

Palladium Books® Presents:

THE

# RIFTS®

Your Guide to the Megaverse®

April, 2004 Issue

Beyond the Supernatural™ Sneak Preview

Palladium Fantasy RPG®: Animation Magic

Palladium Fantasy RPG®: Lizard Men

Palladium Fantasy RPG®: Korath Adventure, Part 2

Systems Failure source-material

Rifts® Mutants & More



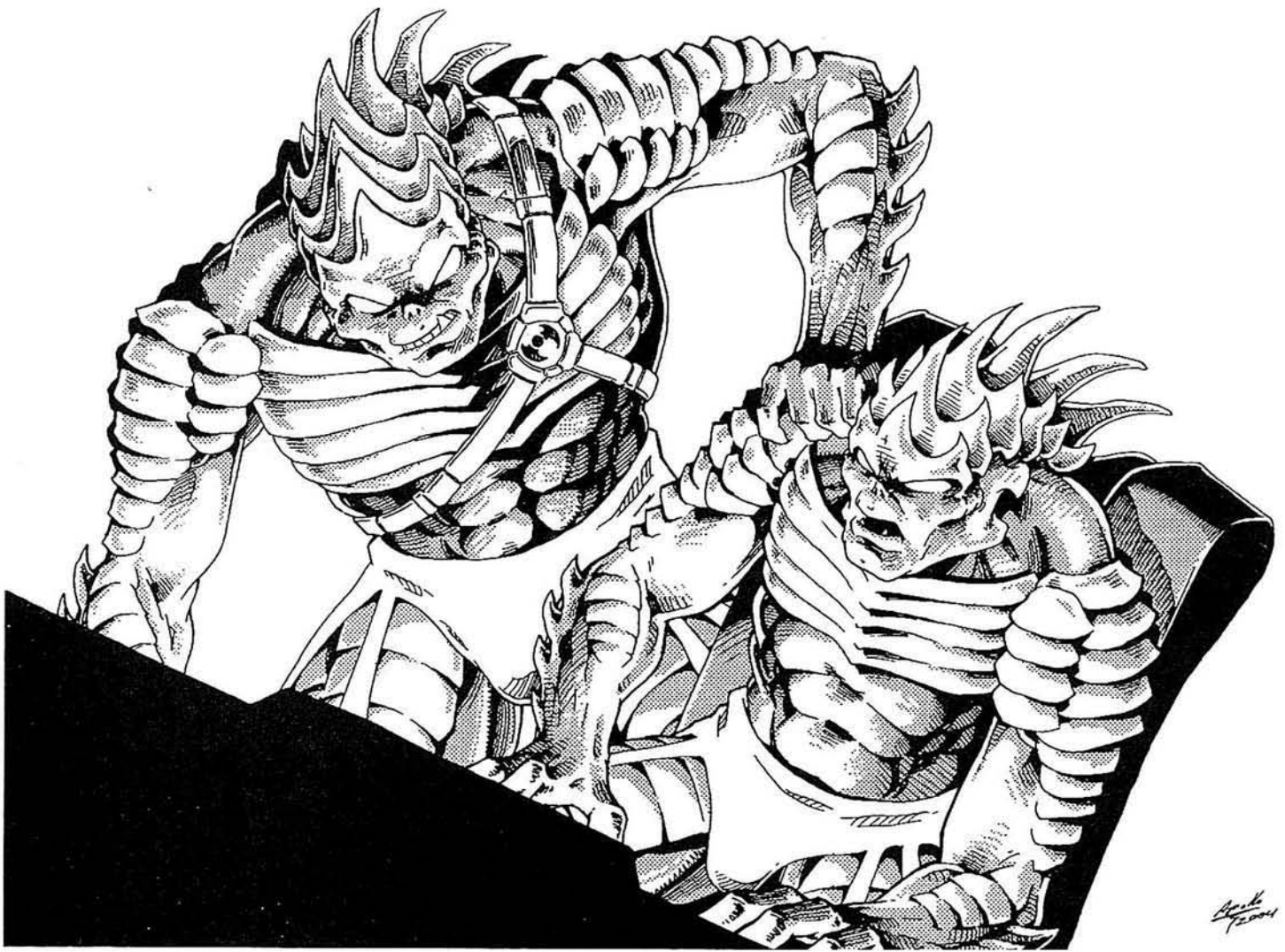
# Warning!

## Violence and the Supernatural

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

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

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



**The Rifter® Number 26**

**Your guide to the Palladium Megaverse®!**

First Printing – April, 2004

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**Palladium Books® Presents:**

# THE RIFTER® #26



BRANDT - 97

**Sourcebook and guide to the Palladium Megaverse®**

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

**Special Thanks** to all our contributors, writers and artists – and a special welcome on board 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® #26 – April, 2004

## Page 7 – From the Desk of Kevin Siembieda

Life at Palladium Books has gotten pretty crazy around here, and threatens to get even crazier as things progress with taking **Rifts®** into the mass market. Publisher and creator, Kevin Siembieda, explains how working toward the future is messing up the present. That's why our release schedule has been a mess. It's all explained here.

Artwork by Mike Majestic of Drunken Style Studio.

## Page 8 – Palladium News

The big news is Palladium's convention schedule this year, and the fact that we are working hard to make **Origins Game Expo 2004** (held in Columbus, Ohio, June 24-27) something special for Palladium gamers. More guest creators than we've ever brought to any convention in the past, more than 30 Palladium gaming events (2 run by Kevin, himself, 6-8 by Carmen Bellaire, 3-5 by Carl Gleba and a whole bunch of other people), plus Palladium's booth bursting with game books, new releases, T-shirts, original artwork, and special items. We're planning to go all out at Origins. Then, in August, we'll be at *Gen Con* (Indianapolis Indiana), and maybe *Dragon Con* (Atlanta, Georgia), and then in October, we'll be at *Trinity Con* (Southfield, Michigan), and maybe *U-Con* (in Ann Arbor, Michigan). Not to mention a few trade shows. This is one of Palladium's busiest convention seasons ever, and we invite gamers everywhere to come on down and join the fun.

Other news includes a big announcement at E3, a writer for the *Rifts Movie*, a Retailer Directory on our website, and some silliness.

## Page 11 – Coming Attractions

Our revised schedule, five "big" summer releases, some recent releases you don't want to miss – including *Powers Unlimited 2*, *Rifts® Megaverse® Builder*, and Naruni Enterprises' return to Rifts Earth in *Naruni Wave Two*. All these titles in print, in stock and available through stores.

## Page 13 – Coming Soon

New titles in the works and scheduled for a May, June or Summer release. That includes **Rifts® China Two**, **Beyond the Supernatural™ 2**, **Rifts® Dinosaur Swamp**, **Phase World®: United Worlds of Warlock** and our new science fiction role-playing game **Splicers** (which is really cool).

## Page 14 – Fleas for Systems Failure™

A new kind of alien insect and danger, but one that can be used against the invading Bugs. Adventure ideas, the Fleas, some new "bug bombs," and other good stuff. Optional for use with **Systems Failure™**.

Artwork by Apollo "I hate bugs" Okamura.

## Page 19 – Sneak Preview of

### **Beyond the Supernatural™, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition**

Kevin Siembieda peels off some of the *new* material he's written for **BTS-2** and presents it here for those of you who have

been waiting for this hotly anticipated Second Edition game. The Sneak Peek opens with a little history and information about the game, followed by a color piece involving *Robert Mach*, head of the Lazlo Agency, and a skeptical reporter.

*The Psychic Medium P.C.C.* is one of the *new* Psychic Character Classes, and is presented in its entirety, starting on page 23. This is one of several new character classes being added to **BTS-2**. The old favorites (Physical Psychic, Psychic Sensitive, Nega-Psychic, Psi-Mechanic, Arcanist, etc.) will also appear in the final product, but they will be expanded upon and made even more interesting while retaining their original flavor. Kevin is shooting to finally have **BTS-2** released by the end of May, but it might slip into a June release (let's hope not).

Artwork by is by Michael Dubisch, one of the fine artists contributing to *Beyond the Supernatural™, Second Edition*. (Ramon Perez and Apollo Okamura are two of the other chief artists breathing life into **BTS-2**; cover by John Zeleznik).

## Page 31 – Palladium Fantasy Role-Playing Game®

### **Construct Animation Magic**

Evan Cooney presents optional rules and clever ideas for a new type of magic that dates back to the early days of the Elf-Dwarf War – animating inanimate objects like a mystical puppet master. This practitioner of magic is know as the *Animator*, and how his powers and creations work is all laid out for your enjoyment.

Artwork is by Brian and Allen Manning.

## Page 40 – Palladium Fantasy Role-Playing Game®

### **Unknown Depths**

Andrew Rusling takes and in-depth look at the misunderstood Lizard Men of the Palladium World. This race of tribal people inhabit the swamps and woodlands of the Yin-Sloth Jungles and are considered to be primitive savages by the rest of the world. Learn about how their reptilian minds and society really work. Includes some tips for using them as player characters, plus some adventure campaign ideas.

Artwork is by Apollo "I'm everywhere" Okamura.

## Page 47 – Palladium Fantasy Role-Playing Game®

### **The Fires of Korath, Part Two**

The conclusion to Michael Long's epic adventure. To quote Julius Rosenberg, one of the original Defilers, "This adventure is great! Definitely worth playing."

More mystery, intrigue and treachery involving the Old Ones, dark gods and insane cultists. Perils include evil Wizards, dark Priests, Necromancers, Thieves, Goblins, Serpent Rats and the ultimate villain, *Minoth Soulbreaker*, among others. Best suited for mid- to high-level characters willing to face deadly odds, torture and death.

Artwork by Kent "Cowboy" Burles. Maps by Michael Long (assisted by Wayne Smith).

## Page 65 – The official Origins Game Expo Ad

Zillions of games, thousands of gamers, hundreds of gaming events, and the one and only Palladium Books. We hope you join us there to make Origins the talk of the town for Palladium gamers from around the world.

## Page 66 – Rifts®

### Mutants of Rifts Earth

Jason Richards offers new ideas and approaches for a host of different mutants living on Rifts Earth. Optional rules enable players to create Mutants of all kinds – Super Mutants, Psychic Mutants, Mutant Animals, and Mutant Humans. Includes Mutant Characteristics, Mutant Abilities, Mutoids, some notable Non-Player Characters, and ideas for incorporating them into your games.

Artwork by Brian and Allen Manning.

## Page 83 – Rifts® Phase World®

### The Hammer of the Forge

Chapter 26 of James M.G. Cannon's ongoing saga.

Artwork by Apollo "Me Again" Okamura.

## Page 86 – Rifts®

### Lord of the Deep

A nice short story by Chris Fox involving the legendary being known only as the "Lord of the Deep."

## Questions & Answers

We had so much RPG material to squeeze into this issue that we left Questions and Answers out. Rodney Stott, Shawn Merrow and Kevin Siembieda will be back next issue to answer more inquiries and offer more Palladium FRPG® Second Edition conversions for the Yin-Sloth Jungles.

## Page 97 – The Summer Catalog of

### Palladium Books

At no extra cost we include our 32 page Summer Catalog for your review and reference. See what's new and look up back stock titles you have been meaning to get your hands on, but haven't gotten around to yet. Note that The Rifter® issues 1-13 are out of print and later titles will be discontinued as they go out of print. (Limited numbers of some early issues will be offered by Palladium at conventions, and if you're a good little boy or girl, *maybe* in our annual X-Mas Surprise Grab Bag).

## The theme for issue 26

Palladium Fantasy, adventure, magic and unique player characters are the themes of this issue. For those of you lamenting that we have let old favorites like *Palladium Fantasy* and cult faves like *Systems Failure* languish in favor of *Rifts®*, Wayne Smith has tried to pack this issue full of material other than *Rifts®*. Furthermore, Palladium Books has many future plans for the *Palladium Fantasy RPG®* and *Heroes Unlimited™*, in particular, so fear not, more gaming material for these two premier lines (and others) is coming over the next year.

## The Cover

This issue's cover is one of the digital paintings John Zeleznik did for the defunct *Rifts® Collectible Card Game* by Precedence. The artwork is simpler than most of John's covers because the art had to fit within an image area of only a few inches. We think it looks pretty darn good at any size.

## 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.

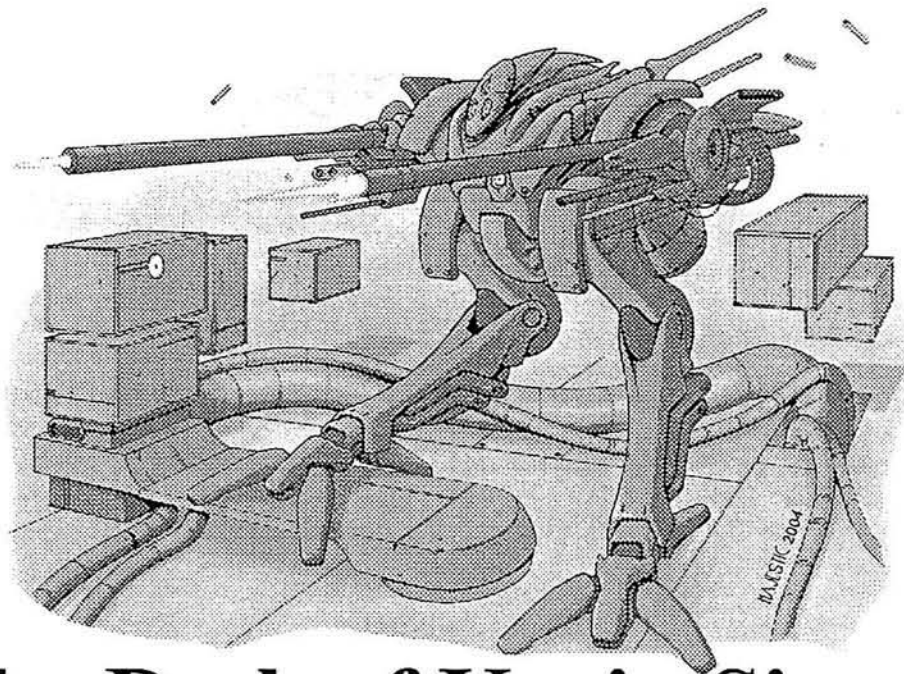
[www.palladiumbooks.com](http://www.palladiumbooks.com) – Palladium Online

## Coming Next Issue

### The Rifter™ #27

- Material for *Palladium Fantasy®*.
- Material for *Nightbane®* and/or *Heroes Unlimited™*.
- Material for *Beyond the Supernatural™*.
- More material for *Rifts®*.
- An exciting announcement about a new license
- 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's games are found  
in stores everywhere**



# From the Desk of Kevin Siembieda

## My Apologies

Palladium's 2004 release schedule is a wreck, and I want to apologize to the thousands of fans we may have disappointed.

Palladium Books has a long history of being late with its releases, though historically 70% of our products are released on time, and 2003 saw a record 90% on time.

Unfortunately, 2004 has been a different story with seemingly constantly changing release dates for at least a pair of our two most hotly anticipated titles from 2003: **Rifts® China 2** and **Beyond the Supernatural™, 2nd Edition**. Both are about to surpass being six months late.

The delays have been unavoidable. **Rifts® China 2** was first delayed when Erick was knocked off his feet for two weeks from the flu (or some hideous thing) and was working at low ebb for several weeks afterward. Additional illness and surgery involving a loved one stole away more of his time and energy. Erick is a friend and freelancer for Palladium and doesn't get a weekly paycheck, so he's been spending time job hunting in the electronic game biz and going on interviews across the country. Lastly, it's not easy to write an outstanding book and truly capture the flavor of the Orient, so a ton of research, planning, plotting and rewriting is required, and it's taking Erick a while to get this book done. Ah, but when it is, it should be fabulous.

As for me, Kevin Siembieda, and **BTS-2**, things are even crazier. I trashed my original work for **Beyond the Supernatural 2** when inspiration struck deep and *demand*ed that I retool it all into something (I believe) will be truly different and fun. Oh, the book will be recognizable to long time fans, but it will be deeper, richer and scarier than ever before. I'm basically rewriting the entire book from top to bottom. The cover is done, 90% of the interior artwork is finished, and I have a pile of notes and a zillion ideas ready to go. I had wanted to get **BTS-2** out in December, and then January, and then March and now . . . May or June. Why the delays? There are so many reasons they could fill the next six pages.

Here's the bottom-line:

A lot (and I mean a ton) of exciting things are going on behind the scenes at Palladium Books. Unfortunately, absolute secrecy is a necessity (in some cases, with a really nasty non-disclosure clause to back 'em up). As a result, I can't tell you about what's going on. All I can say are things like – "It's cool. It's big. It's exciting. Wait till you hear," and similar non-descript strings of adjectives. Hopefully, it doesn't all sound like a bunch of empty hype.

I can tell you this much, we are looking to take Palladium Books to new levels of excitement in role-playing and into the mainstream. Like everything in the world, this requires a lot of work building a strong foundation and making the right deals. A lot of that work is invisible, and the foundation, like an iceberg at sea, is mostly invisible, hidden beneath the waves. However, it should all pay off in big ways, not just for me and the company, but for our fans. Again, I can't reveal the multitude of ideas and possibilities we are exploring or the groundwork being laid, but if everything goes well, the next five years should surprise, amaze and thrill everybody out of their minds.

This involves more than **Rifts** and the **Rifts Movie**, though **Rifts** will pave the way for many of the things that should follow.

Inevitably, someone online will suggest that I don't give a damn about our fans or we wouldn't delay books for months and months. This typically means one of two things, either the individual doesn't like me or Palladium, or this poor guy or gal is unhappy, disappointed and frustrated with the many delays because he or she has been looking forward to something for months. That frustration is coming out as anger and negativity. Truth be told, I don't blame these people for being disappointed and grouching. I hate it when a book I'm looking forward to is delayed, especially if it is repeatedly delayed. It's human nature to think, "Hey, what's the deal? This sucks!" And it does suck, but it sucks for us too.

Please remember, that no matter how much *you* want to see the product out, I want books like **Rifts® China 2** and **BTS-2** in publication a thousand times more. For one thing, I'm the guy catching the heat and looking bad for the delays, and nobody wants to look bad. For another, these are my "babies." I want them born into the world more than anybody. And even if it were true that we didn't give a damn about our fans (which isn't true), these books represent income for Palladium Books, and every delay costs us money and causes cash flow problems. That means every delay has to have a good reason! Lastly, it is precisely because we do care about our fans and the quality of our products that we often delay releases. We want every book we do to be the best. We want them to be full of new and exciting ideas that tantalize and challenge the reader. We want people to pick up that book and say, "wow, this is awesome," and spend endless hours gaming. We aren't going to bang out garbage to make a fast buck or to make people quit complaining because we're late. Besides, gamers aren't stupid. They recognize gems from garbage and don't appreciate the garbage.

Personally, I'm dying to finish **Beyond the Supernatural 2**. I can taste it. I hunger for it. Some days I feel like I could explode with ideas, but other responsibilities and the long-term welfare and benefit of my company, staff and Palladium's future has to take precedence over my personal desires. That's why "my" books are so often the ones to get delayed. I figure (rightly or wrongly) that if **BTS-2** is this late, it's better to make sure some of the other books, like **Naruni Wave 2**, **Splicers**, **Dinosaur Swamp**, **United Worlds of Warlock** and others get out on time (or close to it), rather than push through **BTS-2** and delay everything. And sometimes everything gets delayed anyway. There is often a domino effect that can send everything toppling out of schedule, and it seems that's what we're experiencing now.

For example, a lot of wonderful things are taking shape at Palladium Books, but nothing is easy. I didn't write a single word last week, even though I put in 90 hours of work. I spent almost the entire week negotiating an important contract, and the rest of the time dealing with the day to day tasks of running the business. And when I say the entire week, I mean 7-12 hours a day, Monday through Friday, and most of Saturday just on the contract. You see, cutting a deal isn't the simple stuff you see on TV nor is it a friendly handshake. It's hours and hours of discussion, negotiation, compromise and rewriting of language in the agreement. When reviewing a contract, you have to scrutinize and analyze every paragraph and clause. When there's a clause that's "funky" or "unacceptable," you have to figure out what the problem is, how to fix it, how the changes may affect other elements of the agreement, talk to your attorneys about it, get their input, devise new language that not only does the job you want but that you think the other party will accept, and then submit it to them. Typically, a couple of lawyers, my licensing agent and I discuss the situation in a conference call. We all discuss possible solutions (and potential problems), someone writes a new clause, and then we submit it to the other side. The other party gets it, goes through the same process on their end, and, nine out of ten times, submits yet another version with different language that has to be reviewed, analyzed and discussed all over again. This can go back and forward several times until

all parties can reach a middle ground. It's all very time consuming, complicated and hard work. When the dust clears, all our fans hear is the exciting news, oblivious to the back story and long hours of negotiation it took to make the deal happen. In two days last week, I reviewed six different red-lined drafts of the same 30+ page contract, and spent something like 10 hours on the telephone discussing various issues! In the end, we hammered out the deal. It's a good one and everyone should be happy with it when the news breaks, but I lost an entire week and feel exhausted. The week before I spent packing up my house and moving into a new place.

Bear in mind that this is all *in addition* to the "normal" day to day demands of running a business, handling advertising, developing marketing strategies, dealing with problems that may crop up, as well as coordinating freelance artists and writers, and in my case, trying to write and edit – not to mention trying to have a life. (Which, in case you're wondering, I don't have right now! A 90 hour work week is pretty typical for me. Heck, I'm writing this at 9:30 PM after a crazy day that started at 7:30 AM.) And the awesome crew at Palladium Books all regularly put in 50-60 hour work weeks.

I'm not complaining – I love my job. I love writing games. I love working with other artists and writers. I love marketing and advertising. I enjoy the wheeling and dealing (and I'm good at it). And I even don't mind putting my personal life on hold right now.

Nor am I trying to make excuses for the delays or drum up sympathy.

I just want you, the people who buy our books and who *are* very important to us, to understand *why* **BTS-2** is so late, and why our entire schedule has been knocked off kilter. It's *NOT* because we don't care, it's because these are wild and crazy times at Palladium. Good crazy, but wild and crazy nonetheless.

And to the often asked question: "Why do you announce the release of a title before you know you can hit the release date?" Because when we made the announcement we thought we *could* hit the release date. I *never* dreamed **BTS-2** or **Rifts® China 2** would be delayed over and over again this long. Never in a million years.

I guess in closing, please know that we aren't clowning around and don't think that we don't care about you or our release schedule. Please know that we are working hard to make the best books we can. Please know that we hope to make the delayed books spectacular. Also know that neither Palladium Books or I plan on going anywhere. Role-playing games is where our hearts lie and that's what we plan on doing for another 20 years.

I'll do my best to get **BTS-2** out in May, though I can't promise it won't slip into June, and we have Erick chained to his desk buried under piles of reference books on China right now. The manuscript for our new science fiction game, **Splicers**, by Carmen Bellaire, is in our hands, and so is Todd Yoho's **Rifts® Dinosaur Swamp**, both of which should be out, on time, in June.

Meanwhile, I hope you enjoy the little sneak preview from **Beyond the Supernatural 2™**. Keep the faith and game on.

– Kevin Siembieda, April 2004



## Palladium's Convention Calendar

Kevin and crew are busy folks, but are making time for a handful of Conventions in 2004. Check 'em out.

**May 11-14** – E3 Electronics Entertainment Expo (Guest), L.A., California.

**June 24-27** – Origins Game Expo (exhibitor & running game events), Columbus, Ohio.

**August 19-22** – Gen Con Indy (exhibitor), Indianapolis, Indiana.

**October 1-3** – Trinity Con (exhibitor & running gaming events), Southfield, Michigan.

*Under consideration* – **Dragon Con** (Sept. in Atlanta) and **U-Con** (Nov. in Ann Arbor, Michigan).

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## Origins® Game Expo 2004 – June 24-27

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### The place for Palladium gamers to meet

Palladium Books is going all out this year to make **Origins** the place for Palladium fans to gather, game and have a blast.

For those of you who don't know, **Origins** is one of the largest game conventions in the world. Last year's attendance hovered somewhere around 15,000 gamers, and this year they expect even more. The convention is located in downtown Columbus, Ohio, where there are ample hotels, good restaurants and fun to be had for everyone.

