, hanging limply and dragging intermittently on the ground, was a rifle identical to Amber's.

Flynn stood up and trotted toward him. "Carny, have you seen Red?"

His friend looked at him numbly, his narrow, bony face slack, his eyes big and round.

"Carny?" Amber asked, "What happened to you?"

His suit had been mutilated. It was difficult to tell with all the pseudo-vegetation attached to it, but he was mostly bare-chested, the legs of his pants were ripped and his sleeves were held on by nothing more than twigs and bark.

Carny ignored Amber, staring right at Flynn, who couldn't help but stare back. "It happened to you, too," was all he said at last.

Flynn nodded. Whatever he had become, he somehow knew that Carny was the same as him.

They managed to lay low for the rest of the day, taking a room in a motel off US 23. None of them slept, nobody spoke. Nobody had words for what had happened. They just sat at the windows and the door, watching and waiting in the dark.

The next morning they went back to their homes, and tried to pretend that everything was normal. But it wasn't. Not even close.

The days passed slowly. The following Sunday, they had a quiet memorial amongst themselves for Red. With all the chaos and uncertainty that still hung in the air, the thing they were most sure of was that Red wasn't coming back.

# Tarantula City, The Nightlands

**(Roughly Corresponding to Detroit and Pontiac)**

The darkness was little comfort.

Torque lay in the middle of his chamber, curled up into a shivering, sweating ball, his eyes furiously shut as his teeth ground together. The headaches were getting worse.

As he writhed and wept, the sole consolation that broke through the screaming pain was that at least two of his previous masters were downstairs, likely suffering worse than he was.

They'd gotten Gregory Collins to volunteer himself right off of death row. There'd been some mention of humanitarian goals, some vague description of a process designed to optimize human capabilities to increase battlefield efficiency and survivability. They'd mentioned the possibility of a number of agonizing deaths, but it was the escape from the more imminent demise and the chance of becoming more than human that had made up his mind.

So the Department of Defense had taken him from his cell to a research facility in New England somewhere. Over the following months, guys in white coats and, sometimes, biohazard suits, zapped him with a whole bonanza of radiation, fed him some chemicals, and washed it down with a few sessions of electrical stimulation that made the chair look low wattage. Just for fun, they'd done some extensive surgery on him, hardwired his brain for kicks, and boom, there he was, all torqued up and ready to go.

Problem was, whatever they'd put in his head, in addition to making his reflexes and coordination something to cheer about, gave him the most inspiring migraines. He could have been the poster child for Vicodin.

After all that came the tests. For about eighteen hours a day, they'd had him on treadmills, in simulators, on training courses. Every exam that the eggheads could come up with to measure and quantify his speed, strength, resilience and stamina, he was put through. Advisors and experts on loan from the military devised combat situations to test his practical applications.

The results, sadly enough for later subjects, couldn't be properly reproduced; something about his genes and a chemical imbalance that he'd had prior to the experiment. No matter, though, the CIA had use for him. They just needed a tracking device and a remote-controlled self-destruct system added to his brain package.

Too bad for them, that operation had been scheduled for the morning of March 7<sup>th</sup>, 2000.

By that time, he'd already been liberated by the forces of the Nightlords. They'd taken over key positions within the government, and he'd been promoted. The van that had picked him up from the research facility dropped him off at the old CIA headquarters, where the new Director with the old Director's face welcomed him to the team and shoved him through a mirror that didn't break.

And now, he was somebody important. The Nightlords had all manner of beings in their employ, a great many of which were able to assume something close enough to a human guise

that they could pass on the street. But they were also in need of people like Gregory "Torque" Collins who actually were human, even if a little modified. He could go places even the Ashmedai and the Namtar couldn't, if for no other reason than that they lacked experience as human beings.

As he flinched and twitched on the floor, he heard a pair of boots tapping softly, coming to a stop a few yards away. "Is the pain as exquisite as it seems?"

Torque couldn't help but smile. "Love to show you."

"Some other time," the creature slid down to one knee. She had the face of a remarkably beautiful woman, with narrow, angular features, big eyes that she kept seductively narrowed, long black hair woven into an intricate braid and draped around her shoulder. She wore snug leather pants and a studded leather bustier that Madonna would have fought Courtney Love for. Her talon-like fingernails tapped against her cheek as she admired his suffering and waited for Torque to collect himself.

There was a name for her title that he couldn't pronounce without wanting to laugh. In English, it translated roughly as Night Princess. Her name was Celia, and she'd been the one waiting on the other side of the mirror. On some instinctual level, Torque knew that she wasn't even remotely human.

"What do you want now?" he asked bluntly. His faithful and enthusiastic service had burrowed him into her good side in short order, and he was able to speak to her in a more casual manner than any of her other servants.

It was a quality about him that seemed to please her. "Another mission. Your favorite kind."

He chuckled in spite of the sensation that his skull was melting.

Seek and destroy.

\* \* \*

## Pontiac, Michigan

*Flynn was dreaming again.*

*It always started out the same, standing over Red's grave, not entirely understanding why. He looked around, the drizzling rain something of an oddity. It had been sunny the day they'd buried Red, but in his dream it was usually raining.*

*Amber stood there, on the other side of the headstone from him, giving him that faint half-smile that she always found a way to summon. She wore her light brown hair loose around her shoulders, flowing off of her head in curls that never seemed to get wet in the rain. She had a backpack on her shoulder and a suitcase in her other hand.*

*"I have to go," she said, her brown eyes like bottomless pools. "Ten years' worth of my inventions are on file at the Patent Office, and they suddenly have no record of me. It's not safe here."*

*He tried to tell her not to go, tried to tell her that they'd find a way, that he would protect her.*

*But the train pulled up behind her. She turned away and stepped into it, and she was gone.*

Flynn opened his eyes, realizing with a sense of despair that he was looking at the same ceiling he had been when he went to sleep, with a peculiar, breath stealing ache in his chest and throat.

He sat up slowly, frowning and squinting in the pre-dawn gloom, and ran a hand through his hair, trying to stir some life back into his brain via his scalp. Without thinking about it, he stuck a cigarette between his lips, lighting it with the quick, efficient use of a Zippo.

He hadn't been a smoker before Dark Day. He chuckled at the thought that it was the least of the changes his life had gone through since then.

Flynn pulled his jeans on, stepped around the mattress on the floor, and lurched out into the living room of his apartment. He didn't have to look to know that Carny was sitting in the corner, just out of the light from the balcony. It was just one of the many mysteries of the Nightbane: the unerring ability to detect and identify each other.

Jacob "Carny" Carnival said nothing at first, and in Flynn's bleary point of view, that was probably for the best. His mind and senses had to be sharp and constantly alert, at least to go beyond the front door in Post-Dark Day America, but he didn't count himself to be worth much before the day's first cup of coffee.

Flynn was happy to see that Carny had already started the pot. He poured a mug and stirred it with the aim of one eye, which helped reduce the blurring. Then, alternately sipping the coffee and dragging on the cigarette, he slouched back out to the living room and eased his aching form into a beanbag chair.

"Mornin', Flynn," Carny said with a grin twisting his thin, bony face.

"Mornin', Carny," he replied, still mostly involved with making sure his hands obeyed.

There was something of a sympathetic chuckle from the shadows. "Man, I think you need to drink more. You look better hung over than you do now."

Flynn attempted a shrug. "You're assuming that I'm not hung over."

"If you were drinking last night, you're in a lot of trouble," Carny's eyes were wide and round with the intense seriousness of the statement. "First and foremost because I wasn't invited."

Flynn snorted at that, a grin appearing on his sagging face. "What have we got going on tonight? I know that I knew last night when I crashed."

"The guys over at The Lost and Found want us to do a job for them." Carny shifted in his seat, leaning forward. "They've spotted somebody spying on them, and they think that it's the leak they've been looking for."

Nodding again, Flynn stubbed out the cigarette in an ashtray that he found next to his seat. Yesterday's conversation came back to him now, in pieces and fragments. The City of Pontiac's underground community included a few cells of both the Resistance and the Underground Railroad. There were other factions involved as well, but by and large, those were the two that Flynn and his friends ran across most frequently.

*Friends*, he thought with self-derision. *I only have two.*



For a moment, he missed Red. He could see the dark-eyed, carrot-headed kid grinning at him on the day of their High School Graduation. The kid, not the super powered mutant that martyred himself on Dark Day, not the teleporting, fire-blasting strongman that had been the adrenaline-freak front-line of their little group for the better part of a decade.

Not the hero, but the boy he'd known since Junior High.

And Amber. Sweet Amber, with the curly brown hair and the root beer eyes. The technical genius who'd given them the most outrageous inventions to field test. Flynn and the others had accused her on occasion of watching too many episodes of MacGuyver and The A-Team, with some of the things she pieced together.

He'd loved her as much as he could remember loving anyone.

Carny still carried enough of her gizmos and gadgets, though. He had been Amber's eager lab rat; he'd been willing to try anything, as long as he got to come along on the adventures. The technology had helped make up for his normal human physiology.

Not that Flynn had been anything special either; he'd just picked up the right skills for the job.

As he thought about the job that Carny was talking about, he remembered the slogan they'd made up for their merry little band in those days, "No cause too small, no fee too big."

"That's about the whole of it," Carny snickered.

Flynn shook his head and lit another cigarette. "Can't imagine who'd wanna spy on that bunch. Three Nightbane and a bar full of misfits."

"The Nightlords?" Carny suggested. "Our beloved black-bag government?"

"Fair enough." Flynn stood up and walked over to the balcony window. "I have to go meet somebody first. I got an e-mail from an orphan Nightbane."

"Orphan? Aren't we all orphans, on one level or another?" Carny's tone was a little bitter. He'd spent most of his childhood in foster homes.

Flynn exhaled a thin line of smoke. "This one more than others. I guess her family was wiped out on Dark Day. She got my e-mail addy from someone in the Underground Railroad. Her story checks out."

"Just watch your wizard butt," Carny cautioned. "I know you're a sucker for a pretty face."

"She's ten years too young," Flynn stretched slightly, grunting as he heard the small pops and cracks the movement caused. "I think I can deal with it."

\* \* \*

The girl looked small, fragile, and innocent. Even with too much mascara, electric blue hair, the tube top and the baggy pants, the tattoo of a black rose on the shoulder where her leather jacket hung halfway down her arm, Emily had the frightened look of a small animal.

The handbag plopped on the bench next to her was mostly empty. The only things she had of any value were photos from her old life, snapshots both in 35mm and Polaroid of friends,



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family, her pet turtle, the car she'd hoped to get when she turned sixteen. Everything that she thought had had meaning to her, everything that was gone now.

Aside from that, Emily's meager possessions included two tee shirts and three sets of underwear. She hadn't had much time to pack, after the monsters had come and destroyed her house, killing most of the people in those pictures.

Correction, the *other* monsters.

She shivered as the thought ran through her mind, as she remembered the first time she'd *changed*. She didn't have another word for it. Looking in the mirror at a monster had scared the heck out of her, but somehow it had seemed right at the same time...

"Cream and sugar, right?" Christopher Flynn said as he sat down next to her. He was tall, well over six feet, with unruly black hair. Even though he was wicked cute, he'd frightened her at first. She'd walked into Highpoint Mall rather warily, afraid to be in close quarters with so many people, and imagined herself to be invisible. She dodged the casual shoppers, the groups of teenagers-turned-loose, as she crossed into the food court. That was when she'd felt *him*. It wasn't a sensation she could put a finger on, just a simple knowing, just an infallible, undoubted certainty that *someone* like her was nearby.

Another Nightbane. Father Justin had given her that word, as well as Flynn's e-mail address.

She'd walked right up to him, here at this bench, and could see it in him. It was as though the light hit his skin differently than it did other people. She didn't know him from Adam, really, but she knew that he was like her. He was a monster too.

Emily liked him already, though; something in his eyes, the way he seemed to smile with them more than his mouth. That, and he'd offered to help her. Offered for free, no less.

“Okay, Em,” he said softly after she’d taken a few tentative sips of her coffee, “What would you like to know?”

“What are we?” she spoke slowly, almost as terrified of asking as she was of the answer. “How do I know that you’re like me?”

Flynn nodded, tasting his own coffee before answering. “The short version is that no one knows for sure, really. I’ve met a number of others like us, though. The most common name I’ve heard given to us is Nightbane.”

“How many of us are there?” Emily asked, her fear forgotten for a moment.

“I don’t know. Hundreds, maybe thousands, maybe more. Every single one of us have two forms, one human looking, like we are now. The other is... well, just that. Other.” Flynn shrugged. “I guess that’s why we can sense each other so easily. So that we can know our own people when we see them, not mistake them for mutants or aliens or what-have-you.”

Emily nodded. “That’s what I thought when it happened to me, that I’d mutated or something.”

“I was a sorcerer before my Becoming. I thought it was a bad spell.”

“A what?” Emily’s mouth dropped. “You’re kidding?”

“Nope. There’s real magic out there. Always has been,” Flynn shrugged. “My teacher, Master Wu, started teaching me the martial arts when I was eight. The day after I turned thirteen he started teaching me magic as well.”

Emily just sat there, holding her Mocha Café cup like it was the Holy Grail. Flynn continued.

“Used to hang with these three kids in high school,” he said slowly, and before he knew it he was explaining Red, Amber and Carny to her, and his story staggered as he came to Dark Day.

“That’s when you changed?”

“The Becoming is what we call it. Yeah. And Carny too. We got separated.” Flynn noticed that Emily blanched as he talked about the Hounds.

“Skeletons,” she repeated. “With spears. They destroyed my home.”

“I’m sorry,” he said sympathetically. “They’ve destroyed a lot of homes.”

“Keep talking,” she said.

“Why don’t we get out of here?” Flynn asked, looking around. “All these people make me nervous.”

\* \* \*

It could be said that Carny didn’t like waiting.

He stood near the end of the alley, ball cap pulled low over his narrowed eyes, face cast in a mask of determination and near seething. He wore a plain black tee shirt under a three-quarter-length denim jacket, black cargo pants and thick-soled jungle boots. His impatience building, he was starting to feel the need to pacify himself, either with a stogie or a margarita.

*Either one would do nicely right now, thank you much, he thought.*

He glanced at his watch again. Flynn was late. He should have been here two minutes ago. Carny turned his attention back to the building across the street, staring just past the edge of the building next to him to just barely catch a view of the opposite’s main entrance.

It was an old factory. Ever since Dark Day, this end of Pontiac had been a rust bucket. A good hangout for the street gangs, a few Warlords here and there, a den for thugs, thieves and killers, the criminally insane, and things far worse that seldom came out during the daytime.

Like the Night Priest that lurked in the shadows, just inside the doorway over there.

Carny squatted down, the most comfort he was willing to allow himself. He’d been keeping tabs on this fiend for a few weeks. This guy was the leader of a cult dedicated to the Nightlords. He’d made a pact with those monsters for power. Carny was positive that he was the pipeline for intelligence on both the local Resistance and the Underground Railroad.

Both groups had taken heavy hits lately, well timed, eerily precise. Both suspected that they were being ratted out from the inside. That’s why they’d called on Carny and Flynn: they weren’t affiliated with any of the factions. And they still had a reputation from their adventures before Dark Day.

He thought about all that. From time to time he missed Red, although not too much. The kid had always been a loudmouth, a trait that didn’t go too far with Carny. Amber, on the other hand, had a special place in his heart. She’d been spunky.

“What are you thinking about?” a small voice whispered at his elbow.

Carny looked down. He’d almost forgotten Anthony was here. The Guardian looked up at him with those weird eyes, that pale, porcelain doll face tilted sideways in curiosity. “Why?”

“You were smiling just now.” Anthony shifted position slightly, sitting with his back against the wall. Even with the wide brimmed hat and the black overcoat, there was something of a glow to him, as if any second now he was going to explode into a ball of light. “It doesn’t happen often.”