Gamers come from across the United States and Canada, with some visitors even coming from overseas! This year, we hope a large number of the gamers will be Palladium fans, and from what we're hearing online, there will be plenty of 'em coming from coast to coast.

We invite *YOU* to join the fun.

This should be the biggest, coordinated gathering of Palladium gamers *ever!* Palladium Books is doing its share to make the experience a rewarding one by coordinating over 30 official Palladium gaming events and by bringing in more Palladium personalities than ever before.

### Confirmed Guests at the Palladium Booth #932

- **Kevin Siembieda** – Author, designer, publisher and owner of Palladium Books.

- **Erick Wujcik** – Game designer and writer of **Rifts® China 1 & 2**, **After the Bomb® RPG**, **Ninjas & Superspies**, **Mystic China**, and the **TMNT RPG**, as well as the **Amber Diceless RPG**.

- **Palladium staff members** – Wayne Smith, Steve Sheiring and other Palladium folks.

- **Carmen Bellaire** – Author of **Powers Unlimited™ 1 & 2** and the **Splicers™ RPG**.

- **Carl Gleba** – Author of **Three Galaxies** and **The Rifts Megaverse Builder™**.

- **Todd Yoho** – Contributor to **The Rifter®** and author of **Rifts® Dinosaur Swamp™**.

- **Ramon Perez** – Artist supreme of far too many books to list.

- **Mark Dudley** and **Brandon C. Clark** from **Drunken Style Studio**.

- **Apollo Okamura** – Artist, fan favorite and all around nice guy.

- And with any luck, author and artist, **Wayne Breaux Jr.** (not yet confirmed), and possibly others.

Each and every one will be available to chat with fans and sign autographs by the truckload. The artists will also be selling "original" artwork, some at special low prices for the convention.

### Also at the Palladium Booth #932

- **New releases!** *Should* include **Beyond the Supernatural 2** (soft cover and the hardcover limited edition), **Rifts® Dinosaur Swamp**, **Splicers™ RPG**, and **Rifts® China 1 & 2**. With many of the creators at your disposal to sign the books you purchase.

- **Back stock titles** for each and every line, including **The Rifter®**, issues #1-13.

- **Rare and out of print books**, sold on a first come, first served basis.

- **Convention Specials.**

- **Limited Edition prints and portfolios.**

- **Original Artwork** for sale by the artists.

- **T-Shirts** and convention only items.

- The debut of the **Splicers™ RPG**.

- **The latest news** on all the goings-on at Palladium straight from the people who know.

### Palladium Gaming Events

Over 30 gaming events arranged by Palladium Books. All will be run by Palladium staff members, freelancers and friends, including Kevin Siembieda, Carl Gleba, Carmen Bellaire, Roger Cartier, Todd Yoho, Stan Bundy, Levi Johnstone, James Brown, Kerry Cook, Paul Williams, Brandon Aten and Daniel Ross.

- Two games run by Kevin Siembieda: *A Palladium Fantasy* game set in the Northern Wilderness on Thursday night at 8:00 pm, and a *Beyond the Supernatural™ Two* game on Friday night at 8:00 pm. Up to 12 players in each.

- Six **Rifts®** gaming events.

- Two Rifts® Chaos Earth™ gaming events.
- Two Rifts® Phase World® games.
- Six Palladium Fantasy RPG® gaming events (one by Siembieda himself).
- Five Heroes Unlimited™ gaming events.
- Five Robotech® gaming events.
- One Beyond the Supernatural™ Two game, by Kevin Siembieda.
- Plus other games by people who didn't contact Palladium directly as well as open gaming.

Hey, would you like to run something? There's still time for YOU to contact the Origins people and arrange for even more events. Anybody who wants to run a 3-4 or 5-6 hour game session can contact Mark A. Santillo: Director of Events at [events@gama.org](mailto:events@gama.org) – to make arrangements. Though you've missed getting listed in the Pre-Registration booklet.

### Convention Info – [www.originsgames.com](http://www.originsgames.com)

Want to join the fun?

Contact: 303-635-2223 for more information about the convention and how to attend or check out the Origins convention website at [www.originsgames.com](http://www.originsgames.com) – and tell them Palladium Books sent you. Seriously, they want to know if you're coming to Origins specifically (or primarily) for Palladium Books and its gathering of Palladium gamers.

Contact Mark A. Santillo: Origins Director of Events at [events@gama.org](mailto:events@gama.org) – to run events.

### Let's make this summer sizzle, Palladium style, at Origins – June 24-27

## E3 – Electronic Entertainment Expo – May 11-14

I, Kevin Siembieda, will be a guest at E3, to be held in Los Angeles, California, May 11-14. I'll be there to participate in press conferences and as a guest at the booth of a major company. That company will be promoting an exciting new license to be announced at E3. I will also be available to sign autographs and chat with fans, so if you're coming to the show, please feel free to track me down.

At this time, I am not at liberty to disclose who that company is or what the announcement is about. Sorry. On the other hand, they and I should be located in the main hall, and I don't think this booth will be difficult to find in the least. Call on me if you visit the show.

## Trinity Game Convention – Michigan – October 1-3, 2004

While Origins should be our big, summer convention extravaganza, we also want to point to two notable local Michigan conventions.

One is U-Con held on the campus of the University of Michigan. Fans who attended last year know how much fun we all had there, and there is a good chance that I and/or other Palladium staffers will be attending the show. A lot depends on my schedule. We'll keep you posted.

The other is Trinity Con held in Southfield, Michigan, October 1-3, at the Southfield Hilton. Palladium Books (and Steve Jackson Games) will have a large presence at this convention with our own large gaming room and exhibitor space. The advantage of this small, fun convention (they anticipate 500-700 gamers this year) is that you have more intimate surrounding where you can chat with me, Palladium staffers, and other guests in a quiet setting and for a greater period of time. In addition, I (Kevin Siembieda), Carmen Bellaire and other Palladium people plan on running several gaming events (I hope to run at least four games over the weekend). So this could be your chance to play in two, three or more games with me and other Palladium personalities, something that isn't likely at the big conventions where there are thousands of people trying to book a limited number of gaming events. Also, you will be able to enjoy panel discussions, get autographs and meet other Palladium folks like Wayne Smith (Editor of The Rifter®), Julius Rosenstein (Palladium staffer and contributing writer and proofreader), Carmen Bellaire (freelance writer with Powers Unlimited 1 & 2, and Splicers to his credit), Roger & Randi Cartier (freelance contributors, Game Masters, and have gamed with Kevin for 15 years), among possible others. As always, Palladium's large booth will offer new products, back stock and other odds and ends.

And the above does not even taking into consideration the many other gaming events, open gaming, dealer room, anime room, SJG events, and other good stuff that will be going on that weekend.

Those of you in Michigan, Ohio, Indiana and Windsor, should especially keep this show in mind. We hope to see a lot of Palladium gamers at this and all the shows we attend.

## Convention Support

Palladium Books is glad to support gaming conventions, large and small, by providing select product (often signed by the staff) as special prizes and for charity auctions, but most notably, we are glad to send hundreds (sometimes thousands) of copies of The Rifter® or other books as FREE giveaways to the gamers who attend the convention.

We print extra copies of every few issues of The Rifter® for this very purpose. Gamers love it and it's Palladium's way to help support the gaming community and encourage role-playing. We've been doing this for years, but have recently realized that a lot of convention organizers aren't aware of this policy, so we're making this announcement at the onset of convention season.

Palladium Books has given away more than 6000 copies of The Rifter® this year. Make us a part of your convention fun too.

All we need from you is . . .

The name and date of the convention.

Estimated attendance.

Name of the convention organizer and contact person.

A "street" mailing address to ship giveaways.

Proof of the convention (program books and website are sufficient).

**Contact:** Steve Sheiring by telephone (734-946-1156; this is an order and convention line *only*) to take advantage of our offer for *your* convention.

## Retailer Locator

Do you have a favorite game store that sells Palladium role-playing products and wish more gamers knew about it?

Well now you can help your store and other gamers by telling the store owner or manager about Palladium's new, online **Retailer Directory**. This Directory is intended to publicize stores that offer Palladium products and to help gamers track down product in their neck of the woods. Gamers frequently ask us if we know about a store in their area that sells Palladium Books products, runs events or offers open gaming. Now, with your help, we can point them to the Retailer Directory.

To register, all the store needs to do is . . .

● Go to our web page ([www.palladiumbooks.com](http://www.palladiumbooks.com)), click on to the **Retailer Directory**, and enter the store information. Please include the following:

- E-mail address.
  - Store name.
  - Street address.
  - Telephone number (optional).
  - What Palladium Products are carried: i.e., "Entire Line of Palladium Books' games" or "Rifts and Heroes Unlimited," or "Core Palladium RPGs and the latest releases," and so on.
  - Special Events such as meetings, game nights, area for open gaming, demo-days, etc.
- Spread the word.

## Rifts® Movie News

For those of you who haven't heard, Palladium Books has signed an option with **Walt Disney Pictures** to have **Jerry Bruckheimer** develop a live action, major motion picture based on the **Rifts®** role-playing game.

Palladium is still not at liberty to reveal anything about the movie at this time, but Jerry Bruckheimer, himself, told a Rifts fan in an open forum on the Bruckheimer website that writer, *David Franzoni*, the man who wrote the screenplay for **Gladiator** (and I believe won an academy award for it), has been brought in to work on the script for the **Rifts® Movie**. This came straight from Jerry and is good news indeed.

## Palladium discovers a mole in the Office!

"He must be an industry spy sent by Wizards of the Coast!" exclaimed Steve, moving out of the way.

"Or White Wolf or even Steve Jackson," piped in Julius.

Tensions began to rise as we positioned ourselves to stop the intruder.

"How could this happen?" said Wayne, "How did he get inside the building? The doors are always closed and locked?"

It was the first week of March, but it was well below freezing outside, and had been for several weeks.

"The mole who came in from the cold," chuckled Julius.

"Quick, don't let him get away." I shouted, grabbing Steve's coffee mug to use against him.

"What's going on?" asked Hank who had come to see what all the commotion was about. Alex was right behind him.

"I thought I heard someone say they cornered a mole," responded Alex.

"You mean a mouse?" said Hank.

"Do you have it, Kev?" asked Wayne.

"Yep."

"What's a mole doing in the office?" puzzled Hank. "Don't they live underground and sleep in the Winter?"

"Yeah, and it's so small it has to be a baby," noted the fearless Publisher with the critter caught under the coffee mug.

"What are you going to do with it? Flush him?" asked Hank.

"No, don't kill it." pleaded Wayne on the animal's behalf.

"Yeah, we have to interrogate him first," grinned Julius as the Aikido Master flexed his muscles.

"No, I'm not flushing him. I'm tossing him back outside."

"But who knows what trade secrets he'll take away with him." said Julius.

"Could be a mutant animal," said Alex, "we never had a mole until Erick Wujcik moved in, and you know Erick and mutants and animals."

"Yeah, at least have Erick check it out for mutation." quipped Steve, always looking out for Palladium's best interests.

"It's too cold out. How is he going to dig underground?" queried Wayne.

"He's an animal, and he came from outside. He'll be fine." I retorted.

"I still think we should interrogate the little fella. Don't forget about Perphone (an inside joke)." snickered Julius who seemed to find the situation an opportunity to be silly.

"Just get the door, will ya?" I groaned. "He'll be fine."

And just like that, it was over.

\*\*\*\*\*

See, this is some of the raw excitement you have to look forward to when you're in the publishing business. Funny though, that the mole appeared just one week before the GAMA Trade Show, and Steven Wieck (White Wolf) and Steve Jackson both came by the booth to chat. So did Dave Kenzer (Kenzer Co.) for that matter. Coincidence, or mutant animal spy? Hmm. Maybe I should have consulted with Erick before letting it free, after all.

And then there were those two fans who showed up on our doorstep back in October. A guy and his girlfriend who *claimed* to be from Germany on their way to Oregon for a family wedding. When they found out that Palladium's offices were five

minutes from the airport, and they had a two hour layover, they came by to say hello. I let them take photographs of me and the life-sized alien (you know, from the movie *Aliens*), and the office, and even the warehouse. Why would a fan want pictures of a warehouse!?! I smell conspiracy!!

Just kidding about that conspiracy stuff, but we did have a couple of nice gamers from Germany stop by the office to see if they could take a peek inside and say hello. Normally, we don't allow "tours" of the office, but since they had come from so far away and had spent taxi money on the off-chance that they could see the place, how could I say no? It was fun.

# Coming Attractions

As explained in this issue's *From the Desk of*, a number of positive but disruptive things have knocked our schedule completely out of whack. Consequently, the following list and dates are tentative.

## Tentative Spring & Summer 2004 Release Schedule

### April, 2004

April 23 – **Rifts® Dimension Book 8: Naruni™ Wave Two** – \$13.95 – 96 pages. (The Naruni are back on Rifts Earth with a vengeance.) At the printers and on schedule.

April 29 – **The Rifter® #26** – \$9.95 – 128 pages.

### May, 2004

May 19 – **Beyond the Supernatural™ RPG, 2nd Edition** – \$22.95 – 192 pages. (Sorry about the delay.) I doubt it, but we'll try for the end of May or early June.

May 28 – **Rifts® China Two: Heroes of the Celestial Court** – \$17.95 – 160 pages. That's our target, but we don't know if we can hold that release date.

May? **Rifts® Dimension Book 9: United Worlds of Warlock™ (for Phase World®)** – \$17.95 – 160 pages. We *may* still try for a May release, but this book is likely to be rescheduled for a July or August release. The cover by John Zeleznik is done.

### June, 2004

June 4 – **Rifts® World Book: Dinosaur Swamp™** – \$17.95 – 160 pages.

June 18 – **Splicers™ Role-Playing Game** – final size and price not yet determined.

June 21 – **Rifts® Chaos Earth™: NEMA™ Mission Book One** (tentative) – \$10.95 – 64 pages.

### To Be Rescheduled:

**Beyond the Supernatural™: Tome Grotesque** – 96 or 144 pages – \$13.95 or \$15.95 depending on the final page count. Probably a June or July release.

**Beyond the Supernatural™: Arcanum Sourcebook** – \$17.95 – 160 pages. Probably an August or September release.

### July, 2004

July 14 – **Rifts® Mercenaries Two: Mercetown™** – \$17.95 – 160 pages.

Other title(s) likely to be added.

### August, 2004

**Rifts® Mercenaries Three: Merc Weapons & Gear** – \$17.95 – 160 pages.

Other title(s) likely to be added.

### Other titles slated for 2004

These books are tentatively planned for 2004 but not yet scheduled with a specific release date. Not listed in any particular order.

**Rifts® Arzno**

**Rifts® Lazlo** (the City State of)

**Rifts® Dragons & Gods™**

**Rifts® Australia Two**

**Rifts® Adventure Sourcebook 6**

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

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

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

**Heroes Unlimited® sourcebooks**

**Mechanoid® Space RPG** (realistically, probably 2005)

Plus more out of print books back in stock.

**Note:** See the rest of *Coming Soon* and *Palladium's Spring 2004 Catalog* (included as the last 32 pages of this issue) for details on these and all of Palladium's game lines.

## Five BIG Summer Releases

**Beyond the Supernatural™ Role-Playing Game, Second Edition.** We're working hard to make this a different and exciting role-playing game of horror, suspense and the supernatural. Check out the write-up for it elsewhere as well as the sneak preview that follows this section. **Date of Release:** I'll be shooting for a May release, but it might slip into June. This game and subsequent sourcebooks are definitely in the line up for this summer.

**Splicers™** is a cool, new science fiction role-playing game from the wild imagination of Carmen Bellaire. We had no intention of doing a new science fiction game other than *Mechanoid Space™*, but when Carmen pitched me his ideas for **Splicers**, it was love at first sight and I signed him to a contract. Carmen has spent the last four months writing and polishing **Splicers**. I'll be putting the finishing touches on the project and assigning art-work soon.

**Date of Release:** We are shooting to get this exciting game setting out as a middle of June release. In fact, it should debut at **Origins**.

**Rifts® China Two** – *Rifts® China One* was received with great enthusiasm and **Rifts® China Two** will be even hotter.

**China Two** is a player's delight, packed with new O.C.C.s, martial arts, mystic powers, magic and more. As soon as Erick finishes it up, we will paste it up and send it to the printers.

Date of Release: Ideally May, at worst, June.

**Rifts® Dinosaur Swamp**, a world book that will present Florida, other parts of the southeast, dinosaurs, mutants and adventure. Another long awaited Rifts® World Book.

Date of Release: Early June.

**Rifts® MercTown** – the first of three new books devoted to the Mercenaries of North America. Followed by **Rifts® MercTown Two** and **Arzno**, a mercenary based city-state located in Arizona.

Date of Release: Summer 2004.

## Heroes Unlimited™ RPG

– *Back in print and available now*

**Heroes Unlimited, 2nd Edition** is the most recent incarnation of one of the most popular super-hero role-playing games ever made. It has been continuously in print for 20 years and continues to please comic book fans and gamers alike.

This comprehensive, 352 page tome lets players create virtually every type of super being imaginable (and **Powers Unlimited™ One** provides an extra 100+ super abilities and **Powers Unlimited Two** offers another ten Power Categories – types of super beings.).

- Ten Power Categories: Aliens, Mutants, Cyborgs, Robots, Magic, Mega-Heroes, Psychics, Hardware, and others.
- More than 100 super abilities and scores of sub-powers.
- 40+ psionic abilities, 100+ magic spells and a whole lot more.
- A complete role-playing game where every type of super-human imaginable is made possible.
- Cover by Jim Steranko. Written by Kevin Siembieda.
- \$26.95 – 352 pages.

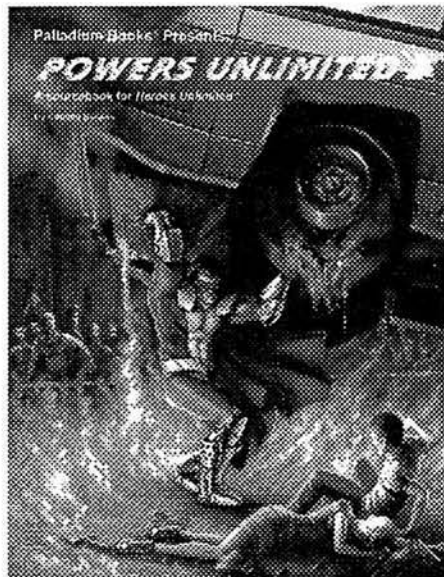
## Powers Unlimited™ Two

*For Heroes Unlimited™ – Available now*

This sourcebook is available now, but with the tremendous response it has garnered and the slew of super-hero movies coming out, it bears mentioning.

**Powers Unlimited™ Two** is a high-concept package filled with new approaches for super-heroes and supported with all kinds of background and power tables, new sub-powers, new super abilities, gizmos and new ideas. This sourcebook is important for anyone trying to capture the full scope and feel of comic book super-heroes.

- 10 new Power Categories, each creating a unique brand of superhuman.
- Immortals and Immortal Demigods.
- Genetic “designer heroes” (Eugenics) and strange Gestalt superbeings.
- Supersoldiers widely expanded and a new type of Weapon Master.



- Heroes empowered through Symbiotic organisms.
- The Natural Genius and his mental disciplines.
- Empowered Heroes who struggle to overcome personal adversity.
- The Imbued Hero, Minor Heroes, sidekicks and more – plus some new super abilities.
- Written by Carmen Bellaire and Kevin Siembieda.
- \$13.95 – 96 pages.

## Rifts®/Phase World®

### Megaverse® Builder™

Carl Gleba, author of the popular **Phase World®: The Three Galaxies™**, has created a sourcebook and guide to help Game Masters create their *own* alien dimensions and worlds. A great tool for G.M.s and fun for players: **The Rifts® Megaverse® Builder** (previously titled the *Rifts® Dimension Builder*).

- Rules, suggestions and tables for generating dimensions.
- Dimensional anomalies and other strangeness.
- The Shifter “Revisited” plus a few new dimension traveling O.C.C.s.
- Dimensional Familiars and other weird creatures.
- A few sample dimensions, adventure ideas, The Mechanoids® and more.
- For use with **Rifts®** and **Phase World®**.
- Written by Carl Gleba. Cover by Mark Evans.
- \$13.95 – 96 pages. Available now.

## Phase World® Dimension Book 8:

### Naruni Wave Two

The Naruni – trans-dimensional weapons dealers – have returned to Rifts Earth and are offering a new array of weapons, armor and vehicles. They’re also looking to give the Coalition States some payback by selling their illegal goods to Tolkeen

Freedom Fighters, Julian's Juicers and others with a hatred for the CS.

- New Naruni weapons and explosives.
- Power armor, robots, armored vehicles and more.
- The Molock Naruni Enforcer revealed at last.
- Background on the Naruni and a ton of adventure ideas.
- Written by Bellaire, Nowak, Rosenstein, and Siembieda.
- \$13.95 – 96 pages. Cover by Freddie Williams. Shipped April 23.

## Coming Soon

### Phase World® Dimension Book 9: United Worlds of Warlock

One more corner of the Three Galaxies is explored, presenting key worlds, people, places, hubs, gods and cults of the UWW, as well as a variety of new spacecraft, weapons, equipment and magic.

- Key planets, moons, people and cultures in the United Worlds of Warlock.
- New O.C.C.s, including the Astral Elves, Shadow Psychics, Knights of the Covenant, Void Rangers, and others.
- New weapons, equipment, rune weapons and magic items.
- Church of the Anvil, dark covens and cults.
- Lightning/Electrical Elemental Magic.
- Shadow and Sound Elemental Magic.
- Adventure ideas galore. For Phase World®.
- Written by Daniel Bishop. Cover by John Zeleznik.
- \$17.95 – 160 pages.

### World Book 25: Rifts® China 2 Heroes of the Celestial Court

**Rifts® China, Book Two** will have it all. Focuses on the heroes and beings (and that means *player characters*) who oppose the Yama Kings, fight for humanity and hide among the sacred mountains and meadows of China. Oriental monks, Demon Quellers, Soothsayers, martial arts masters and more.

- The involvement of the Celestial Court.
- Heroes, avatars of the gods, and superhumans.
- O.C.C.s include the Demon Queller, Soothsayer, various monks and more.
- Martial artist character classes – Rifts® style!
- Mystic powers, Oriental Magic Tattoos, magic weapons and more!
- Secret Monasteries where the Demon Quellers and other champions are trained.
- The soldiers and technology of the Geo-Front.
- Written by Erick Wujcik. Cover by John Zeleznik.
- \$17.95 – 160 pages.

### Rifts® World Book: Dinosaur Swamp

This book will surprise and delight readers as a portion of the east coast of North America is outlined and described for the first time. The imagination of Todd Yoho will take players to places they never imagined even existed. And if you're looking for dinosaurs and general weirdness . . . look no farther.

- Mega-Damage Dinosaurs galore.
- Mutant Dinosaurs and Random Mutations.
- New O.C.C.s, including Wilderness Barbarians, Eco-Wizards, and others.
- The Secret of the Swamps – Florida, Georgia, and the Carolinas all outlined.
- More world background, adventure and adventure ideas.
- Written by Todd Yoho. Cover by John Zeleznik.
- \$17.95 – 160 pages.

### Rifts® Chaos Earth™ Sourcebook 3: NEMA™ Mission Book 1

The Chaos Earth™ series is a success, and Mission Book One is the latest sourcebook for this continuing series.

It takes a look at NEMA, their missions, survival, heroics and adventure, but the main story focuses on the appearance of a rogue cell of the military that has decided to claim the Chicago area for themselves. The heads of this rogue cell – Juicers – including a few unlike any seen before.

- A Juicer Special Forces operation makes its bid for power, making this the first Juicer Uprising.
- Some new weapons, vehicles and gear.
- More on NEMA plus adventure scenarios, adventure ideas and settings.
- Completely compatible with Rifts®.
- Written by Siembieda, Bellaire, and others.
- \$10.95 – 64 pages.

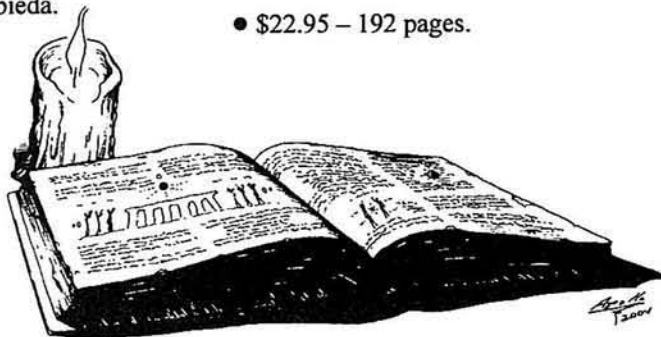
### Splicers™ A New Role-Playing Game

**Splicers™** is a new science fiction role-playing game set on a devastated world where machines rule, and human beings are vermin who are hunted and exterminated. The human struggle is complicated by a nano-virus that instantly turns metal objects touched by human flesh into killing machines. Consequently, humans have been forced to turn to organic technology to battle the world-dominating machines if they hope to reclaim any portion of their planet for themselves.

- The human resistance, their genetically spliced weapons and power armor, secret cities and plans to retake their world.
- The machine mind that rules from on high and commands its robot legions like a psychotic general.

- The nano-plague and its ramifications.
- Human O.C.C.s, strongholds and world background.
- A new, stand-alone role-playing game heavy on science fiction.
- Mega-Damage system – compatible with *Rifts*®, *Chaos Earth*™, and *Phase World*®.
- Written by Carmen Bellaire. Additional text by Kevin Siembieda.

• \$22.95 – 192 pages.



## Beyond the Supernatural™ RPG

BTS-2™ is a stark, plausible reality where ghosts, demons, psychics, and magic are real, yet remain unknown to the world at large. Player characters are part of the secrets, part of the problems, and humanity's only true hope of dealing with the unexplained. Truly unique characters that will challenge and excite those who play them.

- New P.C.C.s include the Psychic Medium (and Spirit Guide), the Diviner and Autistic Psychic Savant, and others, all with new and unique abilities.
- Characters like the Psychic Sensitive, Nega-Psychic and other original P.C.C.s get a face-lift, new powers, and new details.
- The secrets of the supernatural, ESP, and magic revealed.
- Victor Lazlo and his lasting legacy: The Lazlo Agency.
- More world background and guides to adventure.
- Horror, mystery, monsters, and more.
- Top artists, highest production values.
- Writing by Kevin Siembieda and Randy McCall. New material by Siembieda.
- \$22.95 – 192 pages. Cover by John Zeleznik.

## Tome Grotesque

### Sourcebook for Beyond the Supernatural™

A legion of monsters, demons and things that go bump in the night.

- New supernatural creatures and menaces and how they function in our modern world.
- More world background and guides to adventure.
- Top artists, highest production values.
- Written by Kevin Siembieda.
- \$13.95 – 96 pages (may be expanded to 144 and a \$15.95 price).
- Compatible with *Nightbane*®, *Heroes Unlimited*™, *Rifts*®, and *Chaos Earth*™.

# Fleas

## Optional Source Material for Systems Failure™

### By Joseph Larsen

Recently discovered on Earth, "Fleas" are parasites that plague the Bugs, having apparently followed them to our planet. Even though humans call them "Fleas," they are actually more like ticks in their function. However, they do have some characteristics of both the fleas and ticks that are found on Earth. Like the Earth tick, they can attach themselves to a host, and burrow to feed for extended periods. They are like Earth fleas because they can jump 10 feet (3 m) high and they do strongly resemble a flea, except much bigger, about ½ inch long (1.3 cm).

## Dangers to Bugs

The Fleas are natural parasites to the Bugs. They can even attach to a Bug and travel with it while in its Bio-Energy form. Fleas can't transform into energy by themselves, so they need to be touching a Bug when it is either already in or morphing into Bio-Energy form in order to transform. The Bug's Bio-Energy is what the Fleas actually feed on, so naturally most of the feeding takes place while the Bug is in this form. In physical form, the Fleas will attempt to find and attach to the Bug's blasters in order to feed. They'll often try to burrow into the base of the blasters to feed from the energy source.

Because they also carry diseases, there is a 7% chance, per Flea, that the Bug will be infected with a disease. There is also a 4% chance, per Flea, that the Bug will actually mutate slightly from the Flea's bite. Thus the sick Bug's fate is sealed because the Bugs don't tolerate mutations or disease amongst their own. Now that humans have realized what the Fleas can do, they are always trying to find ways to use them to attack the Bugs. On the downside, there are dangers to humans that come with the use this weapon, which are discussed later.

The Fleas have a knack for smelling all Bugs, except Silkworms, up to 10 feet (3 m) away. But, if a Flea tastes a Silkworm Zombie's blood, it will burrow into the body to get to the larva. The most fatal situation for a Zombie is when the Flea starts burrowing in or around the head area. This exposes the blood supply near or in the head to poison and acid. There is little or no chance of the Zombie surviving an attack to the head, even if by just one Flea. The Zombie will be killed in 1D4 minutes. It will take 1D6x10 minutes to kill a Silkworm Zombie if the Flea is burrowing somewhere other than the head area. The Zombies can survive longer than a normal human could because of their ability to manipulate the body's functions and defenses.

The Bug tiers don't matter to the Fleas. Their main targets are the Bugs that morph into the Bio-Energy form most often, which could vary from Bug to Bug in any tier. In any case, the Fleas will still attack any Bug in their sensing range. If the Flea can't find any energy sources on its host, or if the host doesn't

transform into Bio-Energy within 1D4 days, then the Flea will attempt to find another host.

If a Flea is caught in a Bug Motel with a Bug, the Flea will devour the Bug's Bio-Energy, thus killing the Bug. A Flea can devour a Bug that is constantly in Bio-Energy form in only 2D4 weeks. Obviously the Bug will be devoured faster with each additional Flea. For example, if a Bug had 4 Fleas when it was trapped in a Motel, then it will take a quarter of the time for the Bug to completely disappear. Once the Bug is gone, the trap will turn off since there isn't anything to contain. Then the Fleas will emerge from the trap in physical form.

The Fleas are also able to morph and cling to a Bug that is controlling an electrical device, since it is in energy form. The Flea just needs to touch a wire or some conductor that has the Bug's Bio-Energy pulsing through it. Then the Flea can turn into energy form and feed off of the Bug.

A Bug that is in energy free-floating form in the area will always be the Fleas' primary target. They will attempt to reach the free-floating energy and try to morph and cling to the Bug.

No doubt the Bugs have dealt with these Fleas before in other locations, and so defenses against them must exist, but are unknown to humans at this time.

**G.M. Note:** The most common method of Flea removal is to have armored Silkworm Zombies use flame-throwers and blow-torches to kill the Fleas. This is tedious work for the Zombies, and damaging to the Bugs. Another method is to freeze the Fleas, and then remove them using metal instruments. This method is less harmful to the Bugs, but also not as common due to the limited availability of the freezing substances needed. On Earth, sources of these, such as liquid nitrogen tanker trucks, have become a hot commodity among both the Bugs and the humans.

## Dangers to Humans

The Fleas are in no way allies to humans. They have a powerful burrowing ability with acidic, diseased saliva. Although the disease doesn't affect humans, the acid is very potent and harmful. Simple bare-skin contact with a Flea leaves acid burns wherever it touches, doing 1 S.D.C. per melee per point of contact for up to four melees. Even though the Fleas do not like the taste of humans or animals, they still need to burrow a bit to break the skin to taste their prey. This will leave bad acid burns in and around the open wounds. The wounds are common in Flea encounters and inflict 1D4 S.D.C. per burrowing bite, plus the acid damage, whether flesh or object. The Fleas will attempt to burrow through clothes and armor in order to taste their prey.

A Flea burrowing deep into a human body isn't common, but has happened. Most incidences have occurred while attempting to remove the Flea incorrectly, thus causing the Flea to become irritated and provoked, so it burrows deeper into the body. One Flea can kill a human in a short time if it gets completely into the body. Flea intrusion into the neck area or head will kill a person within 1D4 minutes. If the intrusion is on the body's limbs, it will cause internal bleeding, bone damage, and even nerve damage. Tourniquets on limbs have proven to be effective in preventing the Flea from burrowing further, as well as keeping the victim from bleeding to death. Unfortunately, if the Flea

intrudes on the main body, immediate surgery is required, and not always successful. If the bleeding is not stopped, the victim will die from blood loss in 6D6 minutes due to the massive internal bleeding. In any case, fatal or not, a Flea's burrowing is extremely painful. Surviving will likely cause some kind of insanity from trauma. See the Insanity section (page 26) in the **Systems Failure™ RPG**.

Fleas are difficult to shoot due to their small size, so normal projectile weapons are almost completely ineffective as a means of killing them. They have a high Natural Armor Rating to protect from physical attacks, but they are susceptible to fire and cold. Extreme heat will kill them, while extreme cold will freeze them. They can be thawed, unharmed, from a frozen state at a later time. They can also survive submerged in water for up to 6 hours.

The Fleas will also attempt to burrow into any Organitechology device, including weapons and armor. If one does attach to a point on a weapon where it can feed, it will stay in solid form to feed. It will do the initial burrowing damage of 1D4 S.D.C. plus the acid damage. Once it breaks in, it will drain 1 shot from the reserve payload every 6 hours. A Flea's siphoning will also have a 15% chance, per Flea, of initiating a Zapper's death cycle, not to exceed 75%. The death cycle isn't completely imminent because even if there is one charge of the primary weapon left, the weapon has a chance of avoiding it. For armor, the feeding does not affect major function, but it will prevent the regeneration of any place that a Flea is currently burrowed into, until removed. No one knows what it will do to the life span, since the Fleas haven't been around very long. **G.M. Note:** One year will be drained from the armor if one Flea is attached for more than 10 months. Two Fleas will drain 1 year in 7 months, while three Fleas will drain 1 year in 5 months.

NORAD Splicers have also proven to be targets of the Fleas. Fleas will attack them and burrow under their skin, thinking that they're Bugs. The Flea will only be able to survive off of those Splicers that have the Bio-Energy Expulsion power. Otherwise, the Fleas will either die after a week or leave after 1D4 days. Even though Splicers won't mutate due to a Fleabite, they do have a 2% chance per Flea of getting sick. The sickness will slow them down for 1D4 weeks. While sick, they will suffer the following penalties:

- Lose 2 attacks per melee.
- Speed is cut in half.
- Strength is cut in half, which is likely to nullify any damage bonuses from strength.
- 3 to strike, parry, and dodge.
- No initiative bonus.

## Warfare Using Fleas

The humans have created weapons and methods to spread Fleas to the Bugs. Some of these are as simple as infested glass bottle bombs or as complex as infected conductor tubes. See below for common designs of Bug traps using Fleas. More methods are being invented as time goes by thanks to resourceful freedom fighters and NORAD.

Many have frowned upon use of the Fleas in a well-populated area. Their clean up after use is far from perfect, which of-



ten leaves stray Fleas to afflict innocent people. Ulcerous bites are a plague to all, and innocent civilians have died from trying to remove a Flea incorrectly. Larger militias might warrant the use of Fleas in populated areas and consider the losses part of the price of war. Smaller groups generally consider the acceptance of civilian or troop losses due to Fleas to be blatantly irresponsible.

Clean up after using them, and trying to collect more, is often done by luring them using full Bug Motels, which emit the Bug's Bio-Energy. The most common method is placing a sticky pane of glass or flypaper around the motel. Once stuck to the glass or paper, the Fleas would then be plucked or vacuumed off. Other methods might be using CO2 fire extinguishers to freeze the Fleas and then pick them up using instruments. They are easy to contain in glass once captured, although a glass cap is required to prevent the corrosion of any part of the container. All other materials have proven to be poor containers after periods of time due to the corrosive saliva.

Armored hazard suits, or silicon mesh hazard suits are required for clean up in order to stay free from harm. Hazard suits with some type of silicon coating or mesh are the best defense for those that handle, collect or clean up the Fleas. The silicon protects the suit from the acid saliva.

Organitech Shriekers do have a "herding" effect on the Fleas. Fleas will jump away from the signal up to the maximum range of the Shrieker.

NORAD's think tank is rumored to be working on a way to "milk" the Fleas and use the disease they carry to lace bullets or even as a means of killing Silkworms via injection. But, so far, no one has seen any piece of evidence to confirm the rumors.

## Perpetuating the Parasites

Breeding of the Fleas by humans is done in glass tubes and incubators with a conductive gel for the Fleas to lay eggs in. The Fleas and their eggs are fed from the energy of full Bug Motels. The Bio-Energy is used to electrify the gel and therefore provide food for the Fleas. A pair of Fleas can produce about 1D4 offspring per week, if they have food. But that rate increases when there are more Fleas. The Fleas take about two weeks to mature into fully capable adults. It takes about two months for the Fleas to reach their full size.

Feeding, breeding, and incubating take special knowhow. An example of special knowledge is not to directly siphon Bio-Energy from a Bug Motel. This will allow the Fleas to travel into the Motel after the Bug, which is bad. If this happens the only way to retrieve the Flea would be to release the Bug from the Motel, or wait until the Bug is devoured so that the Flea comes out. So instead, batteries need to be charged from the siphoned Bug Motel, or Organitech batteries need to be acquired. Then the batteries, standing alone, can be used for the feeding. It seems that soon after the Fleas appeared on Earth, the smallest version of these batteries became more widely available. This small size battery offers plenty of energy for the incubation period. It's possible that NORAD has allowed these to be sold and distributed, unlike the larger batteries. Otherwise, incubation for non-NORAD groups would not be very easy.

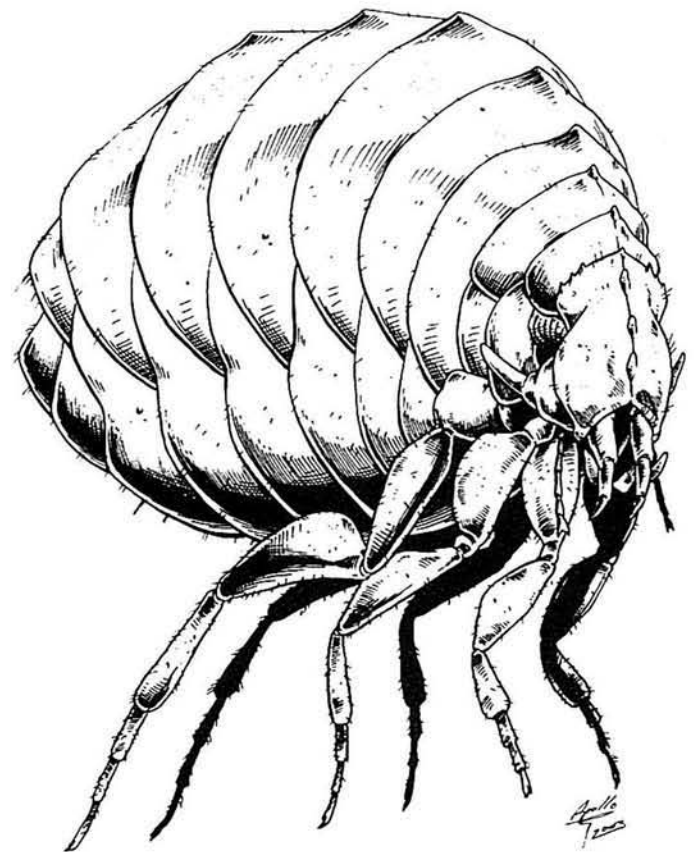
The Fleas can breed quickly on the Bugs as well. Fleas will lay their eggs on the Bugs as their natural means of spreading.

Occasionally a fresh Bug carcass (newer than 1D4+1 days) can be found with Fleas and Flea eggs on it, since the Fleas can only survive in the wild for up to 1 week. There is a 5% chance of a dead Bug having any Fleas, since the Bugs completely obliterate those that are sick or mutated. Such findings will likely be a lone Bug that had died from disease. These sightings offer hope that the infested Bugs are taking the Fleas back to their home base and that the Fleas are spreading there.

## New Skills

**Flea Warfare:** This skill gives the knowledge of how to capture, contain and spread the Fleas. A failed roll will either (01-49%) spread the Fleas beyond the intended range or (50-00%) kill the Fleas. **Base Skill:** 30% +4% per level.

**Flea Breeding and Care:** This is the knowledge of how to breed and handle the Fleas in many respects. It includes the ability to remove Fleas correctly plus the knowledge to treat people and Organitech objects that have had Fleas burrowed into them. **Base skill:** 25% +3% per level.



## Flea Stats

**Alignment:** N/A. Just an indiscriminate need to feed and breed.

**S.D.C.:** 2D6+5

**Natural Armor Rating:** 14

**Horror Factor:** 5 alone, 11 in swarms.

**Speed:** 18 while jumping.

**Size:** Up to ½ inch in length (1.3 cm).

## Natural Abilities:

1. Burrow into living beings and objects: Burrowing will damage a person's Hit Points directly once under the skin, doing 1D4 Hit Points per minute. Burrowing into objects and armor does 1D4 S.D.C. per minute (plus the acid saliva damage).

2. Jump up to 10 feet (3 m) high or across.

3. Acid Saliva: Acidic saliva will do 1 S.D.C. per melee. Damage will be inflicted on contact, so even removing the acid within the melee will still inflict 1 point of damage. It will continue to burn for four melees per place of contact. Glass or objects that have silicone coating or silicone mixed/meshed in will take no damage from the Flea.

4. Sense Bugs and Bio-Energy up to 10 feet (3 m).

5. Sense heat up to 10 feet (3 m).

6. Transform into Bio-Energy with a Bug it is touching.

7. Attach/cling to a Bug that is currently in Bio-Energy form: 30% (the Flea will turn into energy).

**Average Life Span:** Four years. Cannot survive more than one week without feeding.

**Cost:** Fleas sell on the market for 3D4 x \$5 apiece.

**Physical Appearance:** Similar to a Flea from Earth, with a larger, round abdomen.

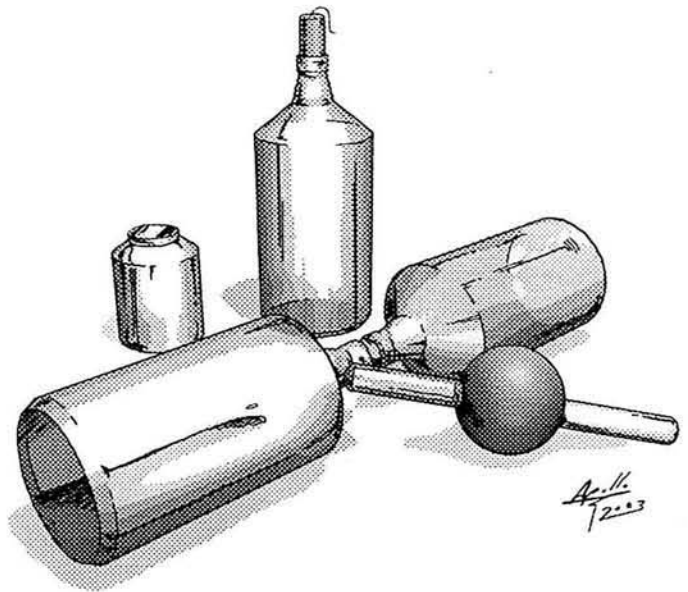
**Special Removal Instructions:** Flea removal is something that needs to be done properly or serious consequences can result. If the patient survives a serious, traumatic Flea encounter, roll to save vs insanity.

The first thing to remember is that a Flea will not like the taste of a human. So if left alone to taste, it will leave within 1D4 minutes. Irritating the Flea by pulling, squeezing, burning, or flicking the Flea will cause more acid to be secreted and cause the Flea to burrow into the body very quickly. The head can continue to burrow without its body. So if simply trying to remove a Flea that is beginning to burrow to taste, use tweezers on the head to pull it off.

If the head is not visible, freezing is the best way to stop the Flea and remove it. If the Flea can't be frozen, extreme heat will be needed to kill the Flea. A blowtorch, firework sparkler or hot iron rod are common items that can be used to kill the Flea. If the source is not hot enough, then the Flea will only be irritated and will burrow deeper to escape the source of the irritation.

## Common Flea-Distributing Weapon Designs

Most of these weapon designs are effective "poor-man" methods of infesting the Bugs with Fleas. Others are more complex methods of traps and electrical distribution. Many of the weapons are thrown. Those that are thrown, if small enough, can also be launched with a simple water balloon launcher to increase the range. For these occasions use the W.P. Targeting (Throwing/Missile Weapons) skill to obtain bonuses.



## Water Balloon Launcher

A water balloon launcher consists of two large, equal sized hoops of latex surgical tubes. The hoops are linked together by a square patch of nylon or any type of cloth, called the seat. Three people are required for a mobile launcher. Two of the people stand on each side of the third and they each hold the far end of one hoop. The third person in the middle pulls the seat back, stretching the hoops to form a giant slingshot. After getting enough tension, loading the ordnance and aiming, the middle person lets go.

Other times, the two hoops can be latched to two stable objects. In these cases, only one person is required for operation. More and more, water balloon launchers have been seen dangling from open jeeps and armored personnel carriers where a one-person launcher was used.

**Range:** 100 feet (30.5 m) launching a 1-pound (.45 kg) object for an average launcher.

**Rate of Fire:** 4 shots per melee for wild shots, 2 shots per melee for aimed shots.

## Simple "Flea Cocktail"

This is simply a glass container filled with Fleas. The container is thrown in the middle of a group of Bugs, or directly onto one. Once the impact shatters the glass, the Fleas are free to infest. The downside to this method is that once the filled bottle is capped with a non-glass plug, in a matter of 1D4 hours the Fleas will be able to put enough acid on the cap of an upright bottle to allow escape. Fleas in water will not be able to escape if the water is deep enough to prevent jumping. If the bottle without water is on its side or upside down, Fleas will escape in a matter of 1D4 minutes. They will be able to escape in 4D6 minutes if they are in water and the bottle is upside down or on its side.

**Damage:** None, unless hitting an object: 1D4 S.D.C. plus strength bonuses.

**Range:** Thrown. Varies.

## “Flea Firecracker Cocktails”

This is a glass bottle filled with Fleas. A plug of some kind (a wad) is shoved down to seal in the Fleas. Then a medium strength firecracker is shoved in almost all the way into the bottleneck. The fuse is lit and the bottle is thrown. The trick is timing the device so that it will explode in the air. Other times, these can be set as bombs for traps with electrical ignitions. The low explosive fireworks will injure the Fleas some, but won't kill them if done right. The bottle will shatter completely and scatter the Fleas.

The danger of this one is the same as the simple cocktail. The Fleas will eventually escape.

Substitutions for this might be mason jars filled with Fleas and a well-pressurized aerosol can. This is ideal for traps. Shooting this will cause the can to explode and the Fleas to be blown in all directions. Fleas will also eat through the aerosol can in 1D4 minutes if not in water. If in water, then the Fleas will take 4D6 minutes to puncture the can.

**Damage:** 1D6+1 S.D.C. to the fleas, half to those in the blast radius from flying glass.

**Blast Radius:** 3D4+2 feet (1.5-4.3 m).

**Range:** Thrown. Varies.

## “Dry Ice Bomb”

Similar to the NORAD Glow Stick Grenade, but with less sophisticated instruments and design, the Dry Ice Bomb often uses 2-liter bottles for the container, filled less than half way with water. A small beaker is filled with Fleas and is sealed with wax or paper wads since it will be used right away. Then the Fleas and the dry ice are inserted and the bottle is capped and thrown to break the beaker. Unlike the Glow Stick Grenade, this needs to be thrown right away.