“The past. People I used to know.”

Anthony nodded, but the expression seemed a sad one. Carny understood, though. He knew that Anthony couldn’t remember much of anything from before he woke up in Milford with his hair white-blonde and the color gone from his eyes.

“I wonder where Flynn is,” Anthony began fidgeting with the sleeve of his overcoat.

Carny was about to reply when he felt another Nightbane nearby. “Hopefully that’s him now.”

It was. Flynn appeared at the far end of the alley, moving at a quick walk towards Carny and Anthony. He gave them both a quick smile of greeting before he peeked around the corner.

“How’d it go?” Carny asked.

“Fifteen year old girl went through her Becoming the night the Hounds killed her family,” he said as he studied the opposite building. “Took her back to my place before I came here.”

“Good.”

Anthony was about to say something when Carny motioned for silence. A battered and rusted out station wagon pulled up by the entrance to the building they were watching, a gray haze bil-

lowing from the tailpipe. The engine died in a knocking, back-firing cry of anguish as the driver unfolded himself from behind the wheel.

Flynn murmured something under his breath, and frowned as he watched the newcomer. The man was tall, broad through the shoulders. He could have been a professional wrestler. His olive drab trench coat and knit cap were covered in dust, as if he'd gone to sleep and woken up a year later in an abandoned building. His aura spoke volumes, though.

"There's something wrong with him," Flynn said slowly, "I'm not sure he's human. Seems to have some cybernetics though. His arms and legs all seem to be metallic."

The man stepped just inside the entrance- Flynn could still see his shoulder and right arm through the doorway.

Carny rolled his shoulders, loosening up. He reached under his jacket, produced something that looked like a paintball gun. He snapped the folding stock into position, slapped an E-Clip into place.

"Hunting elephants, are we?" Flynn asked with a smirk.

"Maybe." Carny shrugged, opening the covers on either end of the scope. It was an energy weapon that Amber had designed. It could be set to fire a narrow pulse or it could spread like a shotgun for more interesting results. Another switch near the trigger allowed for single shot or three-round-burst firing. He put it to his shoulder, peering through the scope, sweeping back and forth. "Naughty, naughty spy. He seems to have a gas leak."

"Got it," Flynn said, looking toward the tail end of the car. There it was, a slow dribble, barely visible even to his sight. He muttered a few more syllables.

A spark flared under the car, followed by a flame that leapt from the growing puddle of gas up to the leaky tank. The back end of the car was lifted off the ground as the contents of the tank ignited. The windshield popped out and shattered against the hood as it was flung upward from the engine.

A few seconds passed, and the informer walked back out to the sidewalk, staring at his burning car and howling in anger.

"Got him," Carny grinned, squeezing the trigger. A blue-white bolt leapt from the barrel, streaking across the street and punching the traitor in the chest, sending him flying backwards. "He's wearing armor."

"How do you know?" Anthony asked.

"A, it didn't blow out the other side of him. B, he's getting back up. And C, I can see it through the hole in his shirt."

Flynn walked out into the middle of the street, shifting into his Morpheus form. Fur sprouted across his face and his hands, his nose becoming vaguely dog-like. The tail sprouted from the base of his spine, whipping around reflexively as he walked.

The traitor raised his arm, pointing his fist at Flynn. If he hadn't expected it, if he hadn't known about the bionics, Flynn wouldn't have had time to react.

A sphere of darkness surrounded him just in time to turn aside a hail of bullets.

Another bolt from Carny's gun slammed into the cyborg's leg, throwing him face first onto the pavement.

Flynn dropped his Shadow Shield and spoke another arcane phrase. A bolt of lightning arced down from a clear night sky as the cyborg tried to get back up. He let out a scream of pain as he fell again.

Even as the traitor lay on the ground, twitching, his clothes smoldering, a black robed figure stepped clear of the doorway. He raised his face just enough for Flynn to see through the shadows of his hood.

The Night Priest wore a black leather mask that concealed all of his face except for his mouth and chin. That mouth twisted up into a leering smile of hatred as it uttered its own words of magic.

There was a flash of light before Flynn could do anything, and the Night Priest was gone.

"The hell?" Flynn growled, taking a couple steps in the direction he'd last seen his enemy.

"Sorry," Anthony called out, hurrying to catch up to Flynn. "I tried to counter his spell, but I guess I didn't put enough umph into it."

"It's all right," Flynn answered. He looked down at the cyborg on the sidewalk. "At least we've got this guy."

\* \* \*

Emily was thoroughly bored.

Flynn's apartment was sparsely furnished. The furniture either folded, inflated or was filled with whatever went into beanbag chairs these days. There was a card table by the kitchen with a laptop sitting on it, but without Flynn's password she couldn't do anything with it. A small color television sat on a pair of milk crates, but it only got two channels.

There was a mattress on the floor in the bedroom, and it looked like Flynn kept all his clothes in a gym bag. There were three books lying on the floor next to the bed; the only one written in English was Victor Lazlo's "Worlds Within Worlds."

The fridge was relatively barren as well. There was a quart of milk, some bottled water, a six-pack of Coke, and an expensive-looking bottle of rum onto which someone had taped a note reading "Don't Touch." In a cupboard she found a loaf of bread, some off-brand peanut butter, and a variety of Chef Boyardee products.

So Emily sat on a beanbag chair, chewing on the rather bland peanut butter sandwich she made for herself, sipping at the milk, and watching an old, black-and-white horror flick on the tube. Bela Lugosi stood midway up a flight of stairs with a tarnished candelabra in his hand, welcoming somebody to his home. The castle looked like it had been vacant for centuries, like those places Emily had seen on the Discovery Channel about ancient ruins.

She had been on the streets for the better part of four months, hiding out in shelters and parking garages when she could, sleeping in alleys and doorways at other times. Most of the time, the worst that she ran into were her fellow homeless, some of them with hard, mean faces and hands that would never come clean. Sometimes things got out of hand, but either she'd manage a clever evasion or her Morpheus would come out. That tended to end her problems pretty quickly.

Or create new ones.

Emily was grateful for the rain. It ran down her face and blended with the tears, hiding them. She clutched her bag to her chest like a little kid hugging a beloved doll, and she immedi-

ately scolded herself and let it hang loose from her shoulder. Her boots made an odd scraping sound against the wet pavement.

He'd tried to hurt her. The old hobo by the tracks had offered her a place by his fire, as well as a helping of the can of beans that he'd liberated from somewhere. Then he'd gotten rough, tried using that line about her "owing" him something in return, about hospitality.

She'd screamed as he shoved her roughly to the ground, and a second later, he was the one screaming. She'd changed into a monster again.

Now she walked, aimless, hopeless, wondering if the nightmare would ever end, if she was in a coma somewhere and making all this up in her head.

That had to be it.

She stepped into a doorway that looked as though no one had used it in years, and sank down to the ground, giving into her tears and despair. She didn't hear the door unbolt from the inside; she jumped when it was pulled open, its hinges squealing in protest.

The man standing just out of the streetlight was slight of build, dressed all in black, and tall. His face was a little white, almost as white as his priestly collar.

"You're drenched, my child," he said, with the hint of an Irish accent. "Please, come in."

He turned from the door, stepping back into the room. Emily slipped inside behind him, wary, not sure if she wanted to close the door or not. As her eyes adjusted to the candlelight, though, she realized that this was some sort of church. To her left was the most humble altar she'd ever seen, with a weather-beaten and obviously wooden crucifix attached to the wall.

"What is this place?" she asked in a small voice.

The Priest, giving her a modest smile, told her, "It is my home, these past few years. These streets are filled with evil and danger, and I try to help everyone that I can. You may rest here as long as you like. My name is Father Justin."

"Emily," she answered simply.

He led the way into the heart of the building, an old, abandoned warehouse that he'd converted into living quarters, of a sort. A dozen cots were arranged on the south end of the building, some of them occupied. At the other end was a large kitchen, and as he showed her around Emily had to wonder where he'd come by all that cooking equipment and food stock.

"Friends," Father Justin stated. "Friends who owe me favors. One day you'll probably be in a position to help others too. All that I ask here is that on that day you remember that you, too, were helped once."

She nodded. It didn't sound so outlandish. As a matter of fact, it sounded absurdly normal.

"What are you?" he asked, matter-of-factly, as if he'd just asked her name.

"What," she stuttered, taking an involuntary step backwards, "What do you mean?"

The Priest sat down at one of the picnic tables, sighing softly. "I can see it in your aura. You're obviously a creature of some power, even if you lack experience."

"My aura?"

"I'll tell you my secret if you tell me yours."

Emily blanched, sitting down across from him. "I don't know. I just... turn into something, something gross and weird, and I have these powers..."

"Nightbane," said Father Justin softly, his eyes widening. "Amazing."

"So what's your big secret?" she asked. "Are you psychic or something?"

"I'm a Wampyr."

"A vampire?" she repeated as closely as she could pronounce.

"No, vom-peer," he corrected. "I was attacked by a vampire who wanted me to join the legions of the undead. Something went wrong though. I retained my soul, my free will. She was the first vampire that I killed."

He crossed himself then, as if the memory of it frightened him in some way.

She was asleep when someone touched her shoulder. Before she had her eyes open she was on her feet, her fists up.

It took her a moment to recognize Flynn. Behind him, a skinny Nightbane that she hadn't seen before said, "Whoa."

She'd gone into her Morpheus form without realizing it. Muscles rippled along her bare arms, shoulders and stomach under dark green scales. Most notable, however, was her head: it was elongated and lizard-like, a dragon perhaps, with a pair of long horns. The skull, eyes, and the top of the muzzle were covered in metal that looked as though it had been bolted on forcibly. Metal screws oozed dark blood near her eyes and the horns.

"It's okay," Flynn tried to be reassuring. "These are friends."

Emily was back into her Façade, arms folded across her chest as she tried not to look any of them in the eye. "Hi."

"This is Carny, and the albino-looking kid here is Anthony."

Carny stepped up toe-to-toe with her, sniffing at her.

"What the—" she blurted, starting to step back.

"He does that to everyone," Anthony's voice was almost too quiet for her to hear.

Carny tilted his head to one side as he regarded her, giving her the alarming impression of a wolf sizing up his prey. "You're afraid of your True Form, aren't you?"

Emily thought about denying it, but found herself saying "Yes" anyway.

Carny leaned closer to her, until his gaunt, bony face was only a few inches away from hers. "We all are. Every last one of us. At least yours is pretty."

"Pretty?" she repeated, a note of disbelief coming to her voice.

"Yeah, watch." There was a great cracking and a wet ripping sound as Carny's Morpheus seemed to tear its way out of his bone and flesh...

\* \* \*

Celia stepped through the mirror and into a posh penthouse suite. It had roughly the same dimensions as the Demon's Tower in the Nightlands, but instead of a rack of torture devices there was a wet bar, instead of a table equipped with all sorts of

flesh-corrupting goodies sat a heart-shaped bed big enough for any six people she could find. The bathtub, likewise, had nothing to do with its Nightland's counterpart.

Behind her came Torque. He cradled his head in his arms as he walked, even as the pain began to recede. He wore a hooded long coat over black plate armor that made him look a lot like the Hounds.



The Night Priest waited patiently by the door, and they almost didn't notice him at first. He stepped farther into the room, throwing back his hood to reveal his masked face and close-cropped red hair.

He wasn't a very big man, but there was something to him that gave Torque an impression of strength and power. The rest of the Night Priests Torque had met had started out as losers and misfits, and had begged the power from the Nightlords for lack of any other hope in life. This one, though, seemed like he could care less about the Nightlords' gift of power.

"Ah, my dear Loki," Celia said with surprising warmth. "What news?"

"My lady," the masked servant responded. "One of my informants was attacked when he reported to me this evening. According to him, there is a Resistance cell here in the city that is preparing to make a move against the NSB Field Office in Detroit. They meet regularly at a bar called The Lost and Found, on Wide Track Drive."

"So the information may no longer be valid," Celia stated calmly.

"I know that the establishment is frequented by a number of powerful individuals. Even if their plans change, I believe much

could be accomplished by wiping them out." Loki's eyes flipped to Torque, sizing him up.

Torque looked to Celia. "We could have the NSB cordon the neighborhood off, and then I could purge the place with a couple squads of Hounds."

"Do it," Celia said with an absent sigh.

"I would like to go with him," Loki added quickly. "They might have spell casters among them. I may be able to assist you."

"Whatever," Torque said, brushing past him on the way to the door. "Just don't get in the way."

Loki looked to Celia, who nodded in approval. Then he turned, drawing up his hood as he walked out the door behind Torque.

\* \* \*

"Back so soon?" Franklin grinned warmly as he wiped down the top of the bar. He was a well-built man of about fifty, although his face was a little round. His hair was shot through with gray at his temples, as were his outlandishly long sideburns, although the majority of it was still raven black. He had a good number of laugh lines around his eyes as well.

Flynn walked over and shook hands with him. "What can I say, everything turns up in the Lost and Found."

Carny nodded to Franklin.

"Carny, Anthony," Franklin greeted them in turn. Then he noticed Emily. "Hello there. I'm not even going to ask for your ID."

Emily laughed. Flynn introduced the two.

"Everybody's downstairs," Franklin said as he put together a margarita for Carny.

Flynn thanked him and started for the back, past the kitchen and the rest rooms to the darkened storeroom. Bending quickly, he opened a panel in the floor and took the first few steps down.

Anthony stepped back. "I'll take a pass on this one, if it's okay."

"That's all right." Flynn glanced at Emily, who seemed more than willing to follow. From the street outside they'd been able to feel the few other Nightbane below. She was obviously curious, and he couldn't blame her. He had been too.

The room beneath the bar was possibly the most dressed up hole in the ground ever. The walls were papered in movie posters and pinup girls, a few hot rods here and there, some "exploded" diagrams of spaceships from science fiction movies.

A television in the corner flashed vibrantly, although the sound was turned down low. In front of it, on a battered couch, sat a Nightbane. When he turned in his seat to glance at the newcomers, his blue, plastic face was as impassive and expressionless as any doll on a toy store shelf. He raised an equally plastic-looking hand to wave at them; the back of his hand was the same plastic as his face, but the palm side and fingers were black rubber.

"Em," Flynn said, "This is Toy. Toy, Emily."

"Howdy," Toy said, his mouth not moving. Emily found that odd; his hands seemed flexible enough, but his face didn't move at all.



"Hi," she answered, smiling pleasantly.

The next room was more business-like. A screen saver of flying pigs danced across a computer to the left, while the cabinets and benches that filled the rest of the room had the feel of either a machine shop or a doctor's office, Emily couldn't quite pin it down.

Right then, however, it was a little bit of both. Strapped to the center table was the cyborg that Flynn and the others had brought in earlier. Emily almost backed out of the room as the man turned his head to look at her, one of his eye sockets empty except for a long, black electrical wire that hung out of it.

His arms and legs were made out of metal, with a number of strategic plates open in the otherwise smooth armor to reveal microchips, small motors and pistons, and more wiring. But it was the man's face that held her attention. He was an ugly sort of man, even if it weren't for the scars that wound around the right side of his face, where the empty socket was.

"What are you doing, Doc?" Flynn asked quietly.

Doc turned from a workbench covered with electronic tools and gizmos to regard Flynn, his metal face covered with a half-dozen optic lenses, some of them focusing and adjusting wildly and quickly to their new target. Four arms ended in long-fingered hands, the left ones carefully holding a pair of circuit boards, the other two holding two wires from a voltage meter.

"Carry's gun killed his EMP protection, and your lightning bolt fried just about everything else. I figured putting him back together might give him incentive to tell us who he's working for." Doc's voice sounded hollow and metallic, like a defective drive-through window speaker.

"Just don't fix him too good," another voice, more like a harsh whisper, came from the darkened hallway beyond this room. A puff of cigarette smoke slid out of the darkness as another Nightbane came almost into view.

"Why don't you put on your Façade, Lisa," Flynn's tone was even, but stern, "and come meet the new kid. This is Emily."

Lisa seemed to pause, letting out another billow of spent tobacco vapor, before simply stepping into the light. Emily felt her stomach heave.

The woman had a shapely figure, wearing leather pants and boots and a bikini top. The distracting feature was the total lack of skin, exposing bright red muscle and tendons. Even her face was exposed to the world, the cartilage of her nose sticking out like a splinter over the naked hole beneath. Her hair was made up of writhing tentacles, which would have hung as low as her knees if they ever relaxed.

She had one arm folded across her chest, the other propped on it to hold the cigarette up by her face like an actress might. The hand that held the cigarette was covered in a skin of metal, with harsh spikes sticking out of it at random angles.

"Emily, huh?" Lisa said, looking her up and down with starkly white eyes. "Always happy to meet the freak of the week."

Emily nodded slowly. "Bet it just gives you goose bumps."

"Screw you," Lisa turned on her heel and stomped off.

Flynn looked harshly at Emily, planting his hands on his hips and giving her a stern, scolding look. He leaned close, and she thought she was about to get it for sure.

"Good job. Keep it up."

She laughed nervously at his sudden smile, then walked out into the other room to see what was on television.

Flynn turned his focus back to the cyborg on the table. "What do they call you?"

"My moniker is Ballistic."

"Okay, Stick," Flynn said, pulling a stool over to sit on, propping his elbows on the table. "You realize that you're in way the hell over your head, don't you?"

"Nothin' I can't handle."

Flynn nodded slowly. "The people you work for strike you as the passive sort?"

"Whatcha mean?"

"Well," he shrugged, "You've been spying on these fine people and their friends. You could tell us what you've been telling them, and screw them up pretty bad. Hell, you might even be able to tell us new things about them, to top that."

"I'm not going to," Ballistic said as Doc began to reconnect the circuit board he'd been working on. He plugged one half in, but left the other hanging out of the panel in the cyborg's chest.

"You think they'll believe that?" Flynn said, absently picking up Ballistic's limp forearm. There was a raised ridge along the top of it, with a circular port at the hand end. "This the machine gun? Cool."

"What are you getting at?"

"I'm saying that you're not just useless to them now, you're a liability. That makes you a target." Flynn sighed, sounding bored as he dropped the arm and sat back. "How do they contact you?"

Ballistic closed his good eye, seeming to ponder his situation. "E-mail, sometimes. Sometimes a courier bumps into me and passes me a note. Usually just an intersection or an address, wherever they want me to be on the lookout."

"They don't even tell you what to look for?"

"I used to be do intelligence work for the Army. They ask me later what I observed, sometimes as general questions, other times very specific. Between my attention to detail and my surveillance equipment, I can give them what they need." Ballistic paused. "The guy I met tonight, he's my usual contact."

"He's a Night Priest," Flynn said for Doc's benefit.

"I don't know what that is, but it fits. He wears these black robes, a leather mask that covers most of his face," Ballistic offered. "I don't know anything about him, really. He just brings money, in cash. He never hands it to me, though."

"What do you mean?" Doc asked.

Ballistic glanced at him. "It's always in an envelope, sitting out somewhere near him. Like at that factory tonight, he was standing in the waiting room, the money was sitting on the sill of the receptionist's window."

"Maybe he's afraid to come close to you," Doc suggested.

Flynn shook his head. "I don't think so."

"Me either. I've dealt with people like that, and with this kind of money before," Ballistic said. He was starting to look a little edgy. "They usually carry the money on them, and toss it to me when they get what they want, or they set it down afterwards. Not this guy; every time, the money is already out in the open."

"Psychometry," Flynn said decisively. "He's afraid to handle the money because somebody might be able to pick his vibes from it, either magically or psychically."

Ballistic snorted, "Whatever man. The only thing I told him was that some guys from The Lost and Found Bar were going to hit the NSB."

When Flynn and the others had brought Ballistic in earlier, they'd come in from the sewer; Ballistic didn't know that he was actually under the bar.

"What?" Doc squawked, his shrill, tinny voice as alarming as it was alarmed. "You're kidding, right? Us, stage a raid?"

"Some of the guys were talking about it," Ballistic shrugged. "I figured it was a good tip."

Doc was wringing two of his hands while the others fidgeted with a tool. "Franklin had to kick some Warlords out earlier. It might have been them."

Flynn nodded as Ballistic looked back and forth between them.

"Here's the problem, Stick," Flynn said as he motioned for Doc to finish putting the cyborg back together. "You overheard some of our local hoodlums BSing about knocking over a Federal agency, and the people you sell info to have probably mistaken them for the well armed and far more militant Resistance. Unfortunately, they will probably mistake these nice people for that same Resistance, when in fact these people are more concerned with helping other people survive the shadow regime."

Doc unlashed the cyborg from the table. Ballistic sat up, closing up the last of his service panels, nodding in thanks. "So?"

Flynn sighed, letting some of his irritation shine through. "So, you're sitting about ten feet underneath The Lost and Found. How long does it normally take for your information to result in an action?"

\* \* \*

Carny puffed on the stogie that Franklin had given him with his margarita. He had the faintest of grins on his face, feeling just a little self-satisfied that he and his buds had done some good tonight.

Not very self-satisfied, but a little.

Anthony slid up onto the barstool next to him. His expression was unreadable under the brim of his hat. Carny patted him on the shoulder, "Y'all right, shorty?"

The Guardian glanced up at him, a worried expression in his too-white eyes. "I don't know."

"What's the matter then?"

"Something's wrong."

They'd had some discussion about his precognitive senses, mostly unproductive. Carny frowned, "Where?"

"Here. Soon."

At that moment, Flynn appeared at the back room door. His face had that hard look to it, like he was about to do something no one else wanted to.

Carny just cursed.

\* \* \*

Torque leaned against a battered dumpster, lit a cigarette, and hooked the earpiece for his walkie-talkie over his ear. "Unit One, in position," he grated into the mic.

"Unit Two, ready." That was Loki.

"Unit three, standing by," came the voice of an NSB Special Agent that Torque had already forgotten the name of. "The cordon is in place, you have a green light from PPD."

Torque looked at the Hound Master next to him, the light from the street and the bar opposite gleaming on its black armor and the spiraling, twisted horns that rose up from its helm. A tattered black cape shifted as the creature moved to unhitch a Darkblade scimitar from its hip.

"Ready to have some fun?" Torque asked the thing.

"What?" it asked.

Torque shook his head, reaching under his duster for his own Darkblade sword. Behind them, four Hounds waited, silently, standing at statuesque attention with their spears in hand. What the beast lacked in personality it made up for in usefulness. "Put up the screen and let's go."

The Hound Master had an ability that the lesser Hounds lacked; he could cloak a small group in illusions, making them look like normal people. According to plan, as the six of them stepped out into the street, they looked like well-dressed businessmen.

Torque led the way into the bar. The barkeeper was whistling softly, cleaning glasses with a white cloth; he looked up at them as the door shut behind them. "Hey guys," he said cheerfully. "What can I do for you?"

Torque smiled disarmingly. "I'm looking for some friends of mine."

Franklin motioned to the handful of patrons clustered here and there, talking and laughing, as relaxed as they could be. "We're a little dead right now, but the night's still young. Can I get you something?"

"No, that's okay." Torque looked around himself. There were about a dozen humans. He turned to the Hound Master, who looked just like Willie Nelson in a three-piece-suit. With a nod, the illusion was dropped. The skeletal hounds moved forward with their spears raised. As far as Torque could tell, "Slaughter" was their favorite word.

"I wouldn't do that," Franklin said, his smile still genuine.

Torque raised his sword, thrilled that the carnage was about to begin with a backhanded, vorpal strike, when something about the barkeep seemed familiar to him.

He shrugged it off and swung anyway. The old man simply stepped backwards, avoiding what would surely have been a fatal blow. Torque corrected himself, rebounding from the miss with a thrust. The blade sliced a neat hole in the front of Franklin's shirt.

But didn't go through the skin beneath.

"What?" Torque almost laughed, amazed.

Franklin shook his head disappointedly. "I told you not to."

With hands almost too fast to see, he grabbed a long-barreled pistol from under the bar, leveled it at Torque's chest, and fired.

The gunshot sounded like a train had hit the side of the bar. The fifty-caliber bullet mashed the front of Torque's armor, sending him flat on his back. That was when he remembered the

man's face. Franklin Thompson had been the leader and spokesman of S-SWAT, the City of Detroit's answer to super-human crime.

"Get 'em, boys," Franklin called out happily.

Suddenly the bar was filled with energy blasts and the sound of metal exoskeletons being violently compromised.

Torque sat up as Franklin hopped over the bar, hyper-fast hands reloading the single-shot weapon and firing in rapid succession.

Franklin saw him getting up and laughed. "Boy, did you come to the wrong place."

\* \* \*

Flynn, in his Morpheus form, dropped down into the tunnel, feeling just a little nostalgic. In the days of Prohibition, the rooms they'd just fled and these very same passageways had been used to smuggle booze and, when necessary, evade the police. At even intervals there were small hatches that led into the city sewers, but he'd had enough of *that* for one night.

They were going to the river.

His tail waving back and forth reflexively, he wandered a few yards up the tunnel as he waited for the others to climb down. Emily was right behind him, then Anthony and Carny. Doc, Toy, Ballistic and Lisa would bring up the rear, since this was essentially their problem.

Doc and Toy had wanted to go upstairs to help defend the bar, but reasoning held that the Hounds would be able to track Nightbane a lot easier than humans or mutants.

More importantly, the three Underground Railroaders were the links to other Railroad cells. Without them, the bar behind them was nothing more than a hangout for God-only-knows-what types of beings and creatures.

It was true. Everything eventually ended up in The Lost and Found.

Carny's face was a hard scowl; the image that kept running through his mind was that of cattle being herded through a chute to their eventual demise. This impression was not helped by the way Anthony periodically shook his head.

"What's the matter, shorty?"

Anthony just shook his head some more. "The same feeling as before. It's not going away."

That didn't make Carny any happier. He drew his weapon out from under his coat and slapped in a fresh E-Clip.

It took them about half an hour, but they came to the end: a large, steel door with big, ugly rivets. About fifty years earlier, the city built a bridge to continue Business Route 24 across the Clinton River going northwest. In the process, they'd discovered this particular exit and sealed it in the concrete under the bridge.

Two years ago, Doc and Toy had reopened it, carving a hole in the concrete just a little smaller than the door on this side; they'd disguised the door with a combination of the old concrete and the moss and vines that grew up the concrete and the support pillars.

Flynn hauled the door open and stepped through. Compared to the near-total dark of the tunnel, the moonlit river and the high grasses on either side stood out in high contrast.

So did the six hounds and their black-robed leader.

"Oh boy," Flynn said as the group behind him filed out the door.

He expected that the Hounds would already be swarming them, that they'd already be up to their ears in combat. He expected that the Night Priest would at least begin casting a spell.

But for a long, heart-straining moment, nothing happened.

"What are they waiting for?" Carny asked, remarkably patient for such a bad situation. He had his rifle shouldered, standing less than an arm's length to Flynn's left.

"I don't know. Maybe their friends back in the bar?"

Emily brushed against Flynn's right arm. "What now?"

"We might be in trouble," he answered her softly.

"That's right, Flynn," the Night Priest known as Loki called out, stepping forward as the hounds fanned out in a semi-circle around them. Black swords and spears glinted dully from distant streetlights.

"How..." Anthony started to ask.

Flynn motioned him for silence, feeling a fizzle of rage spreading into something larger inside him. "I know that voice," he said, his teeth grinding together. Then, louder for the sake of the Night Priest, "I thought you were dead."

Loki threw back his hood and pulled the mask free from his face. "I was very close to dying that day, but no sacrifice is too great for the sake of appearances."

"Hey Red," Carny grinned from behind his scope. "Still running your mouth, I see."

Flynn nodded slowly, starting to walk forward, ignoring the threateningly silent hounds. "Yeah, I get it now. You sold us out to the Nightlords, in return for even more power."

"That would be the whole of it," Red grinned without the Loki disguise. "I liked my powers, really. But what I liked even more was magic. The flexibility of it, the unlimited growth that you showed us was possible."

"I didn't think mutants could learn magic," Carny commented dryly.

"They can't," Flynn answered. "All their personal energies are tied up in their genetics. At least, that's what I've been led to believe."

Red snickered, unfastening his cloak and letting it fall to the ground. "You're right. Even with the gifts of the Nightlords, it was a difficult thing for me to learn spellcraft. But they supplied the power. It came to me soon enough."

Flynn closed the distance between them to about ten feet, his pointed ears twitching and his tail darting angrily back and forth. "So what do you want?"

"Once I realized the power I'd been given, I had to wonder which of us was stronger," Red shrugged. "And I see that you're a Nightbane as well, so this can be an interesting competition on a number of levels. You've always had everything. You got to be our leader, you had the nice car, and you had the magic. You even got Amber. So now we're pretty evenly matched, and I want to show everybody who's best. It's just too bad I couldn't arrange for her to be here to see it."

"Yeah, okay," Flynn said as he kicked Red in the face.

\* \* \*

Torque slogged his way through the sewer. Somewhere behind him a battle still raged between the Hounds and the patrons of the Lost and Found. When he'd left, there had been only one Hound left, and the Hound Master had been fighting a losing battle with a mutant that had duplicated himself three times for numerical advantage.

"Unit Three to Unit One." The voice in his ear was something of a surprise. In all the fun and excitement, he'd forgotten about the others.

"Go ahead," he growled. He wrinkled his nose as something indescribable floated past him.

The NSB agent came back on the line, "Sir, Unit Two has engaged the enemy."

"Cool," Torque said, spotting a poorly hidden hatch set into the wall next to him. "Location?"

\* \* \*

Flynn ducked and rolled away from a blast of fire, using his tail to fling himself back to his feet. As he spun, he growled the words of a spell, sending a slightly larger ball of flame back onto the Night Priest. Somewhere to his left, he saw the telltale flash of Carny's energy weapon. He could hear Emily and Anthony yelling back and forth. There were the various shouts and yells of the others, the shriek of metal on metal, all drowned out every few seconds by bursts of machine-gun fire.

Red vanished for a moment, reappearing next to Flynn. The Nightbane back-flipped away from a fist that Flynn knew could break stone and rend metal. As he flipped, he twisted, lashing



out with his booted feet, sending both he and the Night Priest to the ground.

Red jumped up first, lunging at Flynn.

Flynn stuck his hand up, and in between them appeared a shimmering Carpet of Adhesion. He frowned as he realized that Red had avoided hitting it, but two of the Hounds weren't so lucky.

A boot clipped him in the back of the head, almost sending him into his own carpet.

He stood and spun in one motion. He sprang at Red, driving a shoulder into his midsection.

Red crashed down into the mud, drove an elbow into Flynn's back, hard. The blow would have killed a man, would have turned a good portion of spine, shoulder, and a few internal organs into goo. Flynn's Nightbane physique shrugged it off with little more than a grunt.

They were both on their feet. Springing with the power of legs and tail, Flynn crashed into Red again with a feral snarl.

Flynn felt them tumbling and a heartbeat later the cold water of the Clinton River roared up past his ears. Suddenly, Red was gone, surprising Flynn as he lashed out in the water.

When something heavy hit Flynn in the back, he realized his error. The Night Priest had teleported above him.

Red wrapped his arm around Flynn's neck, trying to choke him.

Through the cold murk, Flynn's tail shot up and coiled around Red's own neck.

\* \* \*

Carny stood over the two hounds struggling against the Carpet of Adhesion, turning his rifle to full-auto mode and letting them have it.

Satisfied at last, he reloaded and looked around.