**Damage:** None.

**Blast Radius:** 2D6 feet (0.6-3.6 m).

**Range:** Thrown. Varies.

## NORAD “Glow Stick Grenade”

These are rare and expensive due to the specialized materials involved to make them function. This is the “high-tech” version of the weapon. There are three components that make this work: 1) a ball made of strong, hardened rubber filled with water, and with one threaded hole with a screw-on cap, 2) a test tube with a glass screw-on top filled with up to 10 Fleas, 3) a test tube filled with dry ice. The grenades come in packs of 20 with the dry ice

included in a sealed, well-insulated container. The container will keep the dry ice for 48 hours if unopened and for 24 hours once opened. The Flea tube is inserted into the grenade via the hole, which is closed with its screw-on cap. The other tube of dry ice is sealed into the grenade the same as the Flea tube right before use. Once the grenade is armed and thrown, the impact will break both tubes. The dry ice will expand until there is too much pressure in the grenade. At this point the extreme pressure causes an explosion, which will then spread the Fleas. The grenade needs to be thrown within 1D4+1 minutes before self-detonating. The wielder can also activate the grenade prior to being thrown. At this point they have 2D4 seconds to throw the grenade. This method is useful for attempting to detonate the grenade in the air.

**Damage:** None.

**Blast Radius:** 1D6 feet (0.3-1.8 m).

**Range:** Thrown. Varies.

**Cost:** \$300 for a pack of 20. Rare.

## Common Bug Traps Utilizing Fleas

A common trap will include a device connected to a line that will mimic an electronic device's activity to lure the Bugs. When the Bugs come through the line, they will trip a breaker. The breaker sets off a small firecracker attached to a glass container with Fleas inside, thus releasing the Fleas to attack the Bugs. Humans need to be careful releasing the Fleas in close proximity, because they will likely get the Fleas on themselves as well.

## Conductors

The Conductors are glass tubes filled with both water and Fleas. At each end of the Container is thick, conductive metal contact that will allow the container to be plugged into an electrical line. When a Bug is lured through the line, it will travel through the glass tube, since water is conductive. The Fleas will then attempt to cling onto the Bug in Bio-Energy form. There is a 30% chance that a Flea in physical form can cling onto the Bug that is in Bio-Energy form and change into energy with it.

A similar method is to place a smaller glass tube(s) filled with water onto the electrical system of a device, then trick a Bug into inhabiting and controlling the machine. Once the electrical systems are active with the Bug's energy, the Flea can attempt to cling to the Bug.



# Beyond the Supernatural™

## Second Edition – Sneak Preview

By Kevin Siembieda © 2004

### About the Game

Back in 1987, before *X-Files*, before *Vampire the Masquerade*, there was **Beyond the Supernatural™**. The concepts, at the time, were so new and different that many gamers found themselves at a loss when it came to setting up a campaign. Looking back at it, the original needed more background, setting information and a template for setting up adventures. It also needed sourcebooks and support material that never came. Despite this, the original **Beyond the Supernatural RPG** was a personal favorite of mine and it did very, selling something in the neighborhood of 18,000 copies and developed a nice cult following, many of whom eagerly await its return as *BTS-2*. I think they'll like what we've done.

The two central concepts behind **Beyond the Supernatural** were, and still are, 1) magic and the supernatural are real, and, 2) few people accept the truth. This latter part was the most important aspect best presented by the fictional character of *Doctor*

*Victor Lazlo*; that the supernatural – ghosts, vampires, werewolves, demons, and all manner of horrors – is real, and that these creatures have co-existed with humankind since the dawn of man. The problem is modern humans have decided that they are not real. Blinded by arrogance, and perhaps fear, and armed with science, such supernatural reality has been pushed away as superstition and wild imaginings, relegating those who suggest they are real to the realm of lunatics or charlatans. Anyone who dares to claim “mythical” magic and monsters are real gets chastised, laughed at and dismissed as misguided souls at best, liars, crackpots and con artists at worst.

That pervasive and pernicious denial of the truth has created a shadowy underground world where magic, monsters and the supernatural flourish. A co-existing reality where the holders of arcane knowledge and beings as far removed from humanity as one can imagine roam freely without the restraints of society, morality, the law or retribution. A world inhabited by predators and prey, the hunters and the hunted, the wise and the helpless, master and victim. This is our modern world beyond the light of day, beyond our precious view of reality.

This leaves only one question: Are you brave enough to enter this realm knowing that it will open your eyes to wonders and horrors denied to exist in the “real” world? Are you ready to accept the impossible? The inexplicable and unexplainable?

If the answer is yes, gentle reader, there is no turning back. Welcome to **Beyond the Supernatural Two™**.

– Kevin Siembieda, 2004

## Warning

Beyond the Supernatural, 1st & 2nd Edition, is a fictional horror game built on the premise that magic and the supernatural are real, and that society adamantly refuses to accept the truth. Working on that premise means magic, monsters, demons, myth and horrific elements are presented as “real,” but only in the context of this *fictional* game.

Please note that nothing in Beyond the Supernatural Two is real. The magic, spells, psychic abilities, ghosts, monsters, secret organizations, Victor Lazlo, the Lazlo Agency and any apparent theories about the supernatural and the paranormal are entirely make-believe. Fiction spawned from the fertile imaginations of the authors. It is not real! We do NOT encourage the practice of the occult, magic, or witchcraft. Nor do we believe it is real.

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## Insight

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“So, like what can you tell me about Victor Lazlo?”

“Well, he was a pioneer in the field of a parapsychology. He wrote nine books on the subject, published numerous articles and put forth several theories about the supernatural and how it all works.”

“Yeah, yeah, I got all that from the website. You knew the guy, right?”

“Yes . . . I knew him.”

“Personally, I mean?”

“Yes, personally,” drawled Robert Mach, head of the Lazlo Agency. He disliked reporters. They never seemed to get the facts straight and always put their own pedestrian slant on things. He especially disliked rude, snot-nosed beginners who got stuck with an assignment they obviously didn’t want in the first place, like this guy. “What is it you’d like to know,” asked Robert, “that isn’t on the website?”

“I don’t know, dude. What makes this guy such a guru? I mean, he went missing, what? Back in 1984, and he’s still considered like one of the top guys in his field.”

“I always saw Victor Lazlo as part Gandhi, part Sherlock Holmes, part Einstein and part Huck Finn – visionary, detective, and thinker with a child-like sense of wonder that never faded. He marveled at the world around him and was never afraid to ask how or why. How do things work the way they do? Why do people fear the unknown and hide from the truth? Why do parents tell children there are no monsters hiding under the bed when there very well might be?”

“See, that’s what I mean. If this guy was such a scientific mind and visionary, why did he . . . and you, just now . . . say crackpot things like that?”

To get a rise out of you, thought Robert Mach to himself with a touch of regret. It was never wise to rattle the rafters of a narrow mind. He just didn’t have the patience and tolerance for this type of rhetoric. Not like Victor Lazlo, who could look past the condescension without so much as a flinch and press on with cool conviction.

“Can I ask you a question, Mr. Sheridan?” Asked Robert.

“Sure. What is it?” said the reporter.

“You don’t believe in the paranormal, do you?”

“You mean like, ESP, bending spoons with your mind, ghosts, witchcraft and bogeymen? No, can’t say that I do. Of course, I don’t believe in UFOs, Santa Claus or the Easter Bunny either.”

“I see,” said Robert with a groan. “So you’re stuck with this crappy assignment and just trying to get through it, eh?”

“Um, well . . . nah, I wouldn’t say crappy, but you know, I don’t believe in this stuff.”

“Yet I’ll bet you or someone you know has at least one ghost story to tell, or have experienced something that defies explanation. A premonition? Deja vu? Am I right?”

“Um . . . not really.”

“No? Seriously, Mr. Sheridan. Stop and think for a minute. There has *never* been something you personally experienced that fits the bill? What about a friend or relative? Be honest.”

“Okay,” grinned the reporter, “my mom says she knew the exact moment my sister gave birth and that it was a little girl with red hair, even though they were two thousand miles apart. But that’s, you know, like . . .”

“A coincidence?”

“Yeah, exactly. A weird coincidence.”

“No other *weird* experience?”

“Um, there was this time in college, okay. We were in this cemetery and . . . but you know, we were pretty drunk.”

“What did you see? A ghost?”

“Yeah. I mean, no. I mean, we thought we did. Scared the shit out of us, man. But like I said, we were pretty trashed, you know. And we were just a bunch of stupid college kids being wise guys and scaring ourselves silly.”

“Mr. Sheridan, you’ve just helped to prove the point Victor Lazlo tried to make his entire life. The supernatural and the unexplained happen every day. Every single day, Mr. Sheridan. And not to freaks, weirdos and charlatans, but to ordinary people like you and your mother. Yet even the people who experience the paranormal event refuse to accept it. You dismiss your mother’s clairvoyant flash of insight as just a ‘weird coincidence.’ You’ve chosen to disbelieve your own eyes and convince yourself that your encounter with a ghost wasn’t real at all, but that it was a booze-induced hallucination. Apparently a hallucination you and your, what, three, four, five buddies also experienced? Do you know how rare mass hallucination really is?”

“Yeah,” smiled the reporter, “I did a piece on it last year. It’s about as rare as real amnesia. You’re more likely to get hit by lightning than experience either one of them in your lifetime.”

Now it was Robert Mach’s turn to smile. “Thank you, Mr. Sheridan, for your honesty. Now let me ask you this: What if your experience in the cemetery was real and had nothing to do

with the alcohol you and friends had consumed? You did see a ghost. How would you explain that?"

"I couldn't, and I don't even want to think about it."

"Why not?"

"I don't know. It gives me the willies. It creeps me out?"

"You'll be glad to know you are a typical American, Mr. Sheridan. Approximately eighty-two point three percent of people surveyed in the United States basically responded the same way. It 'creeped them out.' It was too scary to think about."

"Here are some other statistics you'll find interesting," said Robert Mach. "While 82.3% of the people find the idea of ghosts to be frightening and refuse to believe they are real, 96.4% believe in a supreme being, 91.5% in some kind of an afterlife, 72% in angels or some sort of a guardian spirit whether it be a benevolent ancestor or a Christian-style guardian angel, and 36.7% admit – admit, mind you – to experiencing a ghostly encounter whether it was a visitation of a deceased loved one in a dream, hearing a phantom voice or sound, being sent a sign, or seeing an actual apparition. That's more than one third of the people in the United States willing to *admit* they, on some level, have had a ghostly encounter. These aren't superstitious people from a third world country, but the USA, bastion of skepticism, technology, science and the internet. By the way, our research shows those numbers go up or down by only about five percent with people in other countries around the globe."

Mach paused while the young reporter scribbled down the numbers on his electronic notebook. "So what you're saying," summarized the reporter, "is on one hand, people like claim they don't believe in ghosts, but on the other hand they believe in a god, heaven, an afterlife and angels, all of which fall into the auspicious category of the supernatural."

"There may be hope for you yet, Mr. Skeptic. That's exactly what I'm saying. And it's a worldwide phenomenon. Can every one one of these millions of people be drunk, crazy or mistaken?"

"Yeah," countered the reporter in a playful tone, "they can. After all, didn't everyone think the world was flat? And they were all wrong."

"Not quite everyone."

"Okay, a few guys . . ."

"Like Victor Lazlo had the insight to see the truth and dare to express their unpopular views though it brought them only ridicule and humiliation."

"Hey," chuckled Mr. Sheridan, "you're smooth, changing the direction I was going, like that. Damn smooth."

Robert Mach just smiled.

"I get the point," said Mr. Sheridan. "But where's the rest of the scientific community on this? Why isn't anyone else exploring the supernat . . . um, paranormal?"

"A good question, and one that haunted Victor Lazlo and frustrates me to no end."

"Well?"

"The scientific community hangs its hat on hard facts and results that can be quantified and replicated over and over again. However, even men of science have their prejudices and colored outlook. The paranormal doesn't fit convention. It challenges the accepted rules of nature and functions outside our current

boundaries of scientific understanding. Magic, other dimensions, demonic beings, ghostly entities – they all seem impossible and defy the laws of science. And since the science we know says they are impossible, they can't possibly exist, and therefore they don't. End of story. Except it's *not* the end of the story. The supernatural does exist and may even work within the laws of nature, but in different ways than we currently understand."

"That was something else Victor Lazlo tried to make people understand, wasn't it?"

"I see you did a little homework after all, Mr. Sheridan, or was that from our website too?"

"A little of both," he grinned.

"Yes, it was," replied the head of the Lazlo Agency. "People seem to have forgotten that much of what we hold as scientific truths are *theories*, good ideas about how things probably work and fit together. These theories are tested, tweaked and modified all the time. Our understanding of DNA is greatly expanded and radically different than it was only 10 years ago. When science finds a new piece of the puzzle, it increases our perspective and modifies or confirms the original theory and concepts. However, rather than following the information to see where it might lead, people, including some scientists, all too frequently try to make the information conform to their pre-existing notions. Dismissing puzzle pieces that don't seem to fit, and in so doing, blinding themselves to the broader truth."

"That's kind of harsh, isn't it?"

"I don't think so. Let's face it, Mr. Sheridan, the other reason you don't tell people about your ghostly encounter is because they'd laugh at you. If science was serious about uncovering the truth there would be a ghost-sighting hotline and a research group, but there isn't. There's no person or organization within the scientific community where you, or anyone, can turn to with your questions about the paranormal. There are no theories. No board of supernatural investigation. No government funded research. Nothing. When a mass murderer says that a dog told him to kill people, there's no investigation into the possibility that either the dog or the man may have been possessed by an evil supernatural being. The media labels the killer a madman, the State convicts him, locks him up and throws away the key. In fairness to these social institutions, the knee jerk reaction of most people is to believe the man is insane, and everybody breathes a collective sigh of relief when the madman is locked away. But should they? What if the killer was manipulated, mind controlled or actually possessed by an evil supernatural force?"

"Are you saying the Son of Sam was innocent?" gasped the reporter. "That . . . that he was, like the victim of supernatural possession?!"

"No, I'm not. What I'm trying to say is that we don't even consider the possibility. There is no scientific theory to apply, or science based investigative agency to examine the facts in the case or anything concerning supernatural phenomena. Instead, the crimes and claims are all wrapped together neatly in the blanket of insanity or desperate lies, and ignored accordingly. The scientific community's refusal to even address the possibility makes it impossible for us to believe anything but the killer is crazy. So one madman is imprisoned, we convince ourselves the terror is over, and we sleep better at night. But what if the

real madness is that the man sitting in prison is only one of the real monster's pawns or henchmen? That the true, inhuman perpetrator remains at large, unshackled, invisible and free to work more of its terror. There is no police officer hunting for it. There is no one trying to stop it. It is truly free to do as it will. Hiding in plain sight, because science says it is not real, and the media, you, and Joe Average turn a blind eye and fabricate whatever lies are necessary to shield yourselves from the truth."

"That's one hell of a conspiracy theory you have going there Mr. Mach. And I don't mean that as a smart aleck. It gave me chills, but that's some pretty paranoid thinking. If I believed any of it, dude, I couldn't sleep at night. On the other hand, if you wrote that up right, you might give Stephen King a run for his money."

"You're doing it again."

"What?"

"Dismissing a possibility and hiding behind the mantle of insanity and jokes. All I said was 'what if' – I didn't say it was true."

"Yeah, but that's the kind of stuff you believe, right?"

"Victor Lazlo taught me to question and wonder, Mr. Sheridan. To look past scientific and social dogma and ask the scary questions, and seek the real answers. If I can get any part of Victor's message across, it's that nobody is asking the questions. It's all swept under the rug and laughed at."

"I get the point, but it's hard to . . ."

"Keep an open mind."

"I wish you'd quit finishing my sentences for me."

"Sorry, it's one of my personal foibles."

The two men chuckled for a moment, relieving some of the tension that had grown from the serious conversation.

"Many of Victor Lazlo's theories actually have a scientific basis," continued Robert Mach. "He believed, for example, that he had discovered an unrecognized form of energy he dubbed *Potential Psychic Energy* or P.P.E. This energy fuels what you would call ESP – psychic ability. It also fuels magic and many of the powers possessed by the so-called demons and supernatural monsters."

"So-called demons?"

"Oh, that's one of my pet peeves. I have often wondered if we might not be taken more seriously if these *inhuman beings* were labeled as something other than 'demons and monsters.' Hollywood, comic books and society have colored our views about demons and monsters. We're taught as children that they aren't real, then movies and fiction characterize them to the point of ridiculousness. The same is true of 'magic' – the stuff of fairy tales and children's books. But they're real, all right. The problem is, science doesn't recognize the existence of P.P.E., dismisses the paranormal, and ignores all the anecdotal evidence, even though we could fill the Pentagon with millions of examples from just the last thirty years."

"If that's true, how can they get away with that?"

"Because it's scary and they don't want to uncover the truth."

"Come again?"

"It's the same reason you refute your own personal experience and why you were making jokes 60 seconds ago. It's scary. Scary and mysterious. You said it yourself, if you thought any

of my paranoid ranting was true, you couldn't sleep at night. And everyone wants to sleep easy, Mr. Sheridan. You saw the paranoia after 9-11. People in small town America were buying duct tape and bottled water by the truckload, as if they could be the next target. We don't want our children to worry about the bogeyman or demons. We have enough to worry about. Besides, mom, pop, science and Uncle Sam all insist monsters and magic aren't real. And with a little luck, none of us will ever have to come face to face with one. Oh, your scary moment in a cemetery is one thing, a full-fledged encounter with the face of evil, that's quite another. Funny thing though, and you'll probably call me paranoid again, but we at the Lazlo Agency suspect millions of people have terrifying and deadly encounters with the supernatural every day. Where have the millions of missing people gone, Mr. Sheridan? They can't all be lying face down in a shallow grave somewhere. Why can't we find the thousands of children whose faces haunt us from the sides of milk cartons and posters at Wal-Mart? What about the invisible people we barely notice? The homeless, the illegal aliens, and prostitutes that go missing or are found dead. You're a reporter, do you pay attention when a hooker, junky or street person is reported on a police blotter as dead?"

"No, or if I do, they're forgotten ten seconds later. I only take notice if there was something unusual, I mean really unusual or a celebrity or politician is linked to the deceased."

"Exactly, and every major city has hundreds and hundreds of these people die every year, and hundreds more disappear. And I don't mean gone missing due to foul play, I mean thousands of indigent people, junkies, hookers, and mentally ill roam the streets and come and go without hardly anyone noticing them in the first place. When one drifter is suddenly gone, it's assumed they must have gone someplace else, to greener pastures, home, rehab or jail, most likely, but we don't actually know where they've gone at all."

"And don't care. Those are the kind of people we like to keep our distance from." Added the reporter. "And nobody's going to believe a wino or a whore junked up on heroin or crack if they even have the stones to try to tell the cops they saw a monster or something weird. Burnouts and losers just don't have much credibility. You expect them to be seeing glowing lights, monsters and Elvis in an alley. There's not a reporter in TV or print who's going to waste their time on those people, unless they smell a real story. Something big."

"Mr. Sheridan, you surprise me."

"I'm not stupid. I get the point, and it makes sense." The reporter stopped writing and switched off his notebook. "You know I can't write any of this for the paper. At least not without making you and anyone involved with the Lazlo Agency look like whack jobs."

"I know."

"This sucks. I hear what you're saying. I mean, okay, it sounds crazy, but sitting here talking with you, seeing your demeanor . . . I know you believe and make it sound more than plausible. I believe you, and that scares the spit out of me more than anything."

"Thank you, Mr. Sheridan."

"For what?"

"For not labeling me a 'whack job.'"

“Yeah, well, it’s not like I’m doing you any favors, dude. And I *am* going to have trouble sleeping tonight, thank you very much.”

“It will pass. You’ll either decide I’m one of the best con artists you’ve ever met and that I’m full of it, or you’ll just push it out of your mind. Focus on other more immediate and personally important things. It’s easy. Most people do it.”

There was a moment of silence before either of them spoke.

“Yeah, maybe, but I don’t think so. You’ve given me a lot to think about.”

“You know, if you need or want to talk . . . off the record . . . I’m here. I didn’t mean to upset you. This is intense food for thought. Most people can’t handle it.”

“Thanks. I appreciate that. Maybe I will.”

“I mean it. Anytime, day or night. Here, let me give you my card. It has my private cell phone and e-mail address.”

“That’s cool.”

“Okay dude,” teased Robert Mach, “like if you need to talk, or like, see another ghost, ring me bro.”

The young reporter smiled, but his mind was clearly elsewhere.

“Count on it. You’ve given me a lot to mull over. Maybe it’s because I’m a reporter, but I’ve seen what you’ve said a hundred times. People don’t listen to street people. They don’t even want to get near ‘em. And when the homeless and drifters move on, nobody knows where they’ve been, where they’ve gone, and don’t care. When a hooker or junkie or poor slob buys it, their passing doesn’t make the news unless a gunfight was involved, and sometimes not even then. Do you have any idea how many people get killed, hurt or go missing in a city like Detroit or Chicago that never make the evening news or grab a newspaper’s headline?”

“Yes, I do.”

“Hey look, I hear and see a lot of stuff, you know. If I come across something . . . you know, like . . .”

“Weird.”

The reporter gave him a look.

“Sorry,” said Mach, “personal foible.”

“Yeah, well it’s annoying. Work on it, dude.”

“What about your story?”

“Hey, I’ve got plenty of material.”

“Oh?”

“Don’t worry, I’ll make it a fluff piece. That’s what my editor wants anyway. I’ll talk about the web site and how you guys network to gather weird stories about, you know, the paranormal and monsters, and speculate on their, um . . . uh . . .”

“Validity and relevance?”

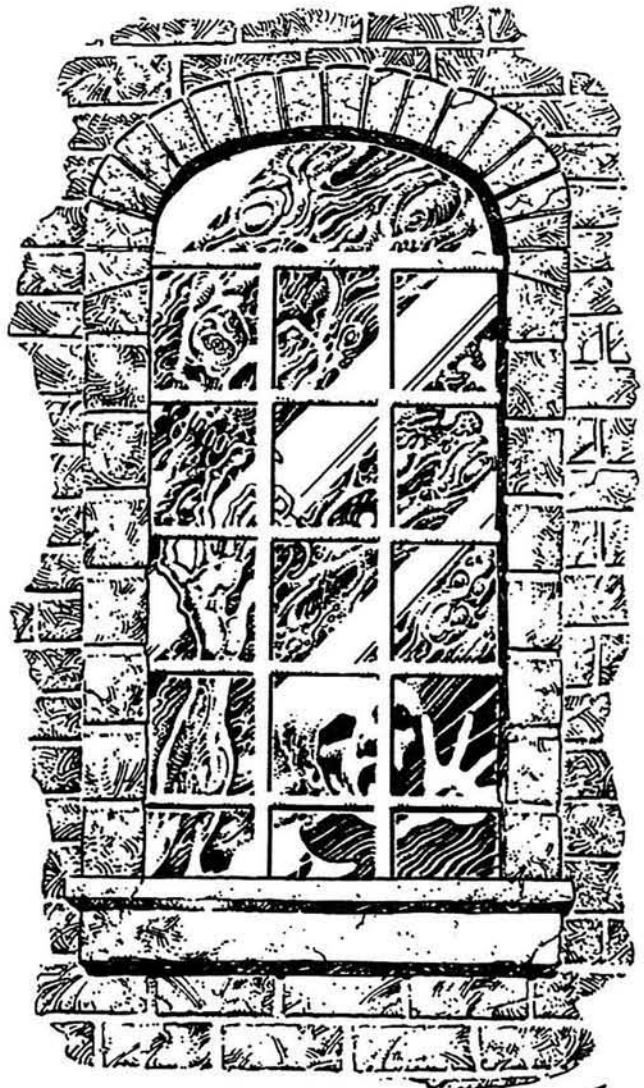
“Yeah, validity and relevance.”

“You’re okay, Sheridan. You’d better be careful though, or you might find yourself . . .”

“A nut job like you?”

“Something like that.”

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*Handwritten signature: JAMES*

The following is one of the *new* Psychic Character Classes (P.C.C.) from *Beyond the Supernatural 2™*. I hope it conveys some of the atmosphere and uniqueness of *BTS-2*, which *should* ship to stores by the end of April. Really.

## Psychic Medium P.C.C.

By Kevin Siembieda © 2004

The Psychic Medium is a different kind of sensitive psychic character. He or she sees ghosts and gets impressions from the *dead*. The character is psychically linked to one otherworldly spirit who provides him with a range of paranormal abilities as well as psychic insight and information. This *ghost* is known as the medium’s “Spirit Guide,” and is supposedly a friendly spirit from the past.