Emily stood close to Anthony, who was sitting on one knee, his coat shredded and dark blood smeared on his face. He gave Carny a nod of reassurance.

The other three Nightbane staggered around, looking for more hounds. Toy absently twirled a Darkblade spear that he'd taken from one of their assailants. All of them wore cuts and gashes that were visibly closing as they waited.

Ballistic lay unmoving in the weeds. Anthony pushed himself to his feet and staggered over, kneeling down next to the battered cyborg. He was missing one of his metal arms. It had been severed neatly by a Darkblade, and it lay in the mud several yards away. His legs twitched in a manner that seemed more human than mechanical.

"Life support," he choked. "Failing."

Anthony pulled his gloves off, revealing long, slender hands that were almost as stark white as his face. "Hang on."

He touched Ballistic's face, a warm, soft glow coming from his fingertips. Suddenly, both the cyborg and the Guardian seemed to be engulfed in bright white light.

Even as the others covered their eyes from the blinding glow, Anthony turned his head to them and spoke. "Doc, I can't heal the metal. I've given you more time, but you'll have to work fast."

"We'll take him with us," Doc answered, motioning for Lisa and Toy to grab him as the glow faded.

Lisa started to balk, but Doc shut her down with a wave of an extra hand. "He fought with us. He helped us. We're going to fix him up."

"Better get going," Carny told them. "There'll be more Hounds coming."

Lisa and Toy started off, carrying Ballistic easily between them, climbing the high, steep sloping riverbank to the street above. Doc gave Carny and the others a nod of thanks before following them.

Carny looked around then. "Where's Flynn?"

"I wouldn't worry about him," came a voice from the tunnel behind him.

Carny turned, his rifle up. And then he grinned, even though there was a dangerous light in the eyes behind the scope. "Why, if it isn't my old friend Torque."

The large man stepped from the tunnel entrance, shedding his ruined coat and brandishing his Darkblade. "Hey Carnival. See you survived the Hounds."

"Yep."

"You haven't shot me yet. Must mean you like me or somethin'."

"Not really. Just wondering which part of you to remove first."

Emily stepped up next to Carny. "Are we going to whack this guy or what?"

"You all really should come work with us," Torque continued, making a face at Emily's Morphus. "You, Dead Dragon Girl here, even the albino over there. The Nightlords would love to hire a Guardian."

Carny tossed his rifle to Anthony, who caught it awkwardly. "This guy's all mine."

"Hand to hand, kid?" the ex-lab rat chuckled, jamming his blade into the cement behind him. "That's not your style."

"It's the methodology," Carny said, his grin widening as he shrugged out of his jacket. "I'm not just going to kill you."

"Really?" Torque's tone was somewhere between a chuckle and a derisive snarl.

"That's right. First I'm going to disgust you. Next, I'll scare you. Then I'm going to hurt you. After a while," Carny paused, a line of blood slowly moving down his forehead, between his eyes and sliding down one side of his nose, "After a while I'll kill you."

Suddenly the skin of his face split with a sickening, wet, ripping sound. Bone cracked loudly as something *else* tore its way out of his skull. His chest blew open in a great spray of blood and gore. Cloth and skin and muscle warped and split. Huge shoulders rose up into a hunched back, as two extra pairs of arms ripped out of his sides. Bone shot through other areas, creating a blood-covered exoskeleton. The bone-plated, snapping mandible head had four empty sockets where Torque could only imagine insect eyes should have been.

Worst of all was the stench, not only of shredded human flesh, but also of bloated, old death, not unlike a two-day-old, road-killed skunk.

Torque fought hard to avoid puking.

And then, the hulking, massive spider-corpse came at him, and he couldn't help but scream.

\* \* \*

Flynn felt Red's grip loosen as they twisted under the water. He rolled to face the mutant Night Priest, grabbing Red by the hair and slamming his other fist into his face repeatedly. Red struggled to free himself from Flynn's tail, tried to cover his face from the flurry of strikes.

Finally, the mutant teleported again, vanished from Flynn's grasp.

For a moment, Flynn's eyes searched the water around him, before he realized that Red had given up in favor of survival. Even with his supernatural endurance, Flynn's vision was getting fuzzy, his chest aching for air.

He kicked out, shoving his way to the surface. The current had carried the two of them away from the bridge and the others. His eyes scanned both banks, hoping to spot his foe.

Red was gone again. Flynn made a noise, something between a howl and a grunt, somewhere between anger and pain. Then he kicked towards the shore, finding ground under his feet after only a couple strokes.

He stood up, shaking the water off of his face with a series of dog-like jerks, and summoned a Doorway. A black rectangle appeared in front of him, a dark portal made of nothingness.

With a heavy sigh, he stepped through it, readying himself to do battle with whatever Hounds were left.

Instead, he was almost knocked back through his portal by Torque, who was too busy trying to scamper away from something to see him.

Carny snarled and pounced, landing on Torque and driving him into the mud. Six arms punched and tore at the frightened mercenary's armor.

"Geez, Torque," Flynn laughed, plopping down in the grass nearby. "What'd you do to tick him off? It's a red-letter day when Carny puts on his Morphus for somebody."

"H-help," Torque screamed between blows.

In a high, screeching voice that didn't belong anywhere on Earth, Carny howled, "You're about to get chopped up for dinner, Toxic-Boy."

Flynn laughed. "You know, I don't think he's kidding. He's got a really big oven."

"The grill, tell him about the grill," Carny screeched.

"Oh, yeah, he's got one of those George Foreman grills," Flynn chuckled, thoroughly enjoying this. "So after he gets done slicing, dicing and filleting you, you'll be properly served without all the fat and grease normally involved in cannibalistic fiestas."

"Please, mercy," Torque screamed.

"Mercy?" Carny repeated, his mandibles butchering the pronunciation. "MERCY? You've sold out the whole human race! The whole planet!"

Flynn stood up, reverting to his Façade. "I think what Carny's getting at in his roundabout way is, 'Why should we?'"

"I'll stop! Please!"



"Not good enough," Flynn clucked. "Bon appetite, Carny."

"Wait!" Torque howled as Carny pulled back a clawed hand, ready for a quick evisceration, "I can tell you things!"

"What kinds of things?" Flynn asked, only half-interested.

"About the Nightlords," Torque's eyes streamed with tears. He was cut and battered, at least one elbow bending in a direction it wasn't meant to. The Hound-like armor that Torque had only shortly before been so proud of had been mostly torn and shredded from his body by the Nightbane that pinned him into the muck. He had little doubt about his odds of survival.

"Not good enough," Flynn said, still feigning disinterest.

"What do you want?" Torque's voice was cracking.

"I don't know, what do we want?" Flynn asked Carny.

"Blonde jokes," Carny screeched.

Torque passed out just as a line of Carny's dead spider drool glopped onto his face.

\* \* \*

"Doesn't that constitute torture?" Emily asked quietly as they sat around Carny's dinner table. Bouncing around as Carny had for most of his childhood had taught him the value of a well-stocked kitchen. On the table in front of them was a feast that would make any normal person think of Thanksgiving.

But this was only the first Tuesday of October.

Flynn shrugged, his face somber. "Not really. The threat was mostly in Torque's mind, which was pretty much what he deserved. Torture is much more involved."

Anthony kept his face lowered, probing the food on his plate with his fork. "I'm not sure I see the difference either. But I know that this is a war. Terrible things have to be done. And at least he's still alive. Which may be more than he deserves."

Carny chuckled as he sat down. "Yeah, but maybe he'll regret our merciful decision."

Emily leaned forward on her elbows. "Where exactly did you guys drop him off?"

"The Nightlords took control of the government when they invaded Earth," Carny explained. "So we couldn't just return him. But now, a lot of guys from the CIA went underground when all the agencies got sucked up into the NSB. We gave him to one of their cells."

"So what about me?" Emily asked after a few quiet moments.

"You can hang with us if you want," Flynn invited. "We'll introduce you to the people we know, so if you decide to join a faction or a cell, you'll at least know which end of the game you're playing on."

Emily nodded slowly. "And if I don't decide to join any of them?"

The three men exchanged glances, mostly shrugging. It was Carny that spoke up. "Then we'll have the proper number of players for poker."

\* \* \*

Red picked his mask out of the mud, rinsing it in the river, and pulled it back over his head, becoming Loki once more. He looked around at the torn, dismembered remains of Hounds. He pressed a small button at the edge of his mask, "Unit Two to Unit Three. We need a cleanup at the river."

Sighing deeply, he stepped out from under the bridge, looking up at the faint and distant stars above, mostly obscured by the light of the city.

Flynn had won. He smiled at that. He was proud of his old teammate, even as he was enraged. As the flashing lights of police cars lit the bridge above him, he knew that he would find Flynn again, that he would be given another chance to best his old friend.

"Fate of the world be damned," Loki thought with a smirk, "That's what this is all about."

The NSB Special Agent In Charge led a group of conspicuously inconspicuous men down the slope, leaving the uniformed cops up by the road. His pale face was passive, expressionless, but that's how the Namtar Hollow Men were.

That's life, Loki figured, When you're riding around in a disguise made of your own crap.

"What happened here?" the Namtar asked him.

"They ambushed Torque's squad at the bar," Loki let the pure contempt ooze out of his voice. "And they destroyed mine."

The Hollow Man nodded, and motioned for his agents to get to work.

Loki watched for a moment as they started gathering the remains of the Hounds. Then he stepped into a shadow and disappeared once more from the world of light.

# The Games Palladium Plays

By Wayne Breaux Jr.

Welcome to the first of a new series of articles which will grace the Rifter from time to time. In these little forays, we, the Palladium staff and employees, will take some time to present you all with a glimpse inside the games we play, specifically those within the Megaverse we have created. We will be spotlighting some of the actual characters that we have played in a variety of Palladium's games. When the idea came to me, I thought it would be a really interesting way to present some NPCs for your use as well as showcase some of our treasured moments from past gaming experiences. Providing a walk through of the character creation process was an afterthought, but I figured it would not only be interesting, but might provide some of you with some ideas for fleshing out your own character. When I sat down to decide which of my characters to do first, it was a hard toss up between two characters, both of which are from Heroes Unlimited. Precision, presented below, was a dual classed Hardware character and Tempest was a Super Soldier. Ultimately, Precision won out, however, I am sure Tempest will make an appearance somewhere down the road. Until then, enjoy this little jaunt down memory lane, for Precision has been retired a few years now and has yet to be approved for reactivation in more recent campaigns, but you can bet her guns will be cleaned and ready for action should the opportunity arise to use them again.

— Wayne Breaux, Jr.

Precision was originally whipped up for a friend's Revised Heroes Unlimited campaign. I say 'whipped,' because I decided to do her on a whim. I had always wanted to try out a dual classed Hardware character, but never quite got around to it. This particular game, I decided to give it a whirl. The concept of a character so dedicated to their calling that they gave up some combat abilities was intriguing, but once I generated the character's scores, I knew there was another option. With the I.Q. I ended up with, I could rationalize that the character was a natural genius and got bored easily, thus he/she had taken up more than one calling and was very good at both (via a high I.Q. bonus), but lacked the dedication to stick with other things like combat. What filled in the time not spent there would be active stuff to stave off boredom, but obviously not truly physical stuff that would help out in combat (given the penalties from dual classing). She ultimately became a female character when all this lack of dedication to the extras meant the character would not only get into lots of trouble (for lack of those combat abilities), but would also actively get into those troubles due to a lack of wanting to sit still. I thought it would be cool if she was always getting into trouble because she had faith in her battle prowess (mainly attributed to her gear), but her limited attacks would get in the way. The idea of the other PCs having to regularly save or rescue a damsel in distress seemed more palatable than their always pulling a geeky guy's butt out of the fire, so the issue was settled. Interestingly enough, as it happened, it would be a long time before she ever needed rescuing from her-

self. By some fluke of RPG fate, she never ran out of attacks in dire situations, or if she did, the villain was never in a position to take advantage of it. As soon as she would run out of actions in the face of sure trouble, it would turn out that the villain would also be out of attacks, would roll badly and suffer a fall or fumble, or something else would change his mind or switch his attention. And it wasn't the G.M. fudging for me. He was determined to take advantage of her flaws, but he never got the chance. He always knew I was screwed, but the villains couldn't realistically do anything about it. It was a funny turn of events and only served to build up her overconfidence, urging her to continue her brash actions and gung-ho attitude.

Since I had never before played anything close to the stereotypical feisty, red-headed, Irish lass, she became all of them in one bundle. That bundle would come to fit perfectly with the ideas I had for her. The stats I had generated also made such choices appropriate. She was gorgeous and charming, but not exceptionally charming. I decided to make her very sexy as opposed to overtly charming, thus limiting the applications of her M.A. The choice also reflected the fact that her high P.B. would complement the decision by making her more attractive to the opposite sex, and less effective, but not totally incapable of influencing women. The emotional stereotypes associated with her hair color evolved into a confident and eager attitude backed by a temper which made her determined and excitable, again linking more traits to the boredom of her natural intelligence. I didn't want her to be brainy and even in character, she would downplay it as much as possible, so the whole personality was really shaping up. Her mind was as sharp as razored Kisentite, but her emotional vibrance kept her well away from the harder sciences except where they were needed for her true busy work: mechanics (both machines and weapons).

As I already noted, she was done years ago as a Revised Heroes Unlimited character and converted to second edition, so any rules lawyers out there may find a point or two to contend with, but the character was fun and everyone else enjoyed having her in the games, which ultimately means there's absolutely nothing wrong with her. The character was generated, if I recall correctly, by rolling 3D6. Any results of 1 were re-rolled and the highest three results were totaled to get the base stats. Her I.Q. is the only perfect Palladium score I have ever rolled (or nearly so), ending up at 24 in the original version and gaining a bonus D6 with the new **Heroes Unlimited, Second Edition** rules (since she had obviously rolled a 6 on her bonus roll the first time). The G.M. almost wouldn't let me keep it, but eventually relented since she wasn't going to be any kind of powerhouse with it. As you can see, her stats came out pretty uniform except for a few exceptional ones. I was surprised, but happy with them. Only two of them give bonuses, but the others are all high, coming in only two points below bonus levels. I got a chuckle working on this article as I looked them over again because the possibility that she could have been cloned or genetically engineered occurred to me. I never thought of that in the original background, but if the G.M. had, he could have done

some interesting stuff with it, even though her power category has nothing to do with experimentation. But back to the creation process. Having picked her two areas of Hardware expertise, mechanical and weapons, I filled out her skill selections with choices that allowed her to use as much of the gadgets she might build as I could. I just thought that's what the character would do. Who else are you going to ask to test your radically experimental designs? Plus, doing such would be exciting and fun for the character and would kill a lot of boredom. Lastly, I picked a name I liked, then tried to put a Gaelic sounding twist on it to make her real name. After that, all I needed was a history for her.

It is interesting to note that the character didn't have her super-hero name, Precision, until something like 3<sup>rd</sup> level. Up to that point, she was just Tanya. This is because she never thought of herself as a hero. She was just out to have some excitement or at the very least, an interesting time. It wasn't until that later time that the other people she had started to adventure with insisted she needed a name for her armored identity. She came up with Precision, got a chuckle or a snort of some kind from one of the guys, and kept it out of spite, because, after all, that's exactly what she would have done.

## Precision

Precision started her life as Tahnee O'Bair, a rather stereotypical Irish lass (fair skin and red hair with a killer accent). She was born in a small town north of Omagh in Northern Ireland. She grew up amid the stories and activities of the Irish Republican Army, but wouldn't actually come into contact with it until her mid-teens when her father was killed. The young Tahnee wanted to be an Olympic athlete and her natural intelligence allowed her to pursue it and maintain her academics simultaneously. All that activity would stave off her boredom, but given her personality, it wouldn't have lasted too very long given the rigid schedules of athletic excellence. Even at a young age, she grew bored if not busy or mentally challenged. Puzzles of all kinds amazed her and after watching her dad work on the truck and the tractors of their farm, she could figure out the troubles with them almost as well as he did. His death during a supposedly peaceful protest resulted from an altercation with a group of British soldiers. A stray round struck her father, killing him.

A short while later, she met Shawn Tain and became romantically involved with him. The devastation of her father's death and the comfort of Shawn's presence each shattered and swept away her old life in turn. Shawn, it turns out, was with the IRA and quickly recognized Tahnee's potential with mechanics, but it wasn't until she started working with guns that she fell in love with weapons just as deeply. A few years later, she was working with his cell designing weapons and machines to use against British soldiers, the ones responsible for the death of her father. Once the soldiers specifically responsible were punished, it wasn't too hard to convince her to carry on with the war. Shortly after that, she was actually doing all the design and building of her own equipment for the IRA cell. It was exactly the kind of interesting, exciting, and ever changing (mostly) diversions she needed to stave off the creep of boredom and get some indirect payback for her father's death. Tahnee never participated in ac-

tions by the cell, nor employed any of her own equipment. Not at the beginning, anyway.

The cell leader was a grizzled old veteran named Shurie Makim. She had also been involved with the attractive young fighter named Shawn, but even though it had been intimate at times, he kept their relationship as uncomplicated as he could and it progressed in an on-again-off-again manner; unfortunately, Tahnee would complicate it far more than he could ever fear. Shurie wasn't the most honorable fighter in the world and Tahnee had to struggle to keep her creations, including bombs, from being used against innocents. Eventually, she began participating in activities to supervise the use of her weapons, armor and bombs, and she continually questioned Shurie's plans. The latter was something the veteran quickly grew tired of. Shurie's frustration grew to include jealousy when Shawn began to side with the young beauty on cell matters. Tahnee likewise grew to like Shurie less and less, but no amount of coaxing could draw Shawn away from her and out of the cell. Shawn did not want to flee his homeland and that is exactly what he would have to do to get away from Shurie. More and more, Shurie began to select civilian or mixed targets for her activities and Tahnee became more and more reluctant to build the needed weapons for them. Shurie decided to keep the young genius busy while she figured out what to do with the situation, so she put a long delayed plan into action that called for a raid against an actual British barracks. To pull this off, a large amount of resources would go into building a small fleet of armored vehicles, including a tractor-trailer rig, some cars, and a few motorcycles, all armed and armored.

Tahnee chose to confront Shurie once and for all on the day, months later, when the vehicles were to be announced complete and the full plan revealed to the cell members. On that day, Tahnee was supposed to take the bus into town with Shawn for a cell meeting, but she went to town early to speak with Shurie before the others arrived. Unknown to either of them, the case Shawn was entrusted to bring to the meeting contained one of Tahnee's bombs...and it was armed and counting down. The bomb was supposed to kill the two people that had frustrated Shurie for the last few years, but it only got one of its intended victims along with nineteen civilians. Shurie flew into a rage when she realized Tahnee had escaped her fate, but managed to restrain herself from killing the young woman in front of witnesses (Some others had also come in early and their presence saved her life). Tahnee learned of the bus explosion before the meeting began and, grief stricken, left to be alone. She was devastated, and spent three days locked in a small, dark hotel room, grieving and hiding from Shurie's wrath. Then she spent thirty minutes raging mad before calming down and formulating her course of action in the next thirty. Shurie had killed Shawn and would have to pay. Unfortunately for Shurie, she was a soldier and by Tahnee's morals could be made to pay with her life. The young genius built a special bomb, talked her way into the headquarters in the middle of the night, and planted the bomb in Shurie's office. An infrared trigger across the doorway would set it off in the morning. Once the bomb was in place, she loaded two of the armored cars and two of the motorcycles into the tractor trailer and wired those that would not fit to explode with radio detonators linked to the bomb in Shurie's office. Just before dawn, she drove the semi away, crashing the car full of guards that had tried to pursue, and made her way to the docks



to catch a pre-arranged freighter to America. She would never be sure if the bomb got Shurie or if she simply got a message out of it, but without Tahnee's skills, the cell would never be as effective as it had in the past.

Newly established in the states, she made quick friends (many of them), set about getting used to the new world, and changed her name to Tanya Beyer. At first, she made money doing odd repair work until a chance meeting with an Omni-tech Security Services manager named Nigel Arway. Convincing him to give her a chance was easy, and her skill made landing the job a breeze. She was hired to help maintain their vehicle fleet, but her natural skills quickly ingratiated her with her employers and she was promoted to the armaments section where she did reinforcing and armoring work on vehicles for clients as well as those of the company's own service fleet. On her own time, she modified and revamped the cosmetic appearance of the tractor trailer, the cars and motorcycles she had taken from Ireland. One of the bikes and a car are lightly outfitted for everyday use with minimal armor and weapons, both concealed (okay, so it's outfitted for everyday use by a player character), while the other two are fully armored with heavier weapons for any combat situation. The heavy models also have concealed armor and weapons, but stealth is not their forte.

A year or more passed as she settled in before she met any of the other characters in the campaign (this is where the campaign

actually started, with all that came before being her character history). Lucian was the first she encountered. He was a former British SAS soldier that had fallen for an IRA beauty whose demise was largely his fault (by accident of course). Neither Dennis (who played Lucian) nor I had correlated our backgrounds in any way, so it was an interesting coincidence that would shape the relationship of the characters. Lucian was instantly attracted not only to Tanya's beauty, but her striking similarities to his dead love. Lucian was a super soldier of sorts with Alter Physical Structure: Ice and...some other powers. He used the APS: Ice so dependably that it is the only one I can recall, truly a defining trait of the character. Tanya and Lucian were the first to arrive at the crash site of a U.F.O. Tanya just wanted a look at the goodies inside and Lucian was instantly taken by her, so their cooperation was rather instant. He was very professional, being former military, but in her case was willing to ignore a whole list of precautions. Inside they found a human looking woman in a suspension chamber of some kind. Lucian insisted on saving her from the government, so Tanya looked the chamber over, impressed the guy with her technical knowledge and decided the chamber could be moved. While disconnecting what she thought would free the chamber (it did), she also inadvertently started the self destruct/no tamper system. Lucian grabbed the chamber and Tanya grabbed what she could, specifically some weapons from a nearby locker. The weapons included a laser pistol, ion

rifle, and a Kisentite pole arm. The woman was a Naiden, but we never really got to find that out. We had trouble waking her up, then put her in medical care to recover from our less than perfect thawing. She wasn't grievously injured, but wouldn't (or couldn't) talk. In order to get her to talk, we then sent her into the care of an old boyfriend of Tanya's who happened to be a doctor in the field of mental health. The campaign ended before she made a full recovery though, so we never found out exactly why she was on Earth. Of course, this whole story line covered a dozen adventures or more with each stage occurring during the down time role-play of another story/adventure.

Next, she would meet Bruce Jackson, a psionic who was employed by Psi-Corporation, the only organized group of psionics in the campaign. The players knew they were bad guys in sheep's clothing, but their powers and PR department had glossed them over so well that nearly everyone else was taken in, even Bruce. Tanya got off on the wrong foot with Bruce's superior at their first meeting, which was at a luncheon to introduce the city to the newest branch of Psi-Corp. that had just opened. Tanya insulted her (on purpose) after taking a rapid dislike to Psi-Corp., even though she liked the quiet, unassuming Bruce very much. As fate would have it, she and Lucian would meet up with Bruce not too long afterward during a terrorist incident in the city. Lucian wanted to play hero, Tanya thought tagging along with him would be exciting, and Bruce was sent there by Psi-Corp. to offer his services as a negotiator. The three resolved the incident superbly (and very unofficially) and slipped quietly out the side. During this development time and through the process of getting to know Bruce, Tanya was reverse engineering the energy weapons from the spacecraft and designing some way to cut the pole arm down to a size more to her liking (she couldn't know that it was a very personal weapon of the comatose Aboera). The weapons were easy, but she added penalties because she wanted to come up with plans to allow their production for consumer markets with the hopes of selling those plans for a healthy sum. The research would also prove necessary for building the laser forge needed to cut down the axe. It would take four levels, but she would eventually make a roll to build a passable laser forge (I think the penalties stacked up to something like -80% or -88% and she finally rolled a 02% to succeed after four or five attempts).

By fourth level, the three player characters were a pretty tight group, Tanya was starting to warm to the idea of being a hero (and having an interesting time simultaneously), and she had even picked a super hero-name. Her general lack of combat skills was offset by an armored combat suit which started out as refitted class four hard armor and evolved slowly over time into a light robotic armored unit with reconfigurable systems and a rudimentary autopilot to fly the jet pack (she once needed the armor and it was five stories below the roof she was on in her trunk). Dozens of gadgets accumulated in her hidden compartments and the three decided to get serious about their unique hobby. Tanya proceeded to design a hidden base of operations. The G.M. allowed her to sell the energy weapons found on the alien ship to a weapons manufacturer for a few million (she included prototypes built from the weapons and plans for reproducing even more, thus he gave more money than he usually might, and since it was all going into the base, we got a further bonus from the G.M.). Through Omni-Tech, Tanya knew of a

secret, but upstanding security firm very much like Fabricators Inc. which would build the secret base for them.

By the time the base was complete, they had met and befriended the fourth member of the group, an exoskeleton pilot hunted by the military named Derek. One of the first things Tanya did for Derek was to cosmetically rework the appearance of his armor to make it less conspicuous to the authorities hunting him. Her skill would also prove invaluable for repairing the armor and replacing damaged systems. Tanya and Lucian had been having an on-again, off-again relationship that allowed her to get rather friendly with Derek in a similar manner. Since the loss of Shawn, she had a real problem with absolute devotion. In fact, Bruce was the only guy in the group to show no interest in the sexy red head, even when she practically threw herself at him in an attempt to get a reaction. She loved him for his restraint, but also joked with the others (in a playful way) that he had to be gay. Knowing Tanya like they did, the others jokingly agreed with her. Regardless of their reasons, all of them became the protectors I had hoped for when building the character. If she ever got into trouble, they would be there to pull her out of the fire and not be put out about having to do it.

They fought their way through Loose in the City (from the HU2 G.M.'s Guide) and numerous other adventures, but their final endeavor, the liberation of Bruce from the evil Psi-Corp., would end the campaign on a shaky note. During the discussions on how to deal with Psi-Corp., Lucian expressed his feelings that the whole building should be leveled with a missile (he was, after all, rather aberrant in alignment). Tanya wouldn't hear of it. She would not build weapons to kill innocents the way Shurie (who, incidentally, never got the chance to show up for revenge, so maybe she did die in that bomb blast after all) had made her do so long ago. Lucian dropped the idea when he saw how upset she got, but later, right after Bruce was spirited away from his masters for good, Lucian casually asked Tanya if she would make him a missile. She knew exactly what he wanted it for. He countered that it was a contingency, but she knew better. They had a fight, she left, and the campaign ended before anything further was resolved. I'm still hoping to one day play her again.

## Precision

**Real Name:** Tahnee O'Bair.

**Other Aliases:** Tanya Beyer.

**Alignment:** Scrupulous.

**Attributes:** I.Q.: 29 (+15% to all skills), M.E.: 13, M.A.: 14, P.S.: 14, P.P.: 14, P.E.: 14, P.B.: 19 (45% charm or impress), Spd: 21

**Height:** 5 feet, 4 inches (1.6 m).

**Weight:** 120 lbs (54kg).

**Level:** 5<sup>th</sup>

**Experience Point Total:** 21,450

**Hit Points:** 33

**S.D.C.:** 35

**Power Category:** Hardware (dual classed): Mechanical Genius and Weapons Expert

**Special Abilities:** +1 attack with modern weapons, +3 to called shots to disarm, Horror Factor 8 (+1 at 3, 5, 7 and 9), paired pistols, sharpshooting (+1 attack when using the same



weapon all melee round, can fire 2-handed weapon 1-handed, shoot over shoulder with mirror, shoot while moving, shoot upside down, acrobatic shooting — no penalty, and ricochet shot (-1D6 per bounce)). All abilities are described in **Heroes Unlimited, Second Edition** in the Hardware: Weapons Expert section on pages 132-133.

**Disposition:** Tanya is a feisty, Irish red-head who's emotions tend to whisk away her reason at times, especially when she's showing off. She likes to be interested in something, no matter what it is, rather than be bored, and with her natural intelligence, she gets bored rather easily. She is naturally friendly and very attractive, making her easy to talk to and interact with. She likes partying, dancing, and flirting with anyone she finds interesting, male or female, and has a string of acquaintances across the city from years of mingling and partying and discussing things both mundane and astronomically technical. It's hard to forget her, so most will remember her easily upon meeting again, even if it has been some time or they met only briefly. Her beauty is truly world class, but she rarely flaunts it, a trait that seems to enhance it more than any make-up or clothes could, but don't think that she won't or doesn't enjoy dressing up to the nines every now and then. She just prefers to be comfortable and to be herself most of the time. She thinks herself through situations, but with the brain in her head, that doesn't usually take long and action quickly follows, which can be both good and bad when dealing with Tanya. She always has good ideas, but they aren't always the smartest things to do. Having developed a special affinity for firearms, she likes to use them and if the dangers to others are low enough, she will as often as she is able. Combat is just another party for her, and although she is well aware of the danger, she thinks she is good enough and well protected enough to survive. So far, she has been right. You may also note that she has no prowl skill. Most adventures start out quiet enough, but eventually, Tanya felt the need to show off and something will get blown up. She does use silencers, but every now and then a wall or something just gets in the way and has to be dealt with.

**Appearance:** Tanya is short and very nicely shaped for a woman. Her beauty is immediately noticeable, though she rarely enhances it with much make-up or fancy clothes. She does prefer close fitting (but not too tight) t-shirts and jeans that hug her figure, but other than showcasing her body this way, she rarely wears anything revealing or racy in public without a reason. At home, look out, modesty in her own living room is a concept Tanya needs to work on, just ask Bruce. She has perfect, fair skin with a touch of light freckling in all the right places and the red hair to go with it. Gorgeous green eyes finish off the stereotypical appearance and a beautiful Irish accent rounds out the stereotypical characteristics. Her body is well built, but not overly muscular, from years of pushing wrenches, breaking the seal on stubborn bolts, and carrying weighty parts.

**Combat:** Hand to Hand: Expert.

**Number of Attacks:** 2 normally, 3 with firearms, and 4 when using the same firearm for the full melee round.

**Bonuses (all are total bonuses):** Initiative: +2, Strike: +2, Roll: +2, Dodge: +3, Parry: +3, +4 strike with thrown weapons, +3 to strike and +4 to parry with blunt, chain, and knife (also has

paired skill with knives), +4 aimed shot and +2 burst fire with modern firearms (+5 aimed shot with revolvers and +6 with sniper) including auto pistols, rifles, energy rifles, heavy weapons, and submachine-guns.

**Education and Skills (Scholastic and Hardware Skills):** Hot Wire Automobiles (105%), Build Super Vehicles (109%), Make and Modify Weapons (109%), Weapons Engineer (95%), Mechanical Engineer (95%), Electrical Engineer (85%), Locksmith (95%), Robot Electronics (85%), Robot Mechanics (98%), Aircraft Mechanics (95%), Automotive Mechanics (90%), Computer Operation (95%), Weapon Systems (95%), Read Sensory Instruments (95%), Mathematics: Advanced (98%), Navigation (98%), Demolitions (98%), Demolitions Disposal (98%), Find Contraband (81%), Pilot: Race Car (98%), Pilot: Motorcycles (98%), Pilot: Automobile (98%), Pilot: Truck (90%), Pilot: Jet Pack (95%), Pilot: Helicopter (98%), Pilot: Tanks and APCs (91%). **Secondary Skills:** Radio: Basic (85%), Research (90%), Pilot: Airplane (90%), Dance (70%), Cook (taken at 3<sup>rd</sup> level) (65%), Art (taken at 3<sup>rd</sup> level) (65%).