The “ghost” may be a deceased loved one, friend or family member or someone completely unrelated and previously unknown to the psychic. Ghosts who were once a friend or family member are ancestral spirits who guard over and help their loved one even though they have passed on into the afterlife. However, such friends and family members are never an imme-



diate relative such as a parent or sibling, but someone a bit removed like a cousin, uncle, great grandfather, or even a great, great, great grandfather. In fact, frequently the Spirit Guide is two to several generations removed. It is the bond of kinship and love that brings them to the psychic and binds them together, though he or she must also possess the special “gift” to see and hear spirits to complete the unity.

The Unrelated Spirit Guide will always be a person from a particular occupation, place or time period with which the psychic has always been fascinated. For it is that similar interest that serves as the link that binds them; kindred spirits who cross the boundary of death. The unrelated ghost may have died recently or herald back to a time hundreds, even thousands of years ago. It can originate from anywhere on the planet, including foreign countries and places such as Atlantis and Lemuria that have never been proven to actually have existed at all. In all cases, regardless of the Spirit Guide’s origin or age, the Spirit is benevolent and friendly. It has come to help the psychic and represents the character’s *focus* and *conduit* to the past and the dead. It is the Spirit Guide who provides the psychic with his powers.

Parapsychologists insist the Spirit Guide is the subconscious or *psychic manifestation* of the Medium’s own mind, perhaps his inner child or subconscious id. It is through the manifestation of this alter-ego (a tangible focus of his own thoughts) that the Medium is able to tap into the realm of the supernatural. Psychic Mediums insist their Guide is the spirit of a dead person, someone who was once a living, breathing individual who has returned from beyond the veil to help the living. As further proof of the ghostly presence, they point out that Psychic Mediums can also see or sense the presence of Spirit Guides of other Mediums, though they can’t speak to them. Supposedly, this is because each Spirit Guide is linked to one specific individual, and is unable to communicate directly with any other living person. The ghost serves as the Psychic Medium’s direct link to the other side, and the Medium serves as the ghost’s direct link to the world of the living. However, this argument is countered by those who contend the Spirit Guide is visible to other Mediums because, a) spirits are also their orientation and frame of reference, and, b) because the Spirit Guide *is* a real psychic manifestation, just one subconsciously created by the Medium himself. While the debate rages among Mediums and other psychics and scholars as to whether the Spirit Guide is a genuine ghost or a figment of the psychic’s own imagination, the bottom line is this: if there was no Spirit Guide the Psychic Medium would be powerless, blinded to the realm of the supernatural and unable to use his special abilities. Thus, real or imagined, the two are irrevocably dependent on each other. Without one, the other vanishes.

This spectral link to the past helps the living character in the present by providing the Psychic Medium with the Spirit Guide’s experience, observations and wisdom. The “ghost” is in effect, a second pair of eyes with its own unique historical background and perspective. In addition, the Spirit Guide serves as a conduit to the past, to the supernatural, and beyond. As the theory goes, the Spirit Guide can tap into the psychic vibrations and impressions left on a particular location in much the same way as a *Haunting Entity*. It then verbally relates what it senses, sees, knows, or suspects, providing snippets of insight, informa-

tion and advice. In addition, the Spirit Guide can serve as a conduit to the past and to the supernatural by conveying sights (visions and dreams), sounds, or smells to its living partner in order to warn him of danger, provide clues or help in other ways.

## P.C.C. Abilities & Bonuses

- 1. Hear Death Rattle:** The Psychic Medium can hear the *death rattle* of the dying: the last dying breaths of those seriously sick or injured. Thus, the character starts hearing the death rattle one minute before the individual expires, so he knows the person is about to die, and knows that when the sound stops, the person is dead. Only exceptional means (immediate medical intervention, heart massage, CPR, etc.) *may* bring a character from their deathbed back to the living, depending on the injury, available medical help and circumstance. I.S.P. Cost: None. Automatic, hears the Death Rattle whether the Medium wants to or not, provided the character is within range; 50 feet (15.2 m).
- 2. Permanent P.P.E. Base:** P.E. attribute number +1D4.
- 3. I.S.P.:** M.E. attribute number x2 +8 I.S.P. per level of experience. Considered a Major Psychic and needs to roll a 12 or higher to save vs psionic attack.
- 4. Impervious to Possession.** The Psychic Medium is *impervious* to all forms of possession, whether it is magical, psionic or supernatural. However, he remains vulnerable to hypnosis and other forms of mind control and illusion.
- 5. P.C.C. Bonuses:** +1D4 to M.E. attribute, +1 on initiative, +1 to dodge, +2 to save vs illusion, +2 to Perception rolls, and +1 to save vs Horror Factor at levels 2, 5, 8, 12 and 15. **Penalty Note:** Psychic Mediums feel less confident when their Spirit Guide is missing in action and suffer a penalty of -10% to all skill performance and -1 on all saving throws until it reappears.
- 6. Spirit Strike:** The Psychic Medium not only sees ghosts and invisible spirits and energy beings, but can attack them as well. Damage is done directly to the creature’s Hit Points and affects even invisible energy beings and ethereal spirits.

To attack, the psychic must will his inner strength to produce a damaging energy that can touch entities and spirits. This counts as one of his melee attacks for the first round. Then by touch, punch, kick, or attack with any type of handheld melee weapon (club, knife, sword, chair, etc.) he can hit the energy being or specter to inflict damage. The energy of the Spirit Strike can also be released as an *energy blast*, but such a ranged attack does half damage and is limited to a range of 20 feet (6.1 m) +5 feet (1.5 m) per level of experience.

Damage (Touch): 2D6 points +1 per level of experience (half as an energy blast). The Spirit Strike can also be used against demons and other supernatural beings (evil or good), but inflicts only 1D6 damage to them. Any supernatural being with the word “spirit,” “ghost” or “specter” as part of its name takes full damage, as does the splintered essence or avatar of an Alien Intelligence. (Note: In a Mega-Damage environment like *Rifts*®, damage is 4D6 M.D. +1 M.D. per level of experience to spirits, Entities, and fragmented essences, and 2D6 M.D. as an energy blast or when the Spirit Strike is used on demons and other supernatural beings.)

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

**Note:** This ability only manifests when the character is facing Entities, ghosts/spirits, or other supernatural beings, and only Psychic Mediums, those who can see the invisible and the creatures he is fighting can see the energy crackling around his fists or energy blasts. The Spirit Strike touch/punch or blast does NO damage to mortals or creatures of magic.

**I.S.P. Cost:** 10 points to call for this defense against the supernatural for the duration noted above.

**7. Psychic Abilities:** The Psychic Medium's abilities have to do with the dead, the past and the Spirit Guide, and are *all* described under this P.C.C. The character does not get any additional psychic powers or abilities. As is so often the case, the powers of this Psychic Character Class (P.C.C.) are very specific and unique unto itself.

**8. Educational Background of the Psychic.** Select or roll for a random educational level and range of skills. Gets one bonus Lore or Ancient W.P. skill of choice.

**Note:** Also see Creating the Spirit Guide and Paranormal Abilities of the Psychic Medium via the Spirit Guide.

## Creating the Spirit Guide

To make it quick and easy for players to roll up their character's Spirit Guide, we provide the following tables. For random determination roll percentile dice, otherwise pick one or make your own unique ghostly companion.

**Number of Spirit Guides:** One.

**Availability of the Spirit Guide:** The Spirit Guide is usually present and accounted for 80% of the time, and seen standing at the Psychic Medium's side or nearby. The Guide shares a similar alignment and outlook to the living character, and both work toward the same goals. However, the ghost is sometimes *unable* to offer help or provide advice because it doesn't know what to say or lacks a proper skill or frame of reference. It may also *refuse* to speak or help when it is angry with the Psychic Medium, at which point it seems to disappear and cannot be seen by the psychic or other Mediums. There are also times when the Spirit Guide vanishes for a period of time and just isn't available. Where it goes is unknown. Perhaps into a sort of limbo holding area, but when it is gone, it seems to leave the physical plane entirely and does not know what's happening to the Psychic Medium or the world around him. (The Spirit never says where it has been or what it was doing, only that it could not be at the psychic's side for a time. End of story.) Similarly, there are times when the ghost will inform its partner that it cannot accompany the character into a particular environment, place or setting, or that it is being held at bay, kept away, or banished, by magic or supernatural power, forcing the Psychic Medium to proceed on his own, the Spirit Guide reappearing at his side when he exits the area protected from spirits. However, in all instances where the Spirit Guide is not talking or is otherwise unavailable, the Psychic Medium's paranormal abilities remain intact and operational. **Note:** Psychic Mediums feel less confident when their Spirit Guide is missing in action, and suffer a penalty of -10% to all skill performance and -1 on all saving throws.

**Link to the Psychic Medium:** The Spirit Guide is emotionally and physically *linked* to the human to whom it is attached. That living individual is the ghost's connection to our physical world. If he or she dies, the Spirit Guide vanishes.

Fundamentally a guardian spirit, the ghost seldom leaves the side of its living partner, except as noted above. Thus, the Spirit Guide is always present, usually standing behind or to the side of the Psychic Medium, or very nearby (within six feet/1.8 m) and always within line of sight, observing what the Medium is doing, looking at or experiencing. Wherever the Psychic Medium goes, the Spirit Guide follows right on his heels. Whatever the Medium experiences, the Spirit Guides bears witness.

**Friend and Mentor/"Guide."** The Spirit Guide, regardless of its alignment or the alignment of the living person to whom it is linked, is completely loyal to its Psychic Medium. While it will not lie or do anything contrary to its alignment, the ghost is a spiritual "guide" and "mentor," as well as being the conduit through which the psychic draws his paranormal abilities. Consequently, a Spirit Guide does *NOT* scout ahead, peak around corners, sneak under doors to see what waits on the other side, or spy on others. Nor does it provide answers or lead the human character by the hand. Instead, it nudges, encourages and guides the character along life's paths so he grows as a person. Remember, the Spirit Guide has no direct influence on the physical world, and only its living partner can hear it.

**Influence Over the Physical World:** None, except through the influence the Spirit Guide has on the Psychic Medium and the paranormal abilities it provides him via their link.

**Alignment:** The same as, or similar to, the Psychic Medium. If different, the Spirit Guide's alignment will be better than its mortal companion. The Spirit Guide and the player character should have many things in common if not be out and out kindred souls and like-minded beings.

**Hit Points:** There are creatures, magic and psychic attacks (the Spirit Strike being one of them) that can hit and hurt entities and spirits. Thus, for the purpose of combat, the Spirit Guide has half as many Hit Points (no S.D.C.) as the Psychic Medium to whom it is linked. Most vanish when they lose half their Hit Points, returning when the enemy is gone or has been otherwise subdued. If the ghost loses all of its Hit Points, it vanishes for 24 hours. In this case, the Psychic Medium retains all of his paranormal powers, but suffers the penalties for being without his spiritual counselor (-10% to all skill performance and -1 on all saving throws). **Note:** Spirit Guides are seldom targets of attacks because they don't represent a threat to beings in the physical world, thus they are usually ignored by other spiritis, supernatural beings and practitioners of magic.

**P.P.E.:** 2D6 points. **I.S.P.:** None.

**Gender:** 01-50% Male, 51-00% Female.

**Kinship to the Psychic:**

01-50% Ancestor/family member.

51-00% No blood ties; an unrelated stranger.

**Age (i.e., when the ghost died):** Roll percentile or pick one.

01-20% Child: 2D6+5 years old (reduce skill knowledge by one for each set of skills available to it).

21-40% Young Adult: 2D6+17 years old.

41-60% Adult: 3D6+32 years old (gets one additional skill of choice from those available).

61-80% Elderly: 4D6+50 years old (gets two additional skills of choice from those available).

81-100% Ancient: 4D6+76 years old (gets one additional Skill Program).

**Cause of Death:** Whatever the cause, the Spirit Guide has come to terms with and does not suffer any lingering trauma or resentment about it. What's done is done. Roll percentile or pick one.

01-20% Natural causes, peaceful.

21-40% Accident.

41-70% Disease/illness.

71-85% War or violence.

86-100% Murder (deliberately killed) or unjust persecution (died as a result of unjust imprisonment, torture, or execution).

**Nationality:** The choices are so many, and the ghost is so personally linked to the living, that we leave this choice to the player.

**Time Line:** How recently the Spirit Guide walked among the living.

01-30% Modern: Died only 5D6 years ago, within a generation or two (a generation is typically considered to be 20 years).

31-60% Turn of the century: Died 1D6x10+40 years ago.

61-90% Olden days: Died 1D6x100 years ago.

91-100% Long ago in ancient times: Died 1D4x1000 years ago.

**Personality Traits:**

01-10% Paternal, kind and caring.

11-20% Mentor/teacher type, but patient and kind.

21-30% Mentor/teacher type, but impatient and stern. Not bossy or mean, but there may be times when the Spirit Guide voices its frustration or disapproval.

31-40% Quiet and shy, but not afraid to speak his or her mind.

41-50% Positive and jovial; the glass is always *half full*.

51-60% Pragmatic and reserved, stoic even; the glass is often *half empty*.

61-70% Inquisitive and caring; likes a challenge, puzzles and new ideas and experiences. Encourages the same in its living partner.

71-80% A generous and kind people person (er, ghost) who likes to help others. Believes people (not things or personal reputation or reward) come first. Very empathic to the plight of his or her living partner and other people.

81-90% Artistic and sensitive. Enjoys life, creativity and beauty. Hates and saddened by death, cruelty and ugliness.

91-100% Science and fact minded. Likes to see the proof/evidence and details. Doesn't trust strangers or practitioners of magic, but trusts his or her living partner completely (and vice versa).

**Skills Based on the Background, Trade or Education of the**

**Ghost:** The Spirit Guide's range of knowledge is limited to its past life, and may be of little help in certain situations and of great help in others. That having been said, most Spirit Guides were once psychics, shamans, priests, scholars/thinkers or people with special gifts or insight about the world and/or the supernatural. While they have no psychic powers available to them as ghosts, they have their own range of skills, beliefs and thoughts. Roll percentile or pick one.

**01-10% Artist:** Was an artist of some kind, from painter or sculptor to musician, poet, writer, photographer, etc. **Skills:** Basic Math, 1D4+1 Domestic skills (+3 additional musical skills if a musician), plus 1D6+2 Technical skills, and speaks 1D4 Languages. +20% to all art related skills and +10% on all others.

**11-20% Work/Labor:** Some form of manual labor from farming to digging ditches, to hefting boxes, to delivering the mail, to operating machines or standing on one's feet as a guard or fry cook, and similar laborious ways to earn a living. Low skill level. **Skills:** Basic Math, 1D4 Physical skills, 1D4+1 Domestic skills, 1D4+1 Technical skills, one Transportation skill and one Language. +20% to work related skills and +10% on all others.

**21-35% Magician:** Studied or practiced the mystic arts. **Skills:** Has an in-depth understanding of the principles of magic and ley lines, knows 1D4+3 Lore skills (+20%), 1D6+2 other Technical skills (+10%), speaks 1D4+1 Languages (+20%), reads 1D4 Languages (+10%) and knows Basic and Advanced Math.

**36-50% Shaman:** Has a basic understanding of magic, knows 1D4+1 Lore skills (+15%), 1D4+2 Wilderness skills (+10%), 1D4+1 Domestic skills (+10%), speaks 1D4 Languages (+20%), First Aid (+10%), Holistic Medicine (+20%), and Basic Math.

**51-65% Learned/Scholar:** May include such backgrounds as student, teacher, professor, reporter, researcher, actuary, historian, archivist, aristocrat, priest, monk, world traveler, and avid reader. **Skills:** Two science skills of choice (+10%), 1D4 Communication skills (+10%; excluding Language), 1D4 Domestic or Paranormal skills (+5%), 1D6+2 Technical skills of choice (+15%), speaks 1D4+2 Languages (+15%), reads 1D4 Languages (+10%), one Transport skill and Basic Math (+4%).

**66-75% Social Engineer:** Observed and studied people and could be a psychologist, anthropologist, nurse, priest, or humanitarian. Gets Anthropology, History, Mythology, 1D4 Lore skills of choice, all at +20%, plus 1D6 Technical or Communication skills of choice (+10%), 1D4 Domestic skills (+5%), speaks 1D4 Languages (+10%), reads 1D4 Languages (+5%), one Transportation skill and Basic Math.

**76-90% Occultist/Supernaturalist:** Was a Parapsychologist, Psychic Medium, Psychic Sensitive/fortune teller, Diviner, priest, wise man, demon slayer or other profession that dealt with studying and dealing with the supernatural. **Skills:** Has a basic understanding of magic, knows 1D4+3 Lore skills of choice (+15%), Anthropology or Psychology (+10%), Astrology or Archaeology (+10%), 1D4 Espionage skills (+5%) or Weapon Proficiencies, 1D4 Wilderness or Transportation skills (+5%), 1D4 Technical skills (+5%),

speaks two Languages (+10%), reads one (+15%), and Basic Math.

**91-00% Military:** Was a professional soldier, mercenary, police officer, or other type of protector or lawman. Skills: Gets Recognize Weapon Quality, Military Etiquette and Law (general), each with a +15% bonus, 1D4 Military or Rogue skills (+10%), three W.P. skills, 1D4 Physical skills, 1D4 Domestic skills, two Transportation or Communication skills (+5%), speaks two Languages (+10%), reads one (+15%), and Basic Math.

## Paranormal Abilities of the Psychic Medium via the Spirit Guide

### Communicate with Spirit Guide

The Spirit Guide can only communicate with its chosen living partner. We use the term “partner” because man and spirit work in concert toward the same goals and most Mediums consider their Guide to be a trusted friend constantly at their side.

The Spirit Guide is a near constant companion who stays at the side of the Psychic Medium. Whatever the character sees, hears and experiences, the Spirit Guide is an invisible and silent witness. The “ghost” is present to help, but not lead, so it is a silent partner using itself as a conduit from which the psychic gets his many other abilities. As a “guide” the spirit is present to help the Psychic Medium develop and use his psychic powers of mediumship, but of greater importance, to find his life path and to help others. **Note:** 45% of all Psychic Mediums are Principled and 40% Scrupulous, and most are driven to help the living and dead.

**Dreams:** Spirit Guides primarily *speak* in dreams in which they usually appear in a friendly setting to talk and exchange ideas, discuss problems or puzzles, and offer advice. Again, even in a dream where the spirit appears as alive as the character himself, the Spirit Guide plays the role of mentor and encourager. Rather than point out specific things or tell the character what to do, it asks questions like, “What do you think,” “Why would she do that,” etc., or says things like, “That doesn’t make sense to me,” “That seems likely,” or offers advice like, “You’re thinking with your heart not your head,” or “You’re not seeing the forest for the trees,” or “Maybe you should go back to the scene of the crime,” or “review the evidence, I think you’re missing something,” and sometimes offering its own ideas, “What if . . .” – but even then leaving the character to draw his own conclusions. The Spirit Guide may also take the role of the character’s conscience or parent figure, “How could you say that, you owe so and so an apology,” or “that’s not like you, what are you thinking,” or “you can do that, but you know it’s wrong.” If challenged (“Yeah, well what am I supposed to do, huh? I’m in a tight spot!”), the spirit is likely to say something like, “I don’t know, Jason, but not this. You know you’ll regret it (or it will hurt others),” and so on. Advice might be something like, “There has to be another way. Can’t you talk to so and so?” or “What about . . .”

**Phantom Voice While Sleeping:** The Spirit Guide can call its living partner’s name or shout a word or two (“Wake up,” “Get out,” “Fire,” “Danger,” “Demon,” “Ghost,” “The phone,”

and similar) to wake the Psychic Medium up or to warn him of danger or alert him to something while he sleeps or dozes. Only the Psychic Medium hears the call.

**Random Thought:** The Spirit Guide sometime pipes in with a random thought, “Yes, that’s it,” “No, that can’t be right,” “Slow down,” “Be careful,” “What about the book,” “Think about what you’re saying,” “Stop it,” “Don’t do it,” and so forth. Only the Psychic Medium hears the words.

**One on One Discussion:** The Psychic Medium can mentally (or verbally) converse with his Spirit Guide at an I.S.P. cost of 10 points for a maximum of two minutes. When this is done, the psychic can speak to his Spirit Guide as if there were another, living person standing next to him. Others don’t see or hear a thing, only the Psychic Medium can hear his ghostly partner. Channeling information is done only to get advice, instructions (“If you know how to open this device, I need you to tell me now.”) or information (“What do you know about this place,” or person or monster, or magic, etc.). The Spirit Guide’s range of knowledge, however, is limited to its past life and may or may not be of much help depending on the situation. That having been said, most Spirit Guides were once psychics, shamans, priests, scholars or people with special gifts and insight about the world of the supernatural themselves. While they have no psychic powers available to them as ghosts, they do know things and have their own range of skills. I.S.P. Cost: 10 points for a maximum of two minutes. Only the Psychic Medium can hear his Spirit Guide.

### See & Communicate with Other Spirits

The Psychic Medium’s link to the other side via his Spirit Guide enables the character to sense the presence of other Spirit Guides, ghosts and Entities. He can even see Entities when they are in their invisible energy form. This ability is automatic and does not require any special focus or concentration. If a pair of Poltergeists are playing in the room, he’ll sense them from outside and see them the moment he enters the room. Likewise, if a Haunting Entity (a sort of ghost) walks past the door, the Medium will see it in whatever manifestation the Entity has currently taken for itself.

I.S.P. Cost: None, automatic.

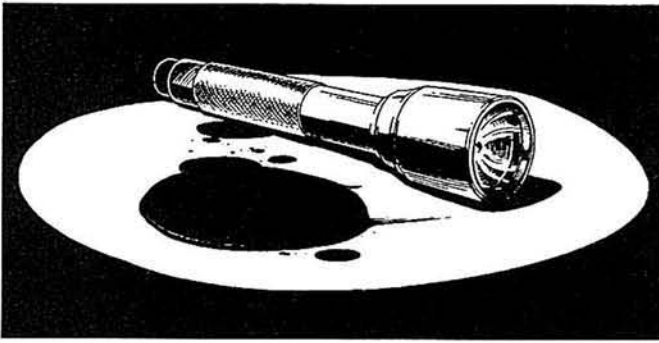
Sensing Range: 600 foot (183 m) radius.

Visual Range: Line of sight.

Limits of Communication: As a “Medium” the psychic can also speak to Entities (all) and other ghost-like beings, all of whom see him as a kindred spirit.

**Poltergeists** will listen to the Psychic Medium and can usually be calmed down and momentarily made to behave or sent away to another part of the house or area.

**Haunting Entities** are the most cooperative, telling him everything they know, though their information will be interlaced with their own tragic history, woes, fears and desires (which may enable the Psychic Medium to help them and free the Entities from their bondage on Earth). Extremely overwrought, hate-filled and evil Haunting Entities/ghosts will speak to the psychic character but may refuse to help or only offer a tiny bit of helpful information. They may also threaten to cause other



problems or hang around to taunt and jeer the Psychic Medium or frighten those around him. However, these ghostly beings know the Medium can see them and could take action against them, so most leave matters as threats they never intend to do. **Note:** They usually leave when ignored and usually back down when challenged or threatened by an angry Psychic Medium (and his Spirit Guide at his side).

**Syphons, Tectonic and Possessing Entities** will stop, listen and consider what a Psychic Medium has to say, but are not compelled to obey or do anything asked of them. Because of this, any "help" one of these Entities may offer must be viewed with suspicion, and is likely to be a lie or a trick to confuse and annoy the psychic or his comrades. **Note:** The Psychic Medium can only see a *Possessing Entity* when it is in control of the host body. It is invisible to him when it lets the host have control of the body.

**Other Spirits** may also stop, listen and consider what a Psychic Medium has to say, but remain free to do as they will.

## Spirit Channeling/Seance

This ability is often mistaken for possession, but it is not done against the psychic's will and never lasts for more than a few minutes. To channel, the psychic opens himself to become a living conduit to spirits and supernatural energy beings who temporarily enter and take over the Medium's body. This is done for the express purpose of communication. Once the spirit is inside the Psychic Medium, it can use his body to communicate with other people. In this state, the spirit can hear, speak and write, but little more. Though the Medium under the influence of a channeled spirit may wave his hands and flail about, shout and even stand up or point, that is the limit of physical control by the spirit/entity/energy being inside of him.

Any type of Entity, energy or spirit/ghost-like being can be *allowed* inside the Psychic Medium to communicate, but the supernatural being must be nearby and wish to communicate or nothing happens. Actually, some other spirit may choose to enter the Medium and speak. The spirit is not compelled to be honest or helpful. Good or needy spirits (the latter are those seeking help from the living, the former to help the living) may answer questions truthfully and try to help as much as possible. Evil and selfish spirits may issue threats, twist the truth, lie, and mislead.

**I.S.P. Cost:** 12

**Questions:** Spirits are unused to being heard by the living and are not used to speaking. Thus, they are not usually proactive and for the best results, should be asked specific questions by one person at a time. If people all talk at once, the ghost be-

comes confused, frustrated and angry, causing it to leave early. Likewise, even a rude or nasty spirit should not be insulted or it is likely to vacate the Medium before it has provided the information it may know. **Note:** Just because contact is made with a spirit, even the specific spirit desired, it doesn't mean the spirit has the information the player characters seek. Likewise, if a spirit doesn't understand a question or if the right question(s) isn't asked, it may not offer everything it knows and may fail to provide the information the characters seek, even when it knows the answers. Remember, spirits are not used to communicating with the living and need to be prodded and invited to speak about what they know.

**The Channeling Process:** The psychic needs to relax and open his mind to the spirit world. This is done by entering a light meditative trance (takes 1D6+4 melee rounds). Once the mind is opened, the Medium hums, speaks softly the name or basic identity of the spirit with whom contact is desired (i.e., "Fred Bishop," or "the spirit of the sad little girl," etc.) and waits (1D6 minutes). Meanwhile, the other participants should also concentrate on making contact with the ghost. The more positive and unified the group is, the better the chances of contact. This mental process sends a beacon through the Spirit Guide and into the realm of the supernatural. With any luck, the spirit desired will hear the request as if someone were calling his or her name. However, other spirits in the area also hear the call, and though they are not the one being sought, may rush forward and take that spirit's place, especially if it takes more than one or two minutes for the desired spirit to respond.

**Duration of Contact:** 1D4+1 minutes before the entity/spirit pulls back its energy.

**Success Ratio:** For best results the Psychic Medium should channel when he knows one or more spirits are nearby: 01-50% +3% per level of experience, +20% if the spirit desires to communicate. **Penalties:** -20% if the spirit is reluctant or unwilling, -5% for each participant who does not want to make contact (possibly out of fear, possibly as a disbeliever or a plain, old disruptive jerk), -15% for each Nega-Psychic in the group or Nega-Psychic within range of influence.

**Requirements & Restrictions:** There must be at least one other person present to ask the questions. The Psychic Medium is the conduit for the spirit and not only is he unable to ask questions, but the entire experience is a blank slate. The Medium doesn't remember anything while he was in the trance and controlled by the spirit. This is why Psychic Mediums like to audio record and/or videotape communication sessions.

It is best if one person asks all the questions even if the spirit singles out one or more of the other participants (evil ones do so to provoke conflict or to distract from the real issue). If others speak, it should be one at a time.

The Psychic Medium can only perform Psychic Channeling *once* for each level of experience within a 24 hour time period, and needs a short, five or six minute break between each experience to rest and recover his energy.

**Negative Effect on the Psychic Medium:** Channeling takes considerable focus and energy. After a successful spirit channeling, the character feels tired and weak. Reduce P.S., P.E., and Spd attributes as well as all combat bonuses and the number of attacks by 50% for 1D4 minutes (+1D4 minutes additional if

forced to take action without an opportunity to rest). Restored to normal once that time (of rest) elapses.

## Auditory Trance

Emotions, experiences, and trauma leave an invisible, psychic impression on physical places like an afterimage or a sort of psychic scar or imprint. Certain supernatural beings, like the Haunting Entity, can sense these impressions in a profound way, and are even attracted to them like flies to honey. Like a Haunting Entity, the Psychic Medium can also pick up little snippets of information from the past by entering into an Auditory Trance. This requires a conscious effort and some sort of specific focus, such as trying to discover what happened when so and so was attacked or murdered. A specific person, event or time must be the focus of the trance. The more recent the event/incident/time period, the better the result.

**Success ratio based on the passage of time.** Roll percentile dice. A roll under the number listed indicates success. A roll above that number means failure – no sound bite or impression whatsoever.

- Within 48 hours: 98% likelihood of success.
- Within one week: 90% likelihood of success.
- Within two weeks: 85% likelihood of success.
- Within four weeks: 80% likelihood of success.
- Within three months: 70% chance of success.
- Within six months: 60% chance of success.
- Within one year: 50% chance of success.
- Within two years: 40% chance of success.
- Within five years: 30% chance of success.
- Within ten years: 20% chance of success.
- Within 20 years: 10% chance of success.
- Within 50 years: 5% chance of success.
- Within 100 years: 3% chance of success.
- Beyond 100 years: 1% chance of success.

**I.S.P. Cost:** The Psychic Medium must also expend 20 I.S.P. points.

**The Trance:** What an Auditory Trance does is put the Psychic Medium in tune with the psychic vibrations of the room or small area he is trying to “read.” The entire experience takes 1D4 melee rounds (15-60 seconds), though it usually seems more like 2-5 minutes to the psychic.

The trance momentarily shuts out the rest of the world, allowing the Psychic Medium to hear a cacophony of sound rushing past him as if someone were fast forwarding an audio tape. Most of the sounds are muffled, pushed into the background and are mostly indistinguishable. The Psychic Medium might be able to recognize laughter, voices speaking, the sounds of a party, a television in the background, a dog barking, birds chirping, a thunderstorm, and similar sounds, but cannot actually hear the words being spoken, until one particular sound stands out like a cannon blast.

This identifiable sound could be a gunshot, crying, glass breaking, or a scream to an actual *word* or *series of words*. Whatever the sound is, he knows it is always important and a clue to what happened, who died, who committed the evil act,

where it happened, where the victim or perpetrator might currently be located, and similar.

**A single word might be a name.** “Carolyn,” “Kent,” “Williamson,” etc., and may identify the (unknown) victim or the (unknown) perpetrator, or a (unknown) witness. The word or name will always provide information that is not yet known, or fills in a missing piece of the puzzle or serves as a new clue. Consequently, it will not be the name of a known victim, though it may be the name of a *known suspect* or a *known associate/family member/friend*, or an *unknown perpetrator*.

**A single word might also indicate a place:** “upstairs,” “outside,” “Mike’s,” “Chicago,” etc. Again, it will be an important clue that has immediate recognition and importance (this is often the case), or which will have significance later, when more clues are uncovered.

**A phrase may indicate** a person, place or thing, but may also provide a time, or motive, or similar detail. “Frank, it’s 1:15, we have to go,” or “open the safe,” “where is it hidden,” “give me the book (or wallet, or photographs, or bracelet, or artifact, etc.),” “don’t make me hurt you,” “you shouldn’t have threatened Tony,” “you shouldn’t have double-crossed the Consortium,” “can’t trust you,” “never liked you, Chrissy,” “can’t risk you going to the police,” “do it, Zachary,” and so forth. It might also indicate an accident, “be careful,” “watch out,” “oh, no,” and so on.

**Background secondary sound.** During an auditory trance, the psychic will also hear and remember any significant background noise. Perhaps one or more voices in the background or crying, or the crash of a vase or a porcelain statue, indicating someone else was present at the time. A witness? An accomplice? Who? Speaking of time, the sound might be a chiming clock or church bells or the nightly news coming on the TV, or the (timed) sprinklers going off, all of which would indicate a specific moment in time. A merry-go-round, engine sound (delivery truck, perhaps), rainstorm, sound of a party, traffic, the clatter and clanging at a train crossing, honking geese, barking dogs and other animal noises, music and distinct sounds might also indicate a specific (or likely range of) location(s) and/or time. Chanting, a specific verse or language, background music, etc., might, likewise, indicate a ritual or ceremony.

If someone was murdered, even quiet sounds like the knife being stabbed through clothes and flesh (perhaps once, perhaps repeatedly), a clunk on the head by a heavy object, a body hitting the ground, or the gurgling or gasping of air from strangulation will be heard distinctly. Actually, this may be a primary or secondary sound depending on the significance of the clue/information and the situation.

**Recognition.** First, the Psychic Medium knows the sound, word or phrase always has significance and is a *vital clue* – the next place to look, the location where the crime really took place, whether the victim knew his/her attacker, perhaps even the name of the killer (“please Thomas, don’t do this . . .”).

Second, a word or phrase will always be heard *in the voice of the person who spoke it* (i.e., the victim, the perpetrator, an accomplice, a witness, etc.). This means the Medium will know if it came from a male, female, or child.

Third, the psychic remembers the sound and the words clearly and correctly, so a phrase will not be forgotten or jumbled, and the psychic *may* recognize the voice (or sound) the

moment he hears it in the trance, or if it is someone he knows or has recently met or heard in the last 48.

Fourth, the psychic is likely (01-68% chance) to recognize the specific voice (or sound) if he hears it again within the next 72 hours; +20% if the voice speaks the exact same word(s) or a very similar phrase, and +10% if it is a threat directed at the Psychic Medium or one of his comrades. All bonuses are cumulative. The character must hear the words himself to recognize them.

**I.S.P. Cost:** 8 points per each Auditory Trance.

**Limitations:** In addition to the passage of time, there are other limitations and restrictions as follows.

1) The Psychic Medium can only try to get an auditory reading once or twice. An Auditory Trance either works or it doesn't. The psychic cannot repeatedly try again and again until he gets something. If he fails, however, he can try again 24 hours after his first failed attempt, but does so at a -20% penalty to be successful. Nor can the character do several readings to get multiple clues and information. Once the trance is successful, that's it. A different Psychic Medium can try his luck, but if he too is focused on the same person, same event or same time-line, he is likely to get the same sound bite/clue. (Note: Game Master's discretion as to whether or not the second Psychic Medium gets a new clue or the same one.) Of course, other classes of psychics can use their different senses and abilities to get additional clues and insight.

2) An Auditory Trance is a method of channeling the psychic vibrations of one specific room, or some contained immediate area such as the front or back porch, wine cellar, basement, crawl space, patio, backyard, trailer, the south end of a parking lot or construction site, a specific street corner, the scene of the crime, an automobile (must be inside it), etc. This means, however, that a Psychic Medium may be able to follow an invisible trail, at least for a short while, by following the clues or his gut instincts and performing an Auditory Trance at several different locations (from the kitchen to the back porch, to the backyard, to the alley or driveway, etc.).

3) Only the Psychic Medium hears the sounds or words.

## Olfactory Symbols & Omens

Scientists agree that the sense of smell is strongly tied to memory and recollection. A particular smell might remind you of Grandma's house and unleash a torrent of fond memories and warm emotions. The smell of antiseptic mingled with blood might remind you of the intensive care unit and the death of a parent or grandparent, and a feeling of loss or sorrow. Meanwhile, the aroma of fresh baked bread might remind you of the bakery you passed every day on the way to school or of mom's home cooking.

The Psychic Medium's link to his Spirit Guide provides the character with additional information, clues and warnings through the character's sense of smell, but not ordinary smells, these are *phantom odors* that hold special meanings.

It's important to note that phantom odors do not occur on a regular or constant basis like the ordinary sense of smell of the living. Phantom odors only happen when the Psychic Medium is concentrating on a specific problem, he spends six I.S.P., and is

actively searching for clues ("what happened here?") or trying to put together the pieces of a puzzle/mystery. Thus, though it may sound a bit humorous, the Psychic Medium can sniff out evil and the supernatural. If the phantom odor is strong, the danger is immediate or the supernatural presence close at hand. A slight smell is likely to indicate a presence or involvement of the supernatural in the past.

**I.S.P. Cost:** Six points to call forth the Olfactory sensory ability at will.

**Duration:** One melee round.

**Note:** Phantom smells *may* also occur as an *automatic warning system* (at no I.S.P. cost) to alert the character to the presence of the supernatural (that is important to know about) and immediate danger, especially if that danger is at the hands of supernatural evil.

## Notable Phantom Odors

Each notable smell indicates or symbolizes a specific thing and may be good or bad, happy or sad, innocent or deadly.

**Alyssum:** A little white flower, symbolizing life and purity.

**Apple or Fruity:** Goodness, sweet, tasty, desire.

**Baby Smell/Baby Powder:** Represents human birth, or an infant or young child.

**Baked Bread:** Symbolizes hearth and home, food and nourishment, comfort and familiarity.

**Bleach or Disinfectant:** Symbolizes making something clean by scrubbing away a stain.

**Chamomile:** Symbolizes healing.

**Chemical Smell:** Symbolizes sanitized, institution, hospital, sickness.

**Cinnamon:** Represents good fortune, something to look forward to, on the right track.

**Citrus:** Symbolizes natural freshness and cleanliness (includes lemons and oranges).

**Coffee:** A fresh coffee smell symbolizes morning, specifically a work morning. A strong or burnt coffee smell represents a long workday, staying awake, sleeplessness.

**Cut Grass:** Represents summertime and goodness.

**Diesel Exhaust:** Symbolizes transportation and big cities.

**Lilac & Blossoms (apple, cherry):** Symbolizes springtime and rebirth.

**Musty:** Symbolizes the old, aging, or the forgotten.

**Peppermint:** Freshness and the wind.

**Plant/Tree Resin or Sap:** Symbolizes blood and blood ties (ancestors and relatives).

**Roses:** Symbolize love, both family and romantic love, closeness and happiness.

**Sweat/Body Odor:** Indicates hard labor or confinement.

**Vanilla:** Symbolizes cooking and baking, food, warmth and prosperity.

**Wood Burning:** Purification through fire (a lighter smell, hickory or pine, perhaps) or destruction by burning (heavy, smoky smell).

## Omens of the Supernatural

When there is a warning, omen or sign that can't be ignored, the Psychic Medium is suddenly accosted by a *phantom smell* that only he detects. There is no I.S.P. or P.P.E. cost involved, the phantom smell just occurs. This is especially common when a supernatural force has been present in the last 72 hours, as well as when a supernatural presence(s) is nearby. The scent or smell cannot, however, be traced to any one person if the supernatural being has used magic or a shape changing ability to appear human or as an ordinary animal, or has taken possession of some poor soul's body. In many cases, the phantom smell just marks the creature's passage or its current presence in the general vicinity. When investigating a crime or other past event, such an odor indicates the supernatural being's presence, involvement or complicity in that past event. **Note:** To deliberately search for an olfactory clue, the Psychic medium must expend 6 I.S.P., but omens and warnings simply happen, unsought, and without I.S.P. cost.

**Charcoal or Coal Burning:** Fire Elemental or fire-based supernatural being.

**Damp Earth:** Earth Elemental or earth-based supernatural spirit.

**Feces/Excrement:** Warns of the presence of Deevils, Lesser and Greater.

**Garlic:** Warns of vampires/the undead.

**Incense (light):** A smoky perfume smell that symbolizes ghosts and Entities that are not an immediate threat or danger (includes Poltergeists and some Haunting Entities).

**Incense (heavy):** A smoky perfume smell that symbolizes wicked ghosts and Entities that hurt people or represent an immediate threat or danger (includes Syphons, Possessing Entities, etc. – Tectonic Entities have a *metallic* odor).

**Machine Oil and/or Burning Wire/Plastic:** Warns of Gremlins.

**Musk:** Warns of Were-Beasts and other supernatural predators.

**Ocean/Sea (has a tinge of salt to it):** Water Elementals or water-based supernatural spirit.

**Onions:** Caution, something is not right, beware.

**Ozone:** Indicates the use of magic. The scent is especially strong when the magic deals with the creation of dimensional portals, Rifts and Teleportation, but may also indicate an Alien Intelligence or Sowki.

**Rotting Human Flesh:** Symbolizes murder, death and corpses.

**Rotting Meat/Dead Animal:** Turns the stomach and warns of Ghouls (most varieties, including the Dybbuk, Dimensional Ghoul and Grave Ghoul), but also the Nacarant.

**Skunk:** A bad omen, turn back, go away.

**Sour Milk:** Warns of evil.

**Sulfur/Brimstone/Rotten Egg:** Warns of Greater Demons.

**Urine (cat urine specifically) and Hot Tar/Asphalt:** Warns of Lesser Demons.

**Wet Dog (stinky):** Warns of Hell Hounds.

# Palladium Fantasy RPG<sup>®</sup>

## Construct Animation Magic

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

By Evan Cooney

Ages ago, when the Elf-Dwarf War began, the Elves rapidly realized they would need some force to counter the Rune Magic of the Dwarves. They handed the task of finding it to their scholars and mages in the hidden forest city of Moralla Laet. Within centuries, not long at all for an Elf, word came that they were on the verge of a major breakthrough. The Elves poured resources and manpower into the frozen north, sending many of their best Wizards and scientists to expedite the discoveries that were promised. The greatest product of this effort was a new school of magic called *Construct Animation*. The Elves found that by channeling large amounts of their own energy into inanimate objects they could give them magical powers and a limited intellect. Unfortunately for the Elves, this was a highly unstable process, and many mages were nearly killed when they were unable to control how much of themselves was given up to the creation. Even worse, all of these creations were temporary, lasting as long as a month, but sometimes as little as a few minutes! With the war raging, the Elves raced to find solutions.

The first improvement was to stabilize the channeling of energy, allowing only very specific amounts to be pumped into the spell. Naturally, the less that was given, the less significant the result was, but it was a great improvement over the uncontrollable early days. While these small creations were impressive by the standards of anyone else, the Elves were not satisfied. If they were going to counter the immense powers of the Dwarves, they were going to need something powerful and long lasting, and they were going to need it fast! The Elves drove themselves to find ways of extending the duration of their creations, eventually even discovering ways to make them permanent. The toll was great for these improvements, but the Elves of Moralla Laet did not care; they were at war for the survival of their race, and victory was worth any price.

Try as they might, they could not create a weapon to rival a Rune blade. While the Dwarven creations harnessed the bound spirits of living entities, the Elves were seeking to create a mind from nothing, something that simply could not be done. All of





their creations, weapons or otherwise, demonstrated only a very basic intelligence, comprehending instructions and acting as ordered, but never forming their own thoughts or taking the initiative. The Elves strove hard, feeling the pressure of the war closer to home as the battlefields of the New Kingdom began moving northward. They sought more resources, magic, and methods for destroying the enemy.

An up and coming young Animation master named Gilthinias was the first to discover the secret of imparting true intelligence into his creations, but he would pay a terrible price. Working closely with his Summoner friends, Gilthinias would create a magic circle and ritual to impart a fragment of his own mind into an Animation as he created it. Ambition and overconfidence proved Gilthinias' end, for in his first attempt he strove not to animate just one creation, but four. With his sword, his long bow, his spell book, and his favorite chair at the four corners of his circle, Gilthinias invoked his new ritual, fully expecting to become master over the most powerful Animations ever created. Alas, the toll on his body was too great, and when the Summoners came to check upon him an hour later, they found his withered body lying in the middle of the circle, his dried skin stretched taut over his bones. To their amazement, however, the four objects were all hopping about the room, speaking with each other and trying to establish where they were and how they had come to be.

Gilthinias was given a hero's funeral, and his notes were rapidly put into use by other Animators to create individual objects with both power and true intelligence. The Elves quickly discovered that unlike Rune objects, their intelligent Animations were free-thinking to the point that they could argue with their "masters," refuse to cast spells, and even try to escape from the city. Rather than binding a mind to the object, they found they

had given the object a mind of its own. Even so, they continued their experiments in the desperate hope that a solution could be found. Soon, however, it became apparent that the toll taken by even these single creations was too great to bear, and the great hope the Elves had had for a quick solution to the Rune Magic problem began to fade. Animation might have died out completely if it wasn't for a mistake made one night by one of the last practicing Animators.

Just as the Animator was at the peak of a new ritual, trying to reduce the side effects of the Animation process, his pet dog ran into the room and jumped into the circle where the intended object had been. With horror, the Animator watched as his pet was flung across the room with a pained bark. Expecting his best friend to be dead or maimed, the Elf hurried to the dog's side, only to leap back in astonishment as it twitched and grew, soon rising to its hind legs and turning to face him. Already faint from the ritual, the Animator passed out on the spot, only to wake in the arms of his now very intelligent, very bipedal, and very concerned dog! Uproar swept the city as word raced around of what had happened. Overnight, the Elf went from being one of the last Animators to the first of the great Elven Bio-Alchemists. Animals were brought in from the homes of the mages, as well as the woods around the city, and it was rapidly confirmed: the magic that could not create an intelligent being from nothing could take an already living animal and transform it into a fully bipedal and highly intelligent version of itself! The excitement was electric in the air — if they could not create weapons to rival those of the Dwarves, they would create an entire race of animal-beings to crush them with overwhelming numbers and ferocity!

While they fervently began production of an immense army, things elsewhere in the Elven Empire were not going so well.

Around this time, the Golden City of Baalgor was annihilated, bringing unprecedented chaos to Elvenkind. Furious at the malaise that had gripped the rest of the empire, and doubly eager now to find something that would turn the tide, the Elves of Moralla Laet brought in every type of beast. Large cats, rodents, bears, birds, and every conceivable creature were experimented with, but it would prove to be the canines that were the most easily changed and trained. The Elves trapped and imported huge numbers of canines of all types, especially foxes, coyotes, and wolves. In the dying days of the Elf-Dwarf War, a time when few messengers came from the south anymore, the Elves unleashed every possible Bio-Alchemical invocation upon these beasts. With dark thoughts filling their minds, and frequent insanities plaguing them as result of the use of incomprehensible magical forces, the Elves used harsh training and cruelty to mold the canine races into heartless warriors, ready to destroy all enemies.

It was at this point, with their armies finally ready to take to the field, that something happened that the Elves of Moralla Laet were completely unprepared for. Peace. Reconciliation. Purification. From their place so far in the north, hidden in the forest, the Elves could not comprehend the horrific casualties and destruction that had swept the rest of the Palladium World. To them they were just numbers, statistics lost under the tramping boot heels of 2,000 years of war. They sent the messengers away, stating that they, the Elves of Moralla Laet, would succeed where the others had failed. They would destroy the Dwarves with their powerful magic and newly created canine minions! To their amazement, they soon found themselves besieged by a *combined army* of both Elves and Dwarves calling themselves the Soldiers of Purification, demanding disarmament and immediate destruction of all the magical creations they had labored so long and hard to perfect.

Rather than give up everything, the Elves of Moralla Laet went to war against their own kind in what is most likely the last battle of the Elf-Dwarf War. Though powerful, it was a fight they could not win. Within a few months, the Soldiers of Purification had swept away the warriors of Moralla Laet in a decisive battle, along with most of their animated comrades, mages, and many loyal canine soldiers. Just days later, the surviving Bio-Alchemists were executed for treason and for refusing to give up the dark arts, and the thousands of remaining canines and other animal-beings were sent out into the wilderness to die. The Soldiers of Purification then left from the north forever, content that they had cleansed it of the last remnants of the powers that once were in play there.

True, the city was cleansed, but not everything was gone; for when they departed from the north, the Soldiers of Purification left behind one remnant of what Moralla Laet had done. In the chaos and insanity of the final battle, a few apprentices of the Animation school fled deep into the woods accompanied by a small group of canine minions. Though they never were able to rediscover the secrets that their masters had held, these apprentices were able to recreate and redirect what they did know, and mold the art into what it is today.

# The Animator

If the G.M. allows it, a player character may choose to be an Animator, starting at first level, having been apprenticed to one of the rare Animators hidden in the north. The character must be an Elf, Wolfen, Coyle, or Kankoran; the reclusive and paranoid instructors accept no others, and no high level Animators are present in the rest of the world to instruct others. Animation is a lost art to most of the world! Modern Construct Animation Magic is close to its early roots, creating machine-like Animations and lesser magical items (lesser compared to Rune weapons and their ilk, anyway). The more advanced art of Bio-Alchemy is irrevocably lost, forever wiped out by the Soldiers of Purification.