**Equipment:** The basic equipment Tanya carries (commonly in a sizable purse) is mostly component based and can be used for a variety of emergency situations, including building make-shift bullets. The large purse usually isn't carried out to parties or dance clubs, etc., but it will be in her car at almost all times if not on her person. Zippo Lighter, Handcuffs, Stun Gun (Taser), Paper Clips, Liquid Solder, Make-Up (mainly to camouflage other chemicals hidden in make-up containers), Sunglasses, Duct Tape (small roll), Perfume & Cologne (for reasons similar to make-up), 3" metal Hair Pins, Hair Spray (small can), Gunpowder/chordite (roughly enough for 4 bullets), ½ " Ball bearings (4-6), Metal Cigarette Case (with mixture of real cigs and fakes filled with components; Tanya doesn't smoke), small strips of plastic explosives concealed as chewing gum (4-6), 1-2 pounds of change (yes, plain old coins that can be used for anything from weights to emergency 'buckshot'), Nail File, Nail Picks, Small Radio (the music kind), small two-way radio, Scotch Tape, Small pouch of nuts and bolts (2D6 of ID4 different sizes), String or fishing twine (50 ft/15.2 m), Fishhooks (6), and a small toolkit (small adjustable wrench, interchangeable tip screwdriver, mini-flashlight, and a mini-pocket knife). Also in the car at all times are a pair of combat driving suits (Absorbs 1<sup>st</sup> 30 points of crash damage and are outfitted with forearm and shin plates to parry weapons in emergencies; each has 40 S.D.C.).

**Special Weapons and Equipment:** All of Tanya's special equipment, including the battle armor, gimmick weapons, advanced armors and gadgets, are protected by safety systems. The most prominent is a finger/palm print pad that matches prints to allow activation of the item. If the prints do not match, the item won't work. The system isn't super sophisticated and can be gotten around with the right skills/powers and a little time, but they do generally prevent things from being used against her in combat. Jury-Rig Kit (Contains varied sizes of bolts, screws, nuts, wires, rods, washers, glue, duct tape, string, cables, clamps, crimpers, needle-nose pliers, etc. A jury-rig kit is built into the combat armor and each vehicle), Sonic Hover Board (captured and copied from

Soundwave, page 187 of **Villains Unlimited**; same stats), Laser Pistol (4D6, range: 2000 ft/610 m), Laser Rifle (6D6, range: 3200 ft/975.3 m), Explosive Arrows (6D6), Explosive Throwing Darts (2D4), Grenades (1D4x10), Smoke grenades, Tiny Exploding Pellets, Secret belt buckle compartment, Exploding Plastique Bullets: Pistol, Spring Release Mechanism (usually holds double-barreled derringer with exploding bullets; 7D6 damage each), Spitfire (1D4, x4, x8; identical to the Spitfire presented on page 179 of Revised Aliens Unlimited (AU)), Stinger Brae (1D4, x6, x12; also identical to the AU counterpart), Korimyr (1D4x10; 1D6x10 microjets; same stats as the Korimyr on page 178 of AU), Compound Bow (2D6+4), Shotgun (4D6; 5D6; 6D6 flechette; 3D6 + knockback bola rounds), M-16 (5D6) (4 of them taken from terrorists), 9mm Glocks (3D6) (6 of them taken from terrorists), Magnesium Glass Cutter (burns/melts instead of cutting), and the non-portable, Dense Metal Laser Forge for reshaping Kisentite.

**Precision's Combat Armor:** Originally a suit of refitted class 4 hard armor, the combat suit evolved into a robotic armored battlesuit with some really advanced systems, namely the unit reconfiguration systems that allows tons of gadgets to be built into the suit without it becoming too bulky since they can collapse and fold away to take up a fraction of their normal size. Some systems were developed and added after specific encounters, such as the thermal insulation (after meeting Lucian) and the sonic shielding (after the fight with Soundwave). It took 5 levels to built the armor into what it is, including three attempts at the robotic armor and six tries on the reconfiguration designs, and it is still a work in progress. Also note that the armor is outfitted with the voice activation and recognition systems detailed later for the vehicles which limits the possibilities of it being stolen or used against her. The armor is also configured with a 'quick dress' system that allows it to flare open on command and close itself once the user has stepped inside, allowing the armor to be donned in a single melee round when necessary. **Armor Rating:** 10 (natural/robotic), **Structural Damage Capacity (S.D.C.):** 100, Full Environmental Battle Armor, Thermal Insulation (+/- 60 degrees; ½ damage from heat and cold), Sonic Insulation (+1 to save and ½ damage or effect from sonic attacks), Flash eliminating visor (visor tints when exposed to sudden, bright flashes; visor makes a save/dodge against 14, if it succeeds, no effect, but if it fails, wearer gets a normal save or dodge to resist being blinded), Multi-Optics Helmet (filtered through or displayed upon the visor plate; no bulky lenses or goggles), special gyroscopic system designed to orient the user when blinded or unable to see while suspended or in flight, 20 minute air supply (originally a modified mini-S.C.U.B.A. system), Retractable face armor can slide into place to protect the area beneath the visor and to seal the environmental systems of the armor, Compact micro-jet pack (210 mph/336 km max, +1 to dodge in flight, max altitude: 2500 feet/762 m, 4 shots of anti-missile chaff; retractable wings can also be deployed to improve maneuverability and speed, adding an additional +1 to dodge, 25 mph/40 km to max speed and 500 feet/152 m to altitude), lock pick release gun (retractable, on wrist under palm), Spike Launch Rod system (compact by design, but same stats as normal; built into right forearm), Bola launcher system (fires compact cable and metal bolas

with 100 ft/30.5 m cable attached; used to snag climbing/swinging anchors the SLR isn't practical for), Super Handcuffs (identical to the TMC heavy handcuffs on page 96-97 of the Aliens Unlimited Galaxy Guide), Retractable Ice Cleats (for fighting on the ice Lucian was so fond of laying about a combat zone), Spot Lamp (adjustable; 500 candlepower to 150,000 candlepower), Paint Ball Gun (range: 75 ft/23 m; used for annoyance/distraction and to blind cameras or opponents made of stone, metal, etc.), Magnesium and Diamond Glass Cutters (built into fingers), Built-in combat driving suit (absorbs the first 30 points of damage from a crash/collision). **Weapons:** Mini-Flame Thrower (3D6 damage; right arm in SLR housing), Kisentite knives (one in each forearm, retractable; 2D6 damage); Rocket Powered Punching Ram (2D4x10 plus damage equals percent chance of knockdown; half knockdown percentage for superhuman or supernatural P.S.), Retractable Circular Saw (tool, but can be used as a melee weapon; -1 strike, 4D6 damage), Mini-Bomb Wall Cutter (1D6x10+10 damage; a circular deploying series of adhesive micro-charges designed to make a 3 ft/1 m hole in walls; launches from up to 30 ft/9 m away; to determine if a hole is made, wall cutter must deplete the S.D.C. of a 3 ft/0.9 m wall section), Spitfire Forearm Gun (custom built equivalent to the galactic weapon of the same name; 1D4, x4, x8 damage), Spring Release Knife launcher (for 4 back-up knives, all vibro weapons; +2 initiative), Forearm Crossbow (left forearm; 1D6+4 damage or 4D6+4 exploding quarrels), Bola Launcher (no cable attachment, used for restraining targets; 2 bolas), Laser Pistol (left forearm in the crossbow housing; 4D6 damage; range: 2000 ft/610 m), Smoke Grenade Launcher/Dispenser (range: 120 ft/36.6 m; payload of 12), Tranquilizer Grenades (payload: 2; gas renders anyone in area that fails a save unconscious within 1D4 melees, leaving the area does not help if save is failed), and Tear Gas Grenades (payload: 2). Weapons carried on the armor but not actually built into it include two additional spitfires, two Korimyr knock-offs, and two heavily modified Glock 17s with 35 round clips and full composite construction (+2 strike and normally outfitted with armor piercing bullets).

**Super Vehicles:** Tanya started with four super vehicles, a light car and motorcycle, a heavy car and motorcycle, and the tractor-trailer rig she often used as a mobile headquarters and home. Later, Lucian gave her a shamrock green DeLorean (she didn't ask where he got it either) which she turned into a pet project and began to outfit as a high-tech armored car with energy weapons and hover systems. Finally, once the group had melded into a coherent whole, she decided they needed some way to get everyone to and from one place comfortably and started working on a van. The van and the DeLorean are presented in their finished state, but both were not quite done when the campaign ended. In addition to the systems listed below, all of Precision's super vehicles have the following systems: Paint Shifting System (electronic currents and chemical tinting that lets the vehicle change color within one melee round), Armored Tires, Self Seal Tires, Voice Actuation for Armor and Vehicles (allows the gadget to be turned on, turned off, and driven remotely with voice commands; commands can even be given through a radio), Voice Recognition Locks (all vehicles and weapons are pro-

grammed with accepted voices corresponding to levels of clearance for the operations they can perform so that only certain people are allowed to do certain things with the equipment; imitate voices can be used to fool the system with no undue penalties since the system is new and has plenty of fine tuning to go through) and Image Recognition Systems (Not only must a thief get past the voice recognition security, but they must also be 'recognized' by visual systems too).

**Light Motorcycle:** Designed for everyday use, the light motorcycle could drive about town and none would notice anything beyond its cutting edge styling. All weapons are retractable/concealed and armor and weapons are light, especially compared to the heavier vehicles. **Maximum Speed:** 195 mph (312 km). **Light Armor** (Bike and Passenger armor, but the latter limited to the windshield and protecting only from frontal attacks). **Weapons:** 5.56mm machine-gun (1; forward facing), 2.75 in rockets (2; forward facing, one per side). **Other Systems:** Smoke Screen, Super Fuel Efficiency. **Replacement Cost:** \$23,800.

**Heavy Motorcycle:** Basically a modified 'Hog' with a canopy and armored protection for the driver. Weapons are retractable and mostly concealed, but the bike is far from unobtrusive. **Maximum Speed:** 105 mph (168 km). **Medium Armor** (Bike and Passenger armor). **Weapons:** 7.62mm machine-gun (2; forward facing), 2.75 in rockets (4; forward facing). **Other Systems:** Smoke Screen, Anti-Missile Chaff (6), Ram Prow. **Replacement Cost:** \$34,300.

**Light Car:** Sleek and sporty, the light car borrows styling from many late model sports cars, but doesn't copy any one in particular. Like the light bike, this car is intended to be used in everyday surroundings and not attract undue attention (not any more than any other expensive looking sports car might, anyway). **Maximum Speed:** 210 mph (336 km). **Light Armor** (Car and Passenger armor). **Weapons:** 5.56mm machine-gun (3; 2 forward facing and one in the rear), 2.75 inch rockets (2 forward facing tubes and 2 rear tubes; 2 rockets per tube). **Other Systems:** Anti-Missile Chaff (6), Smoke Screen, Oil Slick, Vehicle Caltrops, Thief Proof Locks, Hydraulic Righting System (hydraulic arms extend from the roof, hood, or sides to right the car should it roll or flip over), Engine Readout Package, Super Fuel Efficiency. **Replacement Cost:** \$78,500.

**Heavy Car:** Reminiscent of a low slung, luxury car, the heavy car is a combat vehicle with heavy armor and bigger weapons. Weapons are still retractable, but the car is far from subtle and makes a lot of noise when it starts shooting. **Maximum Speed:** 105 mph. **Armor:** Medium vehicle armor and heavy passenger armor. **Weapons:** .50 caliber machine-gun (forward), 7.62mm machine-gun (2; in rear), 2.75 inch rockets (4 forward tubes and 4 rear tubes; 3 rockets per tube), Anti-Missile Chaff (10), Radar Display, Oil Slick, Vehicle Caltrops, Thief Proof Locks, Hydraulic Righting System, Engine Readout Package. **Replacement Cost:** \$59,500.

**Tractor Trailer:** Customized semi designed to be a tank of sorts, but recently customized by Tanya as a showpiece and mobile headquarters. Even though the truck looks like a stylized tour bus of sorts, it is still a very functional urban tank; although, she never had the need to use its firepower in the whole time I played her. In fact, the only vehicle to see combat was the heavy car and it was fortunate she was in it

for she found herself staring down a villain with Alter Physical Structure: Metal as she pulled up to the building the bad guys were hiding in. He was a nice distance away and charged. She lit him up with the .50 cal on a full melee burst, then jumped out to empty two pistols worth of AP rounds into him. In a perfect example of her luck, the damage she did had knocked off 790 of his 800 S.D.C. He paused, knowing how bad off he was, and she gave him the option to leave the area before she finished him off. He left and we got to deal with the rest of the villains without their powerhouse. You just gotta love those villains with a spark of wisdom in them, but anyway, back to the truck. **Maximum Speed:** 115 mph (184 km). **Armor:** Heavy vehicle armor and heavy Passenger armor. **Weapons:** 20mm Auto Cannon (2; forward facing), .50 caliber machine-gun (2; pop-up turrets on top rear of the cab), 2.75 inch rockets (6 tubes with 2 rockets per tube; pop-up turret between the .50 calibers), Anti-Aircraft Missiles (4 tubes with 2 missiles per tube; pop-up turret in front end of trailer). **Other Systems:** Air Recycling, Sealed Environment, Luxury Accommodations, Night Sight, Winch and Cable, Super Fuel Efficiency, Ram Prow, Hydraulic Righting System, Anti-Missile Chaff (18 charges), Radar Display, Oil Slick, Vehicle Caltrops, Thief Proof Locks, Engine Readout Package. **Replacement cost:** \$744,000

**Armored Van:** Designed for the transport of the whole group as well as their protection, this was to be the main deployment vehicle for the team (which had no official name by the time we ended the campaign). A hover system was planned to increase the versatility of the vehicle. It was yet to be finished as the campaign closed. **Maximum Speed:** 100 mph (160 km). **Armor:** Medium Vehicle Armor and Heavy Passenger Armor. **Weapons:** 5.56 mm machine-guns (2; rear), 2.75 mm rockets (4 tubes with 2 rockets each in a Pop-up Turret near the middle of the van), 5.56 mm machine-guns (2; rear). **Other Systems:** Anti-Missile Chaff (8), Engine Readout, Radar Display, Vehicle Caltrops, Oil Slick, Hover System, Super Fuel Efficiency, Hydraulic Righting System.

**Delorean LAV:** A pet project of Tanya's, this vehicle was to be a high-tech showcase outfitted with energy weapons, a full sensor suite, and limited flight capabilities. As with the van, it was unfinished at the ending of the campaign. **Maximum Speed:** 240 mph (384 km). **Armor:** Medium Aircraft Armor (A.R.: 10, S.D.C. 825), Heavy Crew Armor (A.R. 15, S.D.C. 550) and Heavy Fuel Armor (A.R. 14, S.D.C. 400). **Weapons:** Pulse lasers (2; forward facing; 2D6 damage each or 6D6 pulse per weapon), 2.75 inch rockets (10 rear, 10 forward in concealed launch tubes), Turret with Twin heavy lasers (1D4x10 damage each, but fire in tandem for 2D4x10 damage per blast; turret retracts into the underside of the vehicle and can only be used in flight), Anti-Aircraft Missiles (4 tubes with 2 missiles per tube; turret retracts alongside the heavy lasers). **Other Systems:** Anti-Missile Chaff, Pressurized Cabin, Basic Radar, Hydraulic Righting System, Engine Readout, Radar Display, and Winch and Cable.

**Other Weapons, Systems, and Gadgets:** The following list represents some miscellaneous items Precision was working on when the campaign ended or items she built that were lying around waiting to be used. In addition to all the custom stuff, she also regularly added to a stockpile of normal weap-

ons hidden in the truck (and later, the group's base) for emergency situations. This weapons cache included almost a dozen 9mm handguns, M-16 assault rifles, and a sniping rifle or three. Some specific gadgets are given expanded descriptions below.