## Animator O.C.C.

### Abilities and Bonuses

- 1. Spells:** Construct Animation is not the same as a Wizard's spell magic, and the Animator cannot learn Wizard spells other than those provided at certain levels to assist in his work. Similarly, a Wizard or other magic using O.C.C. cannot learn Construct Animation spells. As the Animator gains levels, new abilities will manifest themselves as his long periods of study and experimentation bear fruit. An Animator can use magic scrolls, provided they are in a language he understands, but he has no power of scroll conversion.
- 2. Identify Animation:** An Animator can automatically determine the presence of Animation in an object by touching it. He will not know the item's function or power level, only that it is an Animation. If contact is not possible, the Animator can attempt to recognize Animation from observation. He must observe the item in its waking state for at least 2 melees, and then roll. **Base Skill:** 35% +5% per each level beyond first. Note that this skill only applies to modern-type Animated objects, it will not work on the actually living *biological* creations of the lost school of Bio-Alchemy.
- 3. Sense and Use Ley Lines:** The Animator can sense the presence of ley lines and nexus points. While beneficial, an Animator's magic is not affected in the same way as a Wizard's. The Animator can draw upon the P.P.E. of the ley line/nexus to help fuel his creations, as well as to rapidly replenish his own P.P.E. supply, but there is no bonus to the strength or duration of his magic. Animators who establish themselves in one location will try to do so near a ley line, so they can reduce the strain on their own reserves of magic.
- 4. Recognize Enchantment:** Just as a doctor can recognize flu symptoms and disease, the Animator can recognize the influence of magic that charms, hypnotizes, or otherwise causes mind control (including trances, domination, compulsion, etc.). This ability also includes identifying magic sickness, curses, the effects of Faerie Food and Faerie Magic, and supernatural or magic possession. Illusions, metamorphosis, and psionic powers do not count as enchantment. **Base Skill:** 25% +5% per each level beyond first.
- 5. Recognize Magic:** The mage has a certain percentage chance to recognize a magic item by shape, inscription, magic symbols, or intuition (gut feeling). It is important to understand

that while the character may know something has magical properties, he does not know what powers the item may have or how to use it. **Base Skill:** 20% +5% per each level beyond first.

6. **Magic Bonuses:** +1 to save vs magic at levels one, three, six, ten, and fourteen. +3 to save vs Horror Factor and +2 to save vs possession. Spell Strength is 12, +1 at levels three, six, nine, twelve, and fifteen.
7. **P.P.E.:** All practitioners of magic are living batteries of mystic energy. The character draws from this energy to create magic and cast spells. Permanent P.P.E. Base: 3D4x10, in addition to the P.E. attribute number. Add 2D6+2 P.P.E. per each level of experience, starting at level one. The Animator can also draw on P.P.E. from ley lines, nexus points, storage devices, and other people whenever they are available. Animations are not alive, so neither Animators nor anyone else can siphon P.P.E. from them.

**Alignment:** Any.

**Attribute Requirements:** I.Q. 12 or higher, M.E. 10 or higher, P.E. 10 or higher.

**O.C.C. Skills:**

Languages: Native tongue (98%) and one of choice (+15%).

Literacy: Elven and one of choice (+15%).

Lore: Demons and Monsters (+20%)

Sculpting and Whittling (+15%)

W.P. One of Choice.

Hand to Hand: Basic

Hand to Hand: Basic can be changed to Hand to Hand: Expert for the cost of two O.C.C. Related Skills or Martial Arts for the cost of three O.C.C. Related Skills.

- O.C.C. Related Skills:** Select six other skills at level one, plus select one additional skill at levels three, six, nine, and twelve. All new skills start at level one proficiency.

Communications: Any (+10%).

Domestic: Any (+5%).

Espionage: Detect Concealment and Traps, Forgery, and Imitate Voices & Impersonation only (+5%).

Medical: Any (+10%).

Military: None.

Physical: Any, except Acrobatics, Gymnastics, Boxing, and Wrestling.

Rogue: Any.

Science: Any (+15%).

Scholar/Technical: Any (+10%).

Weapon Proficiencies: Any, except Lance and Long Bow.

Wilderness: Carpentry, Identify Plants & Fruits, Preserve Food, and Wilderness Survival only (+10% to Carpentry only).

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



**Starting Equipment:** Two sets of clothing, boots, a set of work gloves, belt, bedroll, backpack, one large sack, water skin, a 100 page notebook, 3 crow quill pens, a bottle of ink, a small kit of woodworking tools, tinderbox, a lantern, and a 50 foot (15.2 m) length of rope.

**Armor:** Starts with soft leather (A.R. 10, S.D.C. 20).

**Weapons:** A knife and one additional weapon of choice. All are basic S.D.C. weapons of good quality. Magic weapons and additional items are coveted by Animators, but must be acquired later. Animators have a strong attraction to heavy blunt weapons such as maces, Hercules clubs, and staves, as they seem to be the best method of destroying Animations run amok.

**Money:** The character starts with 150 in gold. Additional money will come from payment for services rendered and/or the acquisition of booty. A high level Animator could make a killing providing animated servants to the wealthy and royalty.

**Experience:** The Animator uses the Summoner experience chart.

## How Construct Animation Works

Construct Animation is the process of adding a certain amount of magic, intellect, and capability to an otherwise inanimate object. By exerting the proper effort, as well as P.P.E. and possibly his own Hit Points, the Animator can “bring to life” various servants and assistants. Animations can communicate with the Animator, though frequently on a very limited basis. Higher-level Animations can also communicate with those around them through extended telepathy or even regular speech. An Animation only knows the primary language of its creator, unless another language is granted to it as a skill in the creation process. It is important to note that despite all this, an Animation is not actually *alive*, no matter how advanced it may be or how intelligent it becomes. This can be both a blessing and a curse. On the one hand, Animations are not affected by things like fatigue, psychological or emotional warfare, or a desire to second-guess their purpose or motivation. On the down side, Animations lack true feelings and emotions, function essentially like a machine, and have no abilities beyond those the Animator imbues them with. For exceptions to both these rules, see *Fifteenth Level: Artificial Intelligence*.

All Animations have two states, awake and asleep. In its waking state, the Animated object is communicating, moving around, and is detectable via Presence Sense and other such detection abilities or spells. An Animation must be awake in order to function, take orders, or otherwise serve any purpose beyond a possible use as an inanimate tool. A sleeping Animation will register as magic if it is sensed for, but otherwise nothing will give it away as anything more than what it appears to be (a paintbrush, sword, suit of armor, pile of rocks, etc.). In order to switch states, the Animator touches the item and mentally wills it to wake up or go to sleep. The process is very fast, taking just one melee attack/action to complete. An Animator can even attempt to wake an Animation not belonging to him by touching it and concentrating for a full melee round. The object must save vs magic; a successful saving throw means nothing happens, while a failed roll means the Animation awakens. The Anima-

tion is under no obligation to do anything upon awakening, and depending on its type, abilities, and instructions, may go back to sleep within one melee, try to alert its owner, call guards, or even attack the interloper itself! It is not possible to force another Animator’s creation to sleep.

When creating an Animation for another person, the new “owner” must be present, and must be touching the object(s) to be animated. The creation does not have the innate ability to communicate with the Animator in this case, instead forming its bond with the new owner. In cases where the Animation can talk or telepathically communicate with everyone this is not an issue, but lower level Animations will be completely mute to anyone but their owner.

There are five types of Animations: Trivial, Minor, Standard, Major, and Super. As an Animator increases in level, his Animation abilities move up this scale and have the potential to be more and more powerful. The more advanced types also cost the Animator much more to create. Many powerful Animations actually sap the Hit Points and attributes of the Animator, and leave him weakened for anywhere from several days to the rest of his life! Regardless of type, there are several aspects to an Animation that are important to know:

**Duration:** Quite simply, how long the Animation lasts (unless destroyed or recalled, see below).

**Size:** Small (no dimension larger than 1 foot/0.3 meters), Medium (up to 3 feet on a side/0.9 m), Large (up to 6 feet/1.8 m), or Huge (up to 15 feet/4.6 m).

**Hit Points:** Each Animation gains a certain number of Hit Points in addition to the physical S.D.C. of the animated object. An Animation can be destroyed in four ways:

- 1) The Animated object is smashed to bits. When the S.D.C. of the animated object is reduced to zero, the Animation is gone, leaving only the remains of the object.

- 2) The Hit Points are reduced to zero. This will destroy the Animation, leaving just the inanimate physical object behind. The Animation’s Hit Points cannot be damaged with gasses, electricity, fire, cold, or normal kinetic attacks (though these may destroy the object’s S.D.C., giving the same result). Psionic attacks, as well as magic spells such as Death or Life Drain, do full damage. Spells like Immobilize or Magic Net may be used to impair the Animation, though it will fight back if it has the ability to do so. If not destroyed, Hit Points recover at a rate of three per 24 hours.

- 3) A successful Banishment or Negate Magic spell will immediately destroy an Animation. Exorcism may also have some success at dispersing the magic, but the Animation saves at +3 (failure means it is immediately destroyed). Dispel Magic Barriers has no effect on an Animation.

- 4) Recall. The Animator who created an Animation can instantly eliminate the magic and return the object to its original state. A rival Animator can attempt to use recall on an Animation other than his own, but the Animation saves versus magic with a bonus equal to the level difference between the Animators. **For example:** A second level Animator attempting to recall the creation of a sixth level Animator would find it saving with a bonus of +4 against his Spell Strength of 12, while the sixth level Animator doing the same to his second level counterpart would have a relatively easy

time, the Animation saving at -4, and against his higher Spell Strength of 14. These bonuses and negatives are in addition to any save bonuses an Animation has based on its type. An Animator will immediately know when a recall is attempted against one of his creations, successful or not, and will know which creation it was. A recall requires physical contact with the object, and can be done as often as once per minute with one's own devices, but only once per hour with somebody else's. An Animation is likely to fight back in any way possible against a hostile recall, and if the creator is nearby, will telepathically scream for him.

**Cost:** The cost of creating an Animation can be massive, draining the Animator of more than just P.P.E. For this reason, many Animators prefer to do their important Animations at home or in another secure place where they can recover from the rigors of casting. Animations done on the road are usually lesser types, either to serve some quick function or to amuse and impress common folk. There are four aspects to the cost:

**P.P.E.:** All spells cast by the Animator cost a certain amount of P.P.E., which recovers as usual through rest or charging from a ley line or battery-type source.

**Hit Point:** There are two types of Hit Point costs, Temporary and Semi-Permanent. A *Temporary* Hit Point cost will recover normally after Animation. These Hit Points can only recover naturally; magic or psionic healing has no effect, nor do healing potions or Bio-Regeneration! A completely natural healing booster, such as Al-Kazin, can be used. A *Semi-Permanent* Hit Point cost is far more extreme. These Hit Points cannot be regained so long as the Animation exists. In order to recover them, the Animator must either recall his creation or wait for the duration to elapse, after which they recover the same as a Temporary loss. If the Animation is destroyed by any other means, these Hit Points are permanently lost! Most Animators are extremely careful with their creations that have Semi-Permanent costs.

**Attribute:** Certain Animations will actually sap the physical and mental attributes of the Animator. In general, one day of rest or light activity per physical attribute point and/or 3 days per mental attribute point will see the Animator back to full health again. The recovery periods for different attributes are concurrent.

**Material:** It is wise to use top quality items and materials in Animations to keep them from breaking, being destroyed, or otherwise falling apart from wear. If the Animator wants to create an animated suit of armor to guard his chamber, he needs the suit of armor first, and probably a weapon or two. The creation is only as strong as the material it is made of. **Note:** Yes, it is possible to animate a magic item such as fireproof armor. It is not possible, however, to give a magic item requiring activation to an Animation and expect it to be used. Animations are not alive and cannot activate a ring of flight or similar item. Under no condition can a Runic item of any type be animated.

**Attributes:** Every Animation gains certain attributes, though they vary widely from one type to another. The most basic of these are I.Q. and Speed, both of which are present in every Animation from Trivial to Super. If an object has no leg-like

appendages, its Speed is limited to a maximum of 10 regardless of the listed maximum, and it can only hop or roll along the ground. For example, a chair or a trivet has legs; most picture frames or swords do not. The physical attributes of Strength and Prowess only appear in higher-level Animations, and then only in constructs with some sort of arms and/or legs. For this reason, many Animators are experts with various tools and materials, allowing them to create functional objects with these additions. Mental attributes other than I.Q. only show up in Animations granted artificial intelligence. All Animations are tireless, P.E. being effectively unlimited.

**Abilities:** Most Animations have limited abilities, usually consisting of a few magical spells or useful skills that allow them to serve their purpose. The higher level and more advanced an Animation is, the more abilities it usually has, and the more different functions it can serve. In general, an Animation can use its spell abilities as often as it has melee actions until it runs out of P.P.E. An Animation's spells and skills are cast/used at the same level of experience as the Animator who created it was *at the time of creation*. The only exceptions to this are the Companion Animations (see below).



## Animator Magical Abilities

With each advancement in level, the Animator instinctively knows how to perform one or more feats of magic. The magic may be the equivalent of a Wizard spell with the same P.P.E.

cost and spell performance unless otherwise stated, or the power may be something unique accompanied by a description.

## First Level

At first level the Animator gains the O.C.C.'s special abilities, but he cannot make Animations yet.

**Spell Magic:** Blinding Flash, Decipher Magic, Globe of Daylight, See Aura, and Sense Magic.

## Second Level

**Trivial Animation:**

*Duration:* 1 hour per level of the Animator.

*Size:* Small size only.

*Hit Points:* 1D6, plus 1 per level of the Animator. S.D.C. is unchanged.

*Cost:* 20 P.P.E.

*Attributes:* I.Q. 3, Speed 3.

*Abilities:* One attack per melee.

The Animation knows one of its creator's spells, and will use that spell to help it complete whatever task it is given. A Trivial Animation functions like the most basic of robots, following its last order until given a new order, it is destroyed, or the magic expires. Instructions must be kept very basic, and only very limited communication is possible. Adding arms or legs to a trivial Animation has no effect, and physical combat is not possible.

*Bonuses:* None.

*P.P.E.:* 15, recovers 3 per hour.

## Third Level

**Spell Magic:** Armor of Ithan, Ignite Fire, Invisibility: Simple, Animate Object.

**Duration Extension:** The Animator can extend the period of time an Animation exists by pumping more P.P.E. into the object at the time of creation. An additional 75% of the original P.P.E. cost will keep the Animation around for an extra duration period. For example, if an Animation costs the caster 40 P.P.E. for 10 hours, he can expend another 30, 60, 90 or more P.P.E. to extend the duration an additional 10, 20, 30 or more hours.

## Fourth Level

**Minor Animation:**

*Duration:* 2 hours per level of the Animator.

*Size:* Up to Medium size.

*Hit Points:* 10+2D6, plus 1D4 per level of the Animator. S.D.C. is one and a half times normal.

*Cost:* 40 P.P.E.

*Attributes:* I.Q. 1D4+2, Speed 6.

*Abilities:* Two attacks per melee.

A Minor Animation is a step up in power from the Trivial type, granting an object the ability to effectively communi-

cate with his creator via telepathy and handle slightly more complex tasks. A Minor Animation can cast two spells its Animator knows, and can have one skill known by the Animator, excluding Physical skills or Weapon Proficiencies. Adding arms and legs to a Minor Animation will allow it to walk upright and carry things, but it is not dexterous enough to wield a weapon or fight.

*Bonuses:* +1 to save vs magic.

*P.P.E.:* 25, recovers 4 per hour.

## Fifth Level

**Spell Magic:** Fire Bolt, Magic Net, and Horrific Illusion.

**Lesser Companion:**

Companions are the Animator's version of a Familiar. This spell conjures a Companion Animation out of nothing, creating a servant who will follow the Animator around, handling small tasks for him. It acts very much like an intelligent dog, serving loyally, doing whatever is asked of it. Frequently it is used as a type of valet in the home, or acts as a porter on trips, helping to carry the Animator's bags. Companions last until destroyed or recalled, and high-level Animators may well have the same Companion servant for decades.

Only one Lesser Companion can be maintained at a time. It is not recommended that they engage in combat, as they can use no weapons, fight without bonuses, and their loss hurts the Animator. They appear as a short (no more than four foot/1.2 m) humanoid shape that is essentially an animated set of clothing. The physical body is primarily an ectoplasm-type substance; the facial features are limited to pale areas where the eyes and mouth would be.

*Hit Points:* 20, plus 1D6 per level of the Animator. S.D.C. is 1D6 per level of the Animator, increasing as the level of the Animator increases.

*Cost:* 80 P.P.E., 1D6 Hit Points (Semi-Permanent).

*Attributes:* I.Q. 3D4, P.S. 10, P.P. 8, Speed 10.

*Abilities:* Two attacks per melee.

The Lesser Companion serves as an assistant and porter to the Animator. An Animator can sense the location of his Lesser Companion if within 100 miles (160 km), and gains a bonus of +1 to save versus magic and illusions from his link with it. A Lesser Companion has only one magic ability: Invisibility: Simple, which can be used at will. These companions speak fluently in the Animator's native language via telepathy, but still cannot communicate with anyone other than their creator. They start with four skills known by the Animator who created them, and gain one additional skill for every two levels the Animator earns beyond the level at which he created the Companion. Companions are the only Animations who increase in ability as the Animator does. Lesser Companions cannot learn Physical skills or Weapon Proficiencies.

*Bonuses:* +2 to save vs magic, +1 to dodge.

*P.P.E.:* None, unnecessary.

## Sixth Level

### Standard Animation:

*Duration:* 1 day, plus one day per level of the Animator.

*Size:* Up to Large size.

*Hit Points:* 20+4D6, plus 1D6 per level of the Animator. S.D.C. is double normal.

*Cost:* 100 P.P.E., 2D6 Hit Points (Temporary).

*Attributes:* I.Q. 2D4+2, P.S. 2D6+4, P.P. 2D4+4, Speed 12.

*Abilities:* Three attacks per melee.

The creation of a Standard Animation is a true sign that an Animator is no longer just an apprentice. With this increased mastery, the Animator creates these longer lasting and more rounded out minions. For the first time, the Animation is capable of effective melee combat in addition to its spell knowledge, skills and abilities. A Standard Animation is capable of casting any two spells the Animator knows, as well as having any three skills of the Animator, including Physical and Weapon skills. In addition, the Standard Animation has the ability to telepathically communicate with anyone within 50 feet (15.2 m). The creation needs arms and legs to fight effectively, so statues and topiaries are frequent subjects of a Standard Animation. Physical damage depends on the Animation, G.M.'s discretion, or by weapon.

*Bonuses:* +2 to save vs magic, +1 to dodge.

*P.P.E.:* 60, recovers 5 per hour.

## Seventh Level

Spell Magic: Fly as the Eagle, Detect Poison, and Fire Ball.

Body Formation: Rather than animate an object, the Animator is able to mentally mold golem-like bodies for his creations out of piles of unconnected items. A heap of rubble, a pile of branches, a collection of household goods, a stack of bones, or any other group of items no smaller than one inch (2.5 cm) can be whipped up and molded into a roughly humanoid shape for the Animation to inhabit. Monster hunters and priests may mistake the Animation for a Tectonic Entity and act accordingly. G.M.s can use the A.R. and S.D.C. chart from Tectonic Entities on page 54 of **Monsters and Animals: Second Edition** to determine the S.D.C. and A.R. of the Animation, or can decide upon their own. Remember that the body is still bound by the size restrictions of the Animation, and can only be as large as the amount of material allows. P.P.E. cost is 10 for a Small Animation, 20 for a Medium, 40 for a Large, and 80 for a Huge, in addition to the cost of the Animation itself.

## Eighth Level

Auto-Wake: The Animator can give his Animation instructions to awaken automatically under certain conditions and perform a given task. For example: "If anyone enters this room without me, awaken and destroy them" will send the Animation into a slumber, only to wake and attack any (most likely unsuspecting) intruders who come into the room. Another use would be, "When the moon is at its zenith, light a fire under this cauldron." The Animation will do the best it can to

fulfill whatever instruction is given using whatever is available to it. Upon completion of the task, it will return to where it was and go back to sleep. An instruction can be a one-time order or a perpetual/repeating task (specified at the time of the order). Giving an Auto-Wake order to an Animation costs 25 P.P.E. for a one-time use, 50 P.P.E. for repeating.

The other aspect of this power is that the Animator no longer needs to touch his own creations to awaken them or send them to sleep. Simply being with 20 feet (6.1 m) of them is sufficient, and with concentration and the word "sleep" or "awaken," he can change their state. Visual contact is not necessary, so long as he knows the approximate location. This takes one full melee to do, but costs nothing.

## Ninth Level

Spell Magic: Negate Magic, Sense Dimensional Anomaly, Stone to Flesh, Transferal.

Major Animation:

*Duration:* 1 week, plus one week per level of the Animator.

*Size:* Any size, Small to Huge.

*Hit Points:* 2D4x10+20, plus 2D6 per level of the Animator. S.D.C. is two and a half times normal.

*Cost:* 130 P.P.E., 2D6 Hit Points (Temporary), 1D6 Hit Points (Semi-Permanent), 1 M.E. and 1 P.E.

*Attributes:* I.Q. 2D4+4, P.S. 3D6+4, P.P. 3D6+2, Speed 20.

*Abilities:* Four attacks per melee.

A Major Animation is a force to be reckoned with. With problem solving abilities equal to some sentient beings, and above average physical attributes, a Major Animation can be given instructions and left to independently carry out its duties, coming up with solutions to simple problems as needed. A complex issue that it cannot figure out will send it looking for assistance from its master, or any non-hostile seeming person who happens to be nearby, unless instructed otherwise. Major Animations can speak out loud as well as telepathically, and no matter what they are created from, they will appear to have some sort of face somewhere on them, including a mouth that visibly moves when speaking. A Major Animation can have four magic spells known by the Animator, 4 skills (including Physical and Weapon skills), and one of the following natural abilities: See the Invisible, Wingless Flight (30 mph/48 km), Breathe Fire (from the mouth, 4D6 damage, 30 foot/9.1 m range), Turn Invisible at Will, or Bio-Regeneration (2D6 S.D.C. as often as once every 2 melees, no Hit Points).

*Bonuses:* +3 to save vs magic, +1 to strike, parry, and dodge, in addition to any attribute bonuses.

*P.P.E.:* 90, recovers 6 per hour.

## Tenth Level

Greater Companion:

The Greater Companion is a powerful warrior and traveling companion. A humanoid manifestation of near-solid ectoplasm, it appears with the distinct features of the Animator's race, and a dark gray complexion. An Animator can sense the location of his Greater Companion if within 500 miles (800

km), and gains 15 Hit Points from his link with it. Should his Greater Companion ever be destroyed, these points are lost along with the "Semi-Permanent" portion of the casting cost. The Greater Companion was designed specifically to be the Animator's double in all he does, and it will happily accompany him anywhere, going on any mission it can.

*Hit Points:* 75, plus 1D8 per level of the Animator. S.D.C. is 40 +1D6 per level of the Animator, increasing as the level of the Animator increases.

*Cost:* 160 P.P.E., 3D6 Hit Points (Temporary), 2D6 Hit Points (Semi-Permanent).

*Attributes:* I.Q. 2D6+4, P.S. 1D6+15, P.P. 1D6+12, Speed 24.

*Abilities:* Four attacks per melee.

These Companions speak fluently in the Animator's native language both via telepathy and through regular speech. They will know eight skills of any type known by the Animator who created them, and gain one additional skill for every two levels the Animator earns beyond the time they were created. They also have 4 spells from their master and can learn one more for every three levels the Animator gains beyond the time they were created. Greater Companions can be any size from one to fifteen feet (0.3-4.6 m) in height, but usually somewhere in the middle is most convenient. The Companion can wear armor, wield weapons, and fight competently on the ground or even from horseback (if Horsemanship is known).

Only one Greater Companion can be maintained at any given time, though it is possible to have one Greater and one Lesser Companion at the same time. An Animator *can* recall his Greater Companion, but it is rare that he would do so, for many Animators who attain this level of mastery find themselves looking to their unquestioning Companions as friends and confidants.

*Bonuses:* +5 to save vs magic, +1 to strike, parry, and dodge, +2 to damage, plus attribute bonuses.

*P.P.E.:* 100, recovers 8 per hour.