**Automated Mini-Gun Defense System** (trust a hardware weapon genius to safeguard her security with 4000 round per minute firepower, especially a weapon expert who has a known enemy that can turn himself to metal; two of these 5.56mm mini-guns protect each of the two entrances to the group's hidden base and can fire a pair of full melee bursts each melee round due to their high rate of fire), **Hover Boots** (based on the copied sonic hover boards; identical stats, see page 187 of *Villains Unlimited*), **Rocket Launched Hair Needles** (just like those oriental assassin weapons used to put your hair up, but the bulb on the end gives it a little rocket assisted push; 1D4+4 damage), **Rocket Launched Hair Needles** (exploding; same as the others, but a little thicker to explode on impact; 2D6+4 damage), **High Powered Taser** (same as normal taser, but victim is -2 to save), **Net Gun/Explosive strap gun** (identical to the explosive strap gun from *Revised Aliens Unlimited*, pg 181), **Compact Needle Gun** (onion shaped gun that fits in the palm of the hand and fires durable, alloy needles; needles are armor piercing by nature; 2D6 damage and all six barrels can be fired singly or simultaneously using the volley rules; hollow needles only do 1D4 damage, but can be used to deliver drugs or tranquilizers), **Glaser Rounds** (*Aliens Unlimited*, pg. 180), **Breathtakers** (non-lethal shotgun rounds identical to the 'wheezers' used by the TMC; see the *Galaxy Guide*, page 104, for details), **Fire extinguishing Grenades** (60% chance to extinguish fires in the blast radius of 15 feet/4.6 m), **Climbing Pads** (combo - magnetic, chemical, suction that function exactly like the suction gloves in the *Galaxy Guide* on page 152), **Pulse Laser** (built into armor), **Pulse Laser Pistol** (sidearm), **Vehicle Stopper** (built into armor; does 3D4x10 damage to solid

structures like vehicles and buildings or half that to soft targets, plus the projectile's impact is designed to knock 1D4+1 speed classes off of a vehicle's speed when it strikes the front or side of the target; fires single shots and takes 2 actions to reload).

**Automatic Cable Cutters:** A teardrop shaped frame with a pair of crescent shaped blades inside. When activated, the blades close and prepare to cut, vising against the material to be cut to hold itself in place. The manual switch starts immediate cutting, but a timer can be set to activate the cutters on a delay up to 99 minutes long. It is designed to cut cables, ropes, small pipes, re-bar, weapon barrels, wires, tubes, and any small, tough items. The whole unit is a bit larger than a person's hand with the fingers extended. The super tough blades apply 1D6x10+10 cutting damage per melee action.

**Compact, Hydraulic Door Vise:** This parallel bar device has powerful, compact hydraulics that, when activated, wait for pressure to be applied to the box-end grips on either end of its length. When pressure is detected, they piston outward with matching force (to a limit of about 1200 lbs/540 kg). The unit is about the size of a man's forearm and twice as wide. It was originally designed to pry open sliding doors.

**Push Rockets:** These small items are simply miniature rocket engines with anchoring tips or adhesive points. They are thrown (usually in pairs or trios) and activate on release, race to the target, attach/anchor to it, and continue to thrust for approximately 2 seconds, throwing the target off balance or off its feet (roll to maintain balance). These were especially effective when combined with Lucian icing up a floor.

**Segmented Whip:** The segmented whip is not primarily designed to be used as a whip, although it functions perfectly in that capacity (albeit a short one; 5 feet/1.5 m in length). It is primarily a concealed sword that masquerades as a heavy, ornamental, metal segmented belt. Once taken off, the weapon can be used as a whip/chain or it can be activated and locked rigid to form a sword (2D6+3 damage).

# The Hammer of the Forge

By James M.G. Cannon



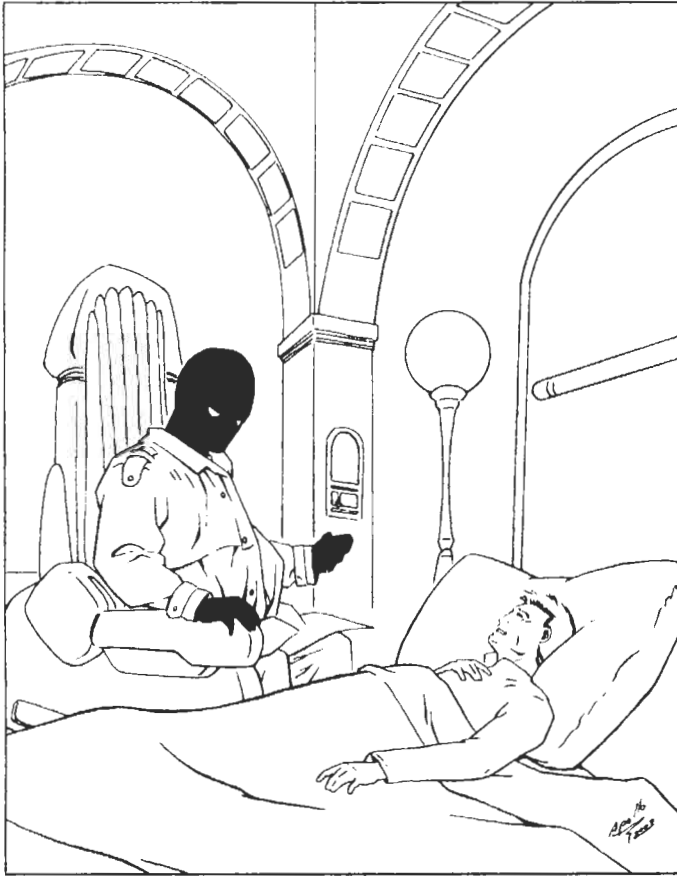
## Chapter Twenty-Two Racing to the Starting Line

*Draconids are one of the more curious species of the Three Galaxies. Though reptilian in form, they are mammalian in design, and appear to be distantly related to dragons. Like dragons, Draconids are predisposed towards psychic and magical abilities, buttressed by a hardy physicality that enables Draconids to survive in a wide range of environments. Draconids do not appear to possess Galactic level technology themselves, but as experienced dimensional travelers, they have*

managed to acquire it through trade. Draconids first appeared on Phase World, but they have branched out into the rest of the Three Galaxies and today control nearly a dozen systems within the United Worlds of Warlock, the so-called "Draconid Hub Worlds."

*Draconids as a species defy expectations. Individualistic, free-spirited, and impulsive, each Draconid is a nation unto itself. That a number of them have banded together to form governments is amazing in and of itself, and yet some of these governments have stood the test of time, withstood wars and despots and galactic tragedies.*

— Guide to the Three Galaxies, Arturo Vargras



Consciousness returned slowly. First came aches and pains, eliciting a groan, then senses sparked to life, and finally full awareness returned.

Slowly Caleb Vulcan opened his eyes and sat up. He lay in a comfortable bed beneath white satin sheets. The walls around him were covered in panels of similarly colorless material, cut in multi-faceted geometric shapes, and the panels in the ceiling emitted a low, ethereal light that gave the entire chamber a pale glow.

Caleb pressed his palm against his forehead, trying to recall how he ended up in this place. The last thing he could remember was —

*white-hot pain flashing through his body, blood seeping from his eyes and nostrils, ears and lips, and the cruel, booming laugh of Thraxus*

— just behind his eyeballs he felt a flash of memory, and he flinched involuntarily. When he blinked tears free of his eyes,

he realized he was not alone in the room. The enigmatic Dr. Abbot reclined in a low, white frame chair. The doctor's blank visage starkly compared to the brightness of the room, as Abbot was a being composed entirely of shadow. The twin orange lights of his eyes were his only features, and the battered fedora and tattered trench coat he wore were the only things that gave his lithe, dark form definition. Despite Abbot's nearly sinister appearance, Caleb found himself immediately relaxing at the sight of his friend.

"Caleb," Abbot said lightly, his British accent no longer as jarring as it was when first they met. "How are you feeling?"

"Better," Caleb said, surprised at how weak his voice sounded. He was a Knight of the Cosmic Forge, gifted with superhuman strength, agility, and the ability to withstand the burning hot core of a star, and yet at that moment he felt as though a kitten could overpower him. "What happened?"

"How much do you remember?" Abbot asked.

Caleb shrugged. "We were on Phase World, deep within Center. I was trying to rescue Kassy." A sudden fear constricted his heart. "Where is she?"

"She is here," Abbot assured him, "and quite safe. You saved both her and the Celestine called Joriel, and nearly paid with your life. Thraxus managed to poison you with a magical virus that even your Forge-enhanced immune system could not shake off. There was nothing we could do to save you."

Caleb looked around the white room with sudden alarm. "I don't feel dead," he said.

Abbot's eyes glimmered brightly in his version of a smile. "No, you are not. Fortuitously enough, just as we escaped Thraxus' clutches, we received a communication from the Council of Time. Those strange visions that were bedeviling you of late turned out to be the Council's garbled attempts to contact you. I knew from past experience how to reach the Council's hidden home, and we rushed here as quickly as we could. As I'd hoped, the Council was able to reach back through space and time to steal the antidote from Thraxus and cure you. Which brings us more or less to the present."

Caleb massaged his temples. "Okay, that almost makes sense."

Abbot's eyes flashed again. "Yes, quite. Questions?"

"The regular kind," Caleb said. "Who, what, where, etc."

"The Council of Time is a group of wizards, scientists, and adventurers who monitor the use of time travel throughout the Megaverse. They are spread thinly across the infinite dimensions, and their responsibilities are vast and varied. Not many are aware of them, or their mission, because of the nature of what they do."

"Which is?"

"They ensure that time is allowed to progress naturally. Think of the Council as a sort of environmental protection agency, but they don't look after wetlands or deserts or pollution levels. They fix damage done to the timestream itself."

"What do they want from us?" Caleb asked.

"Us?" Abbot echoed. "Not a great deal. They seem to be primarily interested in you."

Caleb lurched to his feet. "Why does that not fill me with joy?"



"I wouldn't worry, my boy," Abbot said. "They saved your life for a reason. I suspect they want your help dealing with a certain Draconid wizard of our acquaintance."

"Quajinn Huo," Caleb breathed.

Abbot nodded. "They haven't told us much more than that. I believe the Council is waiting for you to fully recover before sharing everything."

"Let's go give them the good news then, Doc," Caleb said.

\* \* \*

Aboard the Draconid warship *Strabo*, the wizard Quajinn Huo paced across the bridge. Huo was physically unremarkable for a Draconid. He stood about two meters tall, raw-boned and thin, with a long snout and needle-sharp teeth. Thick brow ridges nearly hid white, pupilless eyes, and a thick mane of white hair spilled down nearly to his waist. Huo's scales were colored a brilliant shade of electric blue, and his red and gold tunic complemented his natural coloring. In one thin, clawed hand, Huo clutched a staff forged of durinium steel, topped with a pale blue crystal.

On his left wrist dangled a seemingly ordinary looking wrist-chronometer. It was slate gray, with a clouded lens that showed a crack in the glass. But the digital read-out still ticked away the seconds, minutes and hours at a steady rate.

The chronometer was far from ordinary, however. It was, in fact, one of the single most powerful magical artifacts in the Three Galaxies. And it had allowed Quajinn Huo, a powerful mage in his own right, to slip seven hundred years into the past, where he now stood. In his own time, he had once led an army across the United Worlds of Warlock and conquered world after world. A small band of adventurers had shattered his dream of a Draconid empire spanning the Three Galaxies, but now he had reached a point hundreds of years before those adventurers had even been born.

With the chronometer in his possession, Huo planned to use its time traveling powers to kill those brave fools over and over again, but first he would conquer the Three Galaxies. Without interference from Doctor Abbot, the Wolfen shaman Koguk, the sorceress Callista, or that blasted Lothar of Motherhome.

Huo had already killed Lothar once, and looked forward to doing it again. He would savor it the next time; Lothar's first death had suffered from a necessary haste.

"My lord," a voice interrupted Huo's thoughts. The wizard turned. Arrayed around Huo was his command staff, all Draconids, all clad in the baroque battle armor that the reptilian humanoids preferred when going into battle, even aboard a warship.

"Yes, Commander Krang?"

Krang had golden scales and a neatly trimmed goatee, and a brace of medals across his chest. "We are coming up on Ogretopia," Krang reported.

"Excellent," Huo said. He leaned heavily on his staff and pointed at the viewscreen, where the green and black Ogre home world quietly spun in space. It was ripe for the plucking, a backwards planet ceded to the Ogres to keep them from raiding more peaceable Elven and Dwarven worlds in the UWW. Ogres were



not technologically adept, but they were powerful warriors and formidable opponents. Unless, of course, one had the combined military might of the Draconid Hub Worlds at one's back.

Ogretopia would fall quickly. Its mineral and biological diversity would be added to the burgeoning Draconid empire, and its populace forced into the Draconid military as shock troops. The next worlds to fall would be those of the Elves and Dwarves. And after them...

... laser fire suddenly flashed across the viewscreen as the Ogretopia militia fired a volley across the bow of the *Strabo*.

Beside Commander Krang, Sub-commander Voorlak gestured at the ensign manning the weapons console. *Strabo* answered the Ogres' attack, unleashing a barrage of laser fire upon the defenders that was echoed by the other ships in the Draconid fleet.

Huo cackled. "Release the fighter craft," he ordered. "Begin a bombing run on the capital city. Let these low-browed apes know who their masters are."

Krang gestured at his staff, and a klaxon bell rang across the bridge. In the bowels of the ship, pilots scrambled to their craft and launched out into space.

"They're responding with their own small range ships," Krang reported. "But the Ogres have sub-standard weaponry. This assault will not last much longer, my lord."

"I did not expect it would," Huo muttered. Seven hundred years in the past, Galactic level technology was not much more primitive than it was in Huo's own time. The Draconid Hub Worlds had managed to accrue a massive amount of materiel, and small targets like Ogretopia simply could not mass sufficient defenses to hold back the tide of Draconid power. Which was as it should be.

Huo closed his eyes and concentrated upon the well of Potential Psychic Energy that raged within his thin frame. He called upon that reservoir and transferred a trickle of it to the chronometer on his left wrist. The chron began to hum and glow, and outside the *Strabo*, an Ogretopian defense satellite suddenly crunched together, as though a giant invisible fist had closed around it.

Twenty minutes later, Ogretopia lay conquered. Quajinn Huo strode across the rough-hewn plaza at the center of the planet's capital city. Shattered bodies lay strewn across the square. Carbon scores marred the stone ground. The Grand Chieftain of Ogretopia knelt in the center of the plaza, and he looked up with a blood-streaked visage as Huo and his entourage approached.

"This is their supreme executive," Krang sneered.

Huo pointed his index finger at the chieftain. A line of fire flashed from his fingertip to the Ogre, immolating him instantly.

"Not anymore," he snarled.

\* \* \*

Caleb and Abbot found the rest of their friends in some kind of reception room, which Abbot located after navigating the two of them through a labyrinth of white hallways. It was a large chamber, with plush carpeting and the kind of pseudo-futuristic plastic tables and chairs which Caleb always associated with

Saturday matinees. On the far wall, a wide window looked out on the empty expanse of space outside the station.

Siv Yurilak, the Noro pilot, played a game of chess with Arwen, the green-skinned and blue-haired martial artist. Siv in his leathers and Arwen in her monk's garb made an odd pair, but the glance Caleb spared in the direction of the chess board suggested they were evenly matched. Against the far wall, looking out of the window, stood the tall and graceful form of Ariel, the beautiful Titan who was also, like Caleb, a Knight of the Forge. Their other colleague, the bearded and darkly sarcastic Vyking, reclined on a divan, staring into space and mumbling to himself. A strange figure in blue and red armor, a pair of maroon colored wings erupting from his back, leaned against a wall, coldly watching the room with his lavender eyes. Kassiopaea Acherean, Atlantean Undead Slayer, sat in a chair reading a fat hardback.