## Eleventh Level

**Spell Magic:** Banishment, Control/Enslave Entity, and Phantom Horse.

**Permanence:** In exchange for a bit of his own essence, the Animator can render one of his creations permanent. If this is done, several things occur:

1. The Animation can no longer be dispelled or recalled.
2. Any "Semi-Permanent" Hit Points expended in creation are lost, in addition to the new cost (below).
3. The Animation gains 1D4 to its I.Q., P.S. (if applicable) and Speed, and 50 Hit Points.

The cost to the Animator prevents this ability from being used frequently, but one or two favorite assistants or items may be granted this. The creation of a Permanent Animation for another person is even more unusual, and the Animator will be sure to charge a premium for this lasting effect on his body and mind.

*Cost:* All expenditures are *permanent*, and can never be recovered once expended in a Permanence spell.

- Trivial Animation: 1D4 Hit Points, 2 P.P.E.
- Minor Animation: 1D4+1 Hit Points, 4 P.P.E.
- Standard Animation: 1D6 Hit Points, 6 P.P.E.
- Major Animation: 2D4 Hit Points, 8 P.P.E.
- Super Animation: 2D6+2 Hit Points, 10 P.P.E.

Permanence must be instilled in an Animation within a week of the time it is created.

## Twelfth Level

**Super Animation:**

*Duration:* 1 month, plus two weeks per level of the Animator.

*Size:* Any size, small to huge.

*Hit Points:* 3D6x10+50, plus 3D6 per level of the Animator. S.D.C. is triple normal.

*Cost:* 180 P.P.E., 3D6 Hit Points (Temporary), 1D8+2 Hit Points (Semi-Permanent), 1 I.Q. point, 2 M.E. points and 2 P.E. points.

*Attributes:* I.Q. 3D6, P.S. 4D6+4, P.P. 3D6+4, Speed 30.

*Abilities:* Five attacks per melee.

Super Animations are the most powerful creations of an Animator. Easily equal to any golem or upper-level man at arms, an Animator with a Super Animation at his side should be taken very seriously. A Super Animation has the same hand to hand skill as its creator in addition to 6 other skills, along with 5 magic spells and two natural abilities from the following list: See the Invisible, Wingless Flight (30 mph/48 km), Breathe Fire (from the mouth, 4D6 damage, 30 foot/9.1 m range), Spit Lightning (from the mouth, 3D6 damage, 100 foot/30.5 m range), Supernatural Strength, Turn Invisible at Will, Impervious to Fire, Impervious to Electricity, or Bio-Regeneration (2D6 S.D.C. as often as once every 2 melees/30 seconds, no Hit Points).

With their high capacity for logic and problem solving, Super Animations can work through even complex issues, and are able to understand the benefits of a strategic retreat for time or repairs. They still do not demonstrate any true personality, however, performing more like a powerful computer in the modern world than a person. Some Super Animations are actually created that encompass entire living areas, with whole rooms being Animations with control of all their internal parts such as doors, windows, and built-in cabinets. Others are powerful warriors deployed on the battlefield to spearhead charges, equipped in strong armor and with magical weapons, with orders to pull out before destruction. A third (and extremely dangerous) type are animated weapons, powerful enough to make a significant difference on the average battlefield through the use of their spells.

*Bonuses:* +4 to save versus magic, +2 to strike and parry, +4 to damage, plus any attribute bonuses.

*P.P.E.:* 120, recovers 8 per hour.

## Thirteenth Level

**Size Enhancement:** The maximum size of an Animation can be increased one step without any further P.P.E. cost. Major Animations can be expanded past Huge by one foot (0.3 m) for



every two levels of the Animator, and Super Animations can pass Huge by one foot (0.3 m) for every level. This means that a fifteenth level Animator could have a Super Animation up to 30 feet (9.1 m) in each dimension (length, width, and height), without any increase in P.P.E. cost. This will give the Animation the S.D.C. of the Animation type above it, or in the case of Super Animations, gives it three and a half times the standard S.D.C.

## Fourteenth Level

**Transformation:** The Animator can give his Animation the ability to transform into a tiny replica of its full-size self. The item is shrunk to approximately one inch (2.5 cm) per one foot (0.3 m) of size. It will still be made of whatever material it is normally, just in extreme miniature. The Animation must be sleeping to be transformed, and must be changed back to normal to be awakened. The transformation either way takes one full melee round, and is performed by the Animator touching the object and mentally commanding it to change. It is one of the ancient lost forms of this ability, combined with other magic, which gave rise to the first Guardian Stones! P.P.E. cost is 150 to instill this ability, after which, changing can be done without cost.

## Fifteenth Level

**Artificial Intelligence:** The Animator has become a grand master of the art, harnessing secrets rare even during the peak of the Elven Empire. At this level of mastery, the Animator can actually fragment his essence and place a portion of it in one of his Animations. This process is the only ritual or circle type Animation Magic, and is more taxing to the Animator than any other ability he has. It is not something that he is capable of doing more than a few times in his life, if he is even willing to do it at all. The incredible power of this ability is as follows:

1. The Animation's I.Q. jumps to 3D6+6.
2. The Animation is now permanently "awake."

3. The Animation's Hit Points double.

4. The Animation gains an M.E. and M.A. of 3D6.

5. Most importantly, the Animation gains an independent personality with the ability for abstract thought.

The intelligent Animation can now independently learn skills and train in the non-magical arts, improvise solutions based on observations and deductions, and operate as an almost normal person in the world (with the likely exception of its appearance). While the Animation maintains its P.P.E. and spell abilities, it cannot increase its spell knowledge or study any magical O.C.C.; though if made Permanent it can successfully pursue a career in combat or scholarly pursuits. The Animation has the capacity to understand and discuss theology, philosophy, and most significantly, it can think independently enough to disagree with its creator! A Permanent and Artificially Intelligent Animation could easily outlive the Animator who made it, and could become a wise immortal champion or a long-lasting super-villain, depending on the people it ends up with. The more human-appearing it is, the more likely it will be accepted into normal society somewhere. The mind of the Artificially Intelligent Animation is completely free from that of its creator's in all but two ways. First, the alignment will remain in the same category (good, selfish, evil), and second, the Animation will share any non-magically or psionically induced insanities of its creator.

**Cost:** Imbuing an Animation with Artificial Intelligence will take even the most powerful Animator out of the game for a time, and can easily have lifelong effects. 500 P.P.E., 1D4x10 Hit Points (Temporary), 4D6 Hit Points (Semi-Permanent), 3 I.Q. points, 3 M.E. points, and 3 P.E. points. If the Animation is made Permanent, then 20 P.P.E., the Semi-Permanent Hit Point cost, and one of the three points from each attribute become *permanent* losses, in addition to the cost of the Permanence spell itself! Artificial Intelligence must be instilled in the Animation at the time it is created, and cannot be used on a transformable creation. Clearly, this is not an ability to toy around with.

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# Unknown Depths

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## Optional Source Material for the Palladium Fantasy RPG®

By Andrew Rusling

*With the rising sun I awoke, barely alive; the Tezcat attack had been devastating. But surviving the attack was not miraculous compared to what happened next. I was actually saved by what I knew to be man-eating Lizard Men! A small group of Lizard Men found me and carefully carried me back to their village so that my wounds could heal. My injuries kept me confined to their village long enough to learn many details of the Lizard Men's society that have remained a secret to mankind since the*

*dawn of time. However, it was not enough to satisfy my raging curiosity. I stayed on in the village long after I was healed, to live and learn with the Lizard Men. I also traveled briefly to some of their neighboring tribes. My stay in the land of the Lizard Men took up three months of my life. Eventually, and with some regret, I caught a trading skiff back to civilization where I penned this document.*

*Until now the society of the Lizard Men has been closed to the outside world. Surprisingly, this is not because the Lizard*



*Men actively keep it a secret. Their culture has remained a secret because no one has taken the time to try and understand what drives them. Most humans that travel through an area inhabited by Lizard Men totally focus on their own safety. The irony is that understanding the Lizard Men will practically guarantee the safety of any traveling party. It is true that a few months ago I thought of the Lizard Men as nothing more than a monstrous race to be avoided. It took a vicious attack on our boat by Tezcats to change that silly notion.*

*– Dern Qual, Traveling Scholar*

The Lizard Men are among the most focused creatures of the Palladium World. Their instinct to reproduce and grow their tribe is unparalleled.

Lizard Men are very social creatures who love personal contact and conversation. Their villages are hives of activity, with a multitude of friendly conversations and meetings going on at all times. This is in stark contrast to the silent stares of the Lizard Men for any outsider who ventures near their village. For all of the love that Lizard Men have for one another, their ambivalence towards others can result in swift and decisive action. It seems that their love for one another is only matched by their desire for war.

## Leadership

Three individuals share the leadership of the tribe. The Muccnarra (Muck-nar-ra) or Overseer, the Chyarmon (Chee-air-mon) or War Chief, and the Hunnsou (Hun-soo) who is the Spiritual Guide. All three names are honorary titles; upon accession the Lizard Man is given a new name corresponding to their rank. Hence, all Muccnarra are addressed as “Muccnarra.” These positions are not restricted to any one gender, but it is rare for females (8%) to obtain any of them.

There is also a council of elders who help to guide the Muccnarra, Chyarmon and Hunnsou. To become a member of the council, the candidate must be nominated by one of the existing council members. A council vote is then taken to ascertain if the candidate is worthy of acceptance. There are usually between 5 to 8 members in the council at any time. The Muccnarra, Chyarmon, Hunnsou and council meet once each week to discuss all aspects of the tribe.

The Muccnarra is in general command of the tribe; it is his responsibility to oversee the growth and expansion of the tribe. He oversees the resource gathering, expansion, criminal trials, punishment and the general day-to-day administration of the tribe. He also acts as tribal spokesman when dealing with other tribes and the outside world. The honorary dress worn by all Muccnarra is a colorful yet elegant poncho. With a change of season, existing council members may challenge for the position of Muccnarra. The challenge is put to a council vote and if the

challenge is successful, the newcomer has one month to prove his worth. Failure, as deemed by a council vote, results in expulsion from the council. The previous Muccnarra then assumes control once more.

The Chyarmon is the strongest and most skilled warrior of the tribe. He controls the military, which is a sizeable part of any Lizard Man tribe. In times of war, the Chyarmon assumes full control of the tribe and leads its warriors into battle. The long-standing members of the army guide the Chyarmon in his leadership duties. The guidance of the experienced warriors is very important, because the Chyarmon is not necessarily a good leader or tactician. He has attained the position of Chyarmon purely through individual prowess in combat. Leading and directing a large force of warriors is not an easy task, and many who challenge for the position of Chyarmon fail to realize this.

The Chyarmon dresses like all other high-ranking soldiers. The only symbol of his rank is an emblem of two crocodiles clashing, marked on his sword. When the seasons change, any member of the tribe who is not in the council, and who has permission from the Muccnarra, can challenge for the position of Chyarmon. Only one candidate can challenge for the position of Chyarmon. If there are multiple candidates, they must fight amongst themselves in turn to decide who will challenge the current Chyarmon. When only one candidate remains, a trial by combat ensues. The winner of this combat takes up the position of Chyarmon. All of the trials are fought with the individuals' preferred close combat weapons. The spectacle of these fights draws enough attention to make most of the tribe witnesses to the result.

The eldest, and hence, the wisest priest (at least in the eyes of the Lizard Men) in the village will be the Hunnsoo. As the spiritual guide of the tribe, the word of the Hunnsoo is always held in high regard. Many Lizard Men seek out the Hunnsoo so that they may consult with him about their problems. The Hunnsoo is easily identifiable by the large, black-feathered headpiece that they wear.

Favored religions among the Lizard Men include Pithism (worship of Pith, the Snake God) and The Church of the Seven Waters. Most tribes only follow one religion; this unity aids the tribe and makes them a strong force. Some of the larger tribes have up to three religious groups within the tribe. Each of these separate religious groups will be led by a Hunnsoo, with all of the Hunnsoo assisting the council and Muccnarra. The Hunnsoo in a one-religion tribe holds more sway than a Hunnsoo from a multi-religion tribe. If the Hunnsoo is close to death, he begins the rite of succession in which he enters a trance, which may last for several days, in order to seek divine guidance to select the next Hunnsoo. The existing Hunnsoo will then take the walk of Chidome (Chee-dome); a final pilgrimage into the jungle and forever out of this world. Should one of the Hunnsoo die without announcing his replacement, the tribe priests will commune with the spirits during a lengthy private ceremony to appoint the new Hunnsoo.

The extremely principled nature that flows through all Lizard Men is what drives their political process to work. In a more selfish or manipulative society, this system would fall apart as it is open to double crossing and trickery.

## Trade and Business

Lizard Men live in family groups of 5 to 20. These partially self-sufficient family groups spend most of their time hunting, gathering and expanding their homes. Each family will own several canoes and maybe one medium to large outrigger canoe. It is very rare for any Lizard Man to own or operate a watercraft that is more substantial than a large outrigger. The family owned canoes are regularly used for fishing and occasionally for the transporting of trade goods. The river or lake on which the village is built is the highway for the village, with numerous canoes and swimmers crisscrossing the waterway.

All trade and business carried out in the tribe is done with the intention of furthering the tribe. There is very little greed involved in these transactions. In regards to trade, the tribe acts in unison, almost operating like a hive mind. The unity of vision held by the Lizard Men allows them to expand their tribe and territory quickly.

Every three days, a boisterous and exciting bartering session is held in the village center from noon till three. A huge variety of goods and services are traded between the tribe members. Hundreds of small trades are made in a relaxed and friendly atmosphere during the barter session. Fish, shellfish, crustaceans, leather, cloth, fruits and vegetables are the most commonly traded items. Substantial trades also occur on a regular basis. For example, it is commonplace for one family to feed and clothe the second family while the second family builds a home or boat for the first family. These large trades strengthen the bonds of the tribe with many members helping each other to build a stronger tribe.

Each family group regularly donates a small amount of resources to the village council. There are no tax collectors in Lizard Man tribes; each family willingly donates what they can. The food, clothing and other materials that are collected are used for the good of the tribe, as decreed by the Muccnarra. Weapon smiths, blacksmiths, tradesmen, healers and those in other vital positions are paid a wage by the tribal council. All of the goods created by these tradesmen are evenly distributed amongst the tribe members. This system works because the Lizard Men are a good-natured people and they share a unified vision of expansion. This vision of expansion is driven by their strong instinct to reproduce, and is reinforced by the tribal council as the way the tribe should proceed.

Peaceful tribes trade semi-regularly with human settlements that are close by. Lizard Men traveling to the human settlements perform the majority of trading, and some brave humans travel to the amenable tribes to perform small trades. The Lizard Men are always cautious of new traders who visit their tribe. Regardless of the Lizard Men's caution, any trader will receive polite treatment provided they are polite and cause no trouble. Mother of pearl, food, medicines, drugs, dyes and feathers are traded for human weapons, tools and armor. Each large tribe owns several tribal skiffs that are used to transport their trade goods. In general, humans treat the Lizard Men as savages; and often think they are cheating the Lizard Men on price. However, the Lizard Men are smart enough not to reveal how easy it is for them to acquire the trade goods that the greedy humans eagerly desire.

# Villages

Lizard Man villages are composed of densely packed bamboo stilt huts that are built over a river delta, lake or swamp. Straw thatched roofs and mud-lined walls protect the Lizard Men from the often-torrential rain of the Yin-Sloth Jungles. Temples are constructed in the center of the village, and are twice the size of the surrounding buildings. The temples are plain buildings, only standing out due to their size. Inside each temple, a hall of worship takes up most of the floor space. A couple of small rooms adjoining the rear of the temple provide accommodation for the Hunnsoo and the village priests. A large, open bamboo platform next to the temple is used for village meetings and bartering sessions. On the edges of the platform are several unassuming buildings which are allocated to the tribal tradesmen for their workshops. The village armory is usually found amongst these workshops. Additionally, several tribal storage buildings can be found here holding general supplies such as leather, rope, timber and cloth. Situated just outside of the center of the village are the ceremonial homes of the tribe's tradesmen and leaders. Around those buildings and further out are clusters of family homes. Bamboo walkways link most of the buildings in the village, creating a veritable maze. The buildings are clustered about, leaving barely enough room for people to walk between. Consequently, most trading with humans is performed of the edge of the village or at the village docks. A subtle aspect that many traders miss is the fact that a Lizard Man village is always impeccably clean and tidy.

# The Military

For Lizard Men war is a fact of life, and a common occurrence for some tribes. Upon reaching adulthood all Lizard Men, including all females, serve 3 years in the tribe's army. After this they will serve in the army for one month each year. Approximately 10% to 15% of a village will be serving in the army at any given moment. Upon completion of their first 3 years of service, a few selected Lizard Men are offered the chance to remain full time in the armed services. These select few may go on to become officers in the army. Tribal resources are allocated to feed, clothe and house those Lizard Men who are currently serving in the army.

Members of the clergy and magic users are the only tribe members that are excluded from the otherwise mandatory 3 years of military service. However, even these powerful individuals are required to train with the army on a regular basis. Such training focuses on combining the military and magical might of the tribe into an effective fighting force. The magical powers that are available are used as a first strike weapon to shock and confuse the enemy. It is rare for a man of magic or member of the clergy to become involved in hand to hand fighting, as a dedicated unit of warriors always protects them.

At the start of the compulsory service, each warrior is allocated one weapon from the tribe's stockpile. This will usually be a large sword, ball and chain, spear or short bow. They are expected to care for and maintain the weapon, never trading or selling it. Many warriors also construct their own personal weapons such as knives, spears and bows. This practice is especially common among those who work full-time in the army.

Most Lizard Man warriors do not wear armor, as it impedes their ability to swim. Even in large tribes there will only be one or two units that make use of armor.

Training exercises, which are led by the Chyarmon, mostly revolve around guerrilla warfare, with elements such as ambushes, stealth and coordinated strikes coming to the fore. The Lizard Men often attempt to combine their ability to climb with their fantastic swimming skills into an attacking maneuver. This maneuver results in the unsuspecting target being attacked from the trees, ground and water all at the same time! As devastating as this maneuver can be, it is very difficult to coordinate and is usually only successfully executed by the most veteran units of the army.

In peacetime the army's main duty is to patrol the edges of the village's territory. Patrols are performed in groups of 6 to 12 and are self-sufficient while out on patrol. Any intruders that are found by the patrol will be tailed. Troublemakers will be scared away, or killed if they resist. The patrol sergeant will eagerly trade with non-threatening adventurers, as they often have high quality weapons. If the adventurers are in real need of assistance, then most patrols will at least guide them away from danger.

The other major activity carried out by the army during peacetime is construction. The army is always at work for the good of the tribe, obtaining building materials or constructing tribal structures such as defenses, docks, walkways and storehouses. As the village expands, the tribal defenses such as palisades and walls constantly need to be moved or rebuilt, providing a constant stream of work, enough to keep the army busy.

# Territory and War

Individual tribes use large tripods on both the land and waterways to show their territory. These tripods are generally constructed by tying three saplings together. Colorful feathers and died cloth are then strapped to the saplings. The tribe's basic colors will dominate these markers. It is difficult to miss these markings due to their size and bright, contrasting colors. Spotting the markings is not the problem for any would-be traveler — it's knowing what they mean.

Once a visitor recognizes that they are in Lizard Man territory, they should travel in the middle of the river. It is wise to only approach the shore to resupply when absolutely necessary. Traveling in the middle of the river signals to the Lizard Men that you are not there to take their land. If any Lizard Men approach the boat, the visitors will do well to show their palms at all times. Arms held high or arms pointed down, it does not seem to matter. The Lizard Men just like to know that the visitors are not armed. These two actions, combined with some polite conversation, will allow peaceful visitors to travel through the territory of all but the fiercest Lizard Man tribes.

Conflict is in the blood of Lizard Men and as such, any warrior or council member may call for the tribe to go to war. Once the call has been made, the tribal leaders and council will meet to discuss the matter. When under attack from other tribes or races, the decision will almost always be war, and it will be declared hastily! Lizard Men will also go to war so that they may



expand their territory, in an effort to further their steady expansion along the waterways.

When the tribe does mobilize for war, the Chyarmon will be placed in complete control of the tribe until the conflict has been resolved. The Chyarmon will rally all of the tribe's adult members at the edge of the village. Each Lizard Man will bring along their allocated weapon, personal weapons and whatever provisions they can easily carry. This formidable force, which consists of roughly 70% of the tribe, will then move out to attack the enemy however the Chyarmon sees fit. Advance scouting units will move ahead of the main army to provide information on the enemy's location and movements.

Several veteran army leaders will stay behind in the village. Their task is to organize the remaining Lizard Men and secure the village. Many outsiders would consider a few young Lizard Men to be a pushover; this could not be further from the truth. Lizard Men are indoctrinated with the knowledge of war from a young age. Those who remain behind to defend their village do so in a tenacious and no-holds-barred manner. Traps, ambushes and close quarters combat will greet anyone who dares to attack a Lizard Man village during wartime.

When fighting a war the Lizard Men fight with fierce determination and a strong sense of honor. They treat all prisoners of war fairly and never kill foes that could be captured. The white flag of peace and all envoys of the enemy are granted the respect that they deserve.

For all of the information that I could gather on their warlike ways, there is an equal amount of information that was hidden from me. I was never able to travel with the army or watch any

training session. No one would speak to me of the three battles against nearby Tezcat tribes which occurred while I was staying with the tribe. However, from the stories told by the Zarrhor, I was able to learn that twice they utterly destroyed the enemy's forces in through swift and decisive action. The third battle was never mentioned, and I wisely chose not to ask about it.

## Law and Order

In general, Lizard Men are good people (with the vast majority of the tribe having the Principled alignment). With so many good people, the rate of crime is exceptionally low in a Lizard Man village. As an indication of how infrequently crime occurs, there are no locks in a Lizard Man village! These sharing and caring people do not think about crime, and they are shocked to their very core when it does occur. Crime is a shameful event in the minds of the Lizard Men. The shame suffered for committing a crime constitutes most of the punishment.

When a crime has allegedly been committed, the Mucnarra and council will hold a solemn trial. During the trial, several Lizard Men will be called to speak before the council about the crime. After all of the speakers have finished, the council and Mucnarra confer in private. The Mucnarra, who has the final say over the verdict and punishment, will announce the result of the trial as soon as it is known. During the next bartering session, one of the appointed council members will reveal the details of the trial to all interested parties.

A convicted criminal will be shunned by the majority of the village. For several months they will be avoided and any conversations that they have with fellow tribe members will be abrupt and to the point. Heinous crimes such as murder and violent assault customarily result in the most dreaded punishment of all — banishment. Those who are banished are doomed as lost souls in the eyes of their tribe. They are destined to wander alone until the end of their days. For these social creatures it is sometimes more than they can handle. Those who do not go adventuring out in the world where they can interact with other people, end up as insane hermits living in the deepest jungles.

## Culture

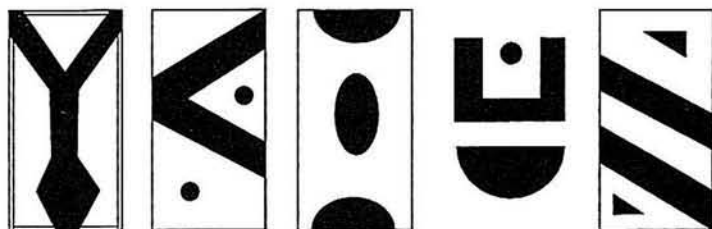
The Zarrhor (Zar-hore) are the tribe's historians, and they hold an important role in Lizard Man society. Paper will not last long in the Yin-Sloth Jungles, and there are very few caves or rock walls on which to record the tribe's history. Due to this lack of suitable materials, many Lizard Man tribes, especially those in the deep jungle, trust their history to the memory of the Zarrhor. In small tribes, one Lizard Man will assume the role of Zarrhor, while in large tribes up to six Zarrhor will work together to preserve the history of the tribe. On alternating nights, the Zarrhor recites parts of the tribe's history for all to hear in the village center. Epic tales of battles and other such dramatic events are the mainstay of the Zarrhor. However, they will regale the villagers with all manner of stories each night. The Zarrhor are considered very important people and treated with the according respect