As soon as Caleb appeared in the doorway, Kassy threw the book down and leapt to her feet. She was across the room and hugging Caleb tightly before he could squeak out a "hello."

She released Caleb, smiling broadly. "I was worried about you," she said.

Caleb grinned lopsidedly. "You should know better," he said. "Mamma Vulcan's little boy always bounces back." He didn't want to tell her he still felt weak.

Kassy led Caleb into the room and the others exchanged greetings and expressions of concern. The guy with the feathers turned out to be the Celestine, Joriel, who had been strapped to Thraxus' torture device next to Kassy before the virus had stolen Caleb's consciousness. Joriel shook Caleb's hand with a strong grip, but said little. Ariel and Arwen were more effusive, and even Siv gave Caleb a slap across the back.

"Perhaps now," Vyking suggested, "we can get to the bottom of this 'Time Council' nonsense."

"An excellent idea," offered a new voice. A petite human woman in black leather jeans and a red waistcoat stood in the doorway. Her black hair was cut short and neat, her dark eyes warm and intelligent, and her lips were bright red against pale skin. She was also easily the most beautiful woman Caleb Vulcan had ever seen. He watched, dumbfounded, as she approached him slowly.

"Romana Vorishcenko ne Uskios," she said, offering her hand.

Caleb took it. "Caleb Vulcan," he responded.

"I know," she said. Caleb felt his cheeks redden, and watched with some surprise as color appeared on her cheeks as well. She dropped her eyes and pulled her hand away. "Doctor Abbot," she said, turning to the shadowy wizard, "Master Astyanax is waiting for you all." Caleb had the sudden nagging feeling that he had met this girl somewhere before.

"By all means, my dear," Abbot said, "lead on."

As the gathered adventurers followed the girl out of the room, Vyking smoothly interposed himself between Caleb and Romana. "That's an Altess name, isn't it?" Vyking asked her. Kassy linked her arm under Caleb's, and he missed Romana's response.

"Abbot trusts these people," Kassy whispered. "But something about them rubs me the wrong way. Siv's nervous, too. He

won't say anything, but I can tell by the way he moves that he's not comfortable."

Siv Yurilak's comfort levels were not a priority for Caleb, but he knew better than to ignore Kassy's instincts. "Received," he told her. In all honesty, though, all he could think about was the girl.

Romana led them along another winding path through the space station's antiseptic white corridors. At one point in the trip, Siv sidled up next to Kassy and said, "This place is messing with my senses, but it is definitely larger on the inside than it is on the outside." He sighed. "Headache central, kid."

Kassy merely nodded. Caleb had no idea what they were talking about. He wasn't sure he cared. Whatever this Council of Time's plans might be, they had voluntarily saved his life. That earned them a fair hearing at the very least.

The corridor opened up into another large room, this one more spacious than the reception area, but devoid of furniture. A dozen figures stood in a semi-circle in the center of the room, a broad cross-section of alien races that included a silver-skinned giant with glowing eyes, a human-sized amoeba covered in dark blue eyes, a squat-bodied, fish-lipped alien, something that looked like an armor-plated jellyfish, and more human-looking beings with strangely colored skin or odd ridges on their faces.

"Ladies and gentleman," Romana said, "I present the Council of Time."

"Caleb Vulcan," the silver-skinned giant said, his voice booming, "you have been summoned here and resuscitated so that you may be of service to us."

"Astyanax," Abbot said, a note of warning in his voice, "you can spare us the theatrics. We are grateful for your help, and we will happily aid you in any way that we can, but don't try to impress us."

Astyanax's glowing eyes flashed for a moment, but his metallic face remained expressionless. "Doctor Abbot," he said at last, "you will be silent. Caleb Vulcan, step forward."

Abbot's orange eyes blinked rapidly at the rebuke. Caleb bit back an angry remark and stepped around Abbot into the room. He folded his arms across his chest and looked Astyanax in his freakish, glowing eyes. "What's the trouble, Sparky?"

The shimmering green gaze flashed angrily in Caleb's direction this time, but a titter went through the other councilors. The armored jellyfish shook slightly, its tentacles lashing the ground as it floated in the air. The amoeba reached out a pseudopod and placed it along Astyanax's arm. There was no mouth, and yet a perfectly enunciated gurgle sounded, saying, "Quajinn Huo has gained possession of a powerful temporal artifact. He has used it to travel into the past, and unless Caleb Vulcan stops him, Quajinn Huo will march his armada across the Three Galaxies and bend them to his will."

"Shivok," Siv swore softly behind Caleb.

"That does sound pretty bad," Caleb said. "I'll help in any way I can. But I have to ask, why me? You must have the whole of the Three Galaxies to choose from — certainly there are more experienced Cosmo-Knights who could help you."

"The answer is simple," Astyanax boomed. "It must be you, Caleb Vulcan, because that is how it happened."

Caleb exchanged a look with Abbot. Abbot's eyes flickered. "Time travel," Kassy muttered. "Instant headache."

"What do you mean?" Caleb asked Astyanax.

It was the armored jellyfish who answered. "History has recorded Quajinn Huo's attempt to conquer the Three Galaxies seven hundred years ago. It also records his failure and defeat at the hands of an hitherto unknown Cosmo-Knight named Caleb Vulcan."

Caleb felt his mouth drop open. His mind whirled with the implications. When he could form a coherent sentence, he said, "Okay. Assuming for a minute that I understand what you just said, what do I have to do to take Huo out?"

The jellyfish managed to smile somehow. "That, I fear, we cannot tell you. The exact means used to defeat Huo have been lost. Further, the artifact he holds complicates things."

A pastel-skinned woman in multi-colored robes stepped forward. "With the Singularity Watch, Quajinn Huo possesses the power to change the way history has worked out. There is a very real possibility that he may succeed in his aims."

"Shivok," Siv swore again.

"How in Hades' name did Huo get his hands on such a thing?" Kassy asked.

The pastel woman shrugged. "We are not certain. The Watch remains safely ensconced within its tabernacle here within our citadel. Yet we can clearly feel the echo of the Watch's powers being used seven hundred years in the past."

"If we look down the line into our future," the amoeba said, "we see that the Watch will be stolen. Somehow the future Watch found its way into the present, and into the hands of Quajinn Huo."

Vyking snorted angrily. "Security isn't very tight around here, is it?"

"And what would you know of that, Vyking of Vegas?" Astyanax rumbled. Vyking looked ready to retort, but Caleb put his hand up, and the other Knight fell silent.

"Save the arguments for later. What do I have to do?"

Astyanax pointed a cruelly clawed finger at Caleb. "You will go seven hundred years into the past, defeat Quajinn Huo, recover the Watch, and return to the present."

"That doesn't sound too hard," Kassy said. "We should be back before lunch."

"Romana will accompany you," Astyanax continued, as if Kassy had not spoken. "Two others can fit within the Timepod."

"Two?" Caleb said. Ariel and Vyking would probably be a natural fit. Three Cosmo-Knights would be much more useful than only one, especially considering how weak Caleb felt. And Huo had already killed one Cosmo-Knight, Caleb's mentor, Lothar of Motherhome.

"It's a matter of practicality, I'm afraid," Romana said quietly. "We expended a great deal of power to send me back to Phase World in time to recover the antidote for you. Short jaunts like that are actually more costly than larger leaps forward or back."

"You saved me?" Caleb asked, surprised. Romana's eyes widened slightly, as if surprised herself. She nodded. "Thank you," Caleb said sincerely. She turned red again, and Caleb allowed himself a little smile.

"Who must go?" Abbot asked Astyanax. Caleb refocused his attention on the Council and the matter at hand.

“Caleb Vulcan will choose. Now leave us. We must prepare.”

\* \* \*

They waited in the reception room for the Council to ready itself.

Siv settled down into a lotus position in one of the room’s corners and tried meditating to quell the migraine growing right behind his eyes. Arwen, more used to physical activity, swept her outer robes off and began to do calisthenics in the opposite corner. The others gathered in the center of the room to discuss their options. Caleb could not ignore Romana, who hovered nearby.

“I’m sorry, but I’m going to have to bug out,” Ariel said almost immediately. “I’ve felt the Forge tugging at the corner of my senses for some time, but stayed to ensure Caleb’s health returned. I wish I could help, but the Forge requires my presence elsewhere.”

“Uh, yeah,” Vyking said in the silence that followed Ariel’s declaration. “I have to second that motion. This whole time travel trick is terribly intriguing, but I’m needed elsewhere as well.”

“Of course,” Abbot told them while Caleb stared dumbfounded at his colleagues. He had hoped that three Cosmo-Knights would provide the necessary firepower to deal with Quajinn Huo with finality, but apparently the Forge had other plans. “You must do what you must,” Abbot continued, “and we wish you well.”

“Good luck,” Caleb finally managed to say.

Ariel rose to her full height and, with a smile, bent down to plant a kiss on Caleb’s forehead. “I think you will need the luck, my young friend.”

Vyking pointed thumb and forefinger at Caleb and faked pulling a trigger. “See you around kid. Give Huo my regards, will ya?”

Then they were gone. Romana volunteered to guide them to the nearest airlock, promising that their cosmic awareness would be of little use within the station. The four of them who remained in the circle sat silently for a long moment.

“That was sudden,” Kassy said at last.

“And unfortunate,” Abbot agreed. “We’ll miss their firepower.”

“Which is why,” Joriel said slowly, “I will accompany Caleb into the past.”

Abbot, Kassy, and Caleb exchanged a look. “I’m not sure that’s wise,” Abbot began to say, but the Celestine interrupted him.

“Can you stand toe-to-toe with a starship?” Joriel asked pointedly. “Now that the Titan and the human are gone, Caleb and I are the only people on this station who can both survive in a vacuum and withstand the firepower of a warship.”

“Point,” Caleb agreed. Kassy and Abbot seemed to trust Joriel, but up until a few days ago, Joriel was an enforcer for a confederation of intergalactic slavers. As a Celestine, Joriel wasn’t even alive in a conventional sense. He was an android, cunningly and artfully designed, but still artificial for all that.

“Abbot and I have a prior claim on Huo’s head,” Kassy said. “We owe him for Lothar.”

“Among other things,” Abbot muttered. Louder, he said, “But Joriel raises a salient point. Nor am I one to give up a tactical advantage in the interest of what is ‘fair.’”

Kassy frowned and crossed her arms. “This two companions nonsense is so arbitrary.”

On other hand, Caleb thought, Quajinn Huo was a deadly adversary. If anything happened to Kassy or Abbot — if Lothar’s death repeated itself — Caleb didn’t know what he might do. Perhaps he was indeed fated to defeat Quajinn Huo, but the murky promises of the Time Council did not fill him with much in the way of confidence for the survival rate of either himself or anyone who went with him. If he brought Abbot and Kassy into the past, he could be signing their death warrants.

“I accept your offer of help,” Caleb told Joriel. The Celestine merely grunted. Kassy looked at Caleb as if he had slapped her. He tried to ignore her look, and turned to Abbot for support. The wizard’s orange eyes dimmed slightly. Despite his earlier words, Abbot didn’t approve of his decision either.

Arwen bounced into Caleb’s line of sight. “I’ve decided. I’m going too.”

“You don’t get to...” Kassy started to say, but Caleb cut her off.

“No, she’s right,” he said. “We’ve got the wizard thing covered with Romana, so Abbot can stay here. And Arwen has that power shield thing. You said she handled those Repo-Bots all by her lonesome, right?”

“Did you suffer brain damage while you were in that coma?” Kassy demanded.

Romana appeared in the doorway once more. “They’re ready for us, Caleb.”

“We’re not ready,” Kassy said.

Caleb rose. “We’re done here,” he said. Kassy’s look shot daggers at him.

\* \* \*

Romana led them out of the reception room for one final time, through another winding path down the white walled corridors of the Time Council’s space station. This time the trail ended in a smaller chamber, dominated by a giant white bubble.

Kassy could barely think straight, she was so angry with Caleb. What was he thinking? Arwen was powerful, yes, but relatively inexperienced. Joriel might be able to hold his own against a starship, but he was too new, too untried. Yes, he had helped Kassy and Abbot against Hazmat, but he had been backed into the corner at the time.

Why had Joriel volunteered? Kassy shook the nagging thought away. She was more concerned with Caleb’s cavalier attitude. Did he really expect to handle Quajinn Huo alone? To succeed where even Lothar had failed?

“What is he thinking?” Kassy hissed at Abbot.

They watched as Astyanax opened a door in the side of the bubble and Romana slipped inside. Arwen followed, humming some obscure tune, and then Joriel wedged his bulk through the

small opening. His wings caught on the edge, and Kassy heard the Celestine growl a colorful curse. Caleb paused before entering, and offered his friends a lopsided grin and a shrug. Then he was inside, and Astyanax sealed them up.

“He is finally thinking like a Knight,” Abbot said softly. “My heart, like yours, wishes to face Quajinn Huo and revenge myself upon him for the loss of my dear friend. But I see what Caleb is doing. This is the first salvo. If this fails, there must be someone left behind to deal with Huo.”

Kassy’s anger slowly dissipated. “He doesn’t expect to come back.”

“Of course he doesn’t. He is not the insecure youth from mythical Earth that we first met so long ago. Caleb Vulcan is a Knight of the Forge, and I believe he is finally coming to learn what that means.”

The Council gathered around the bubble, the “Timepod,” and a silver light filled the room. Kassy heard voices chanting in esoteric tongues, and a rising roar of sound. The light grew steadily brighter, as did the sound, drowning out the voices. Eventually Kassy had to look away, tears streaming from her eyes, and just as she did, everything stopped.

Slowly she opened her eyes. The Timepod, and her friends, were gone.

“Good luck, Caleb,” she whispered.







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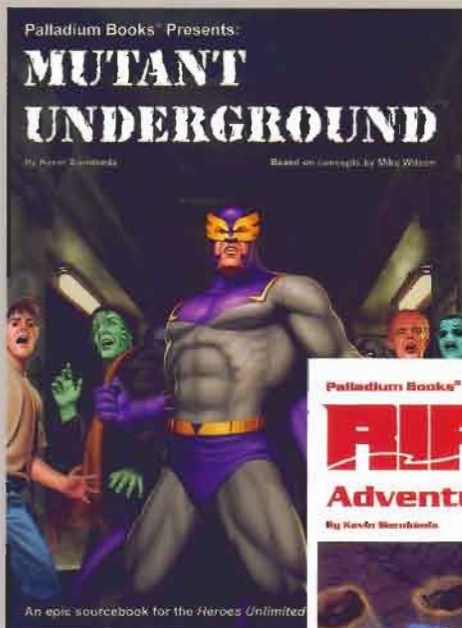
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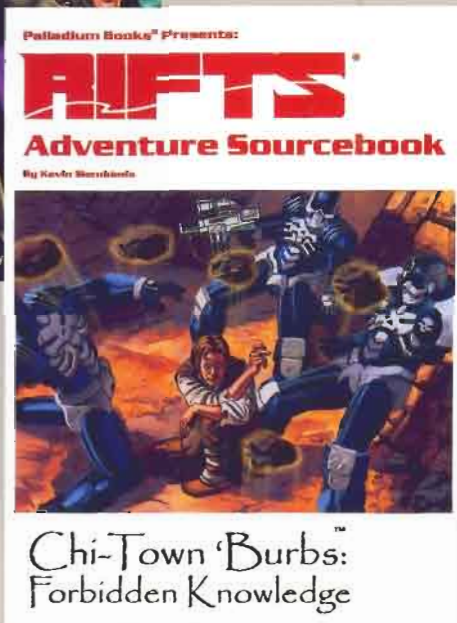
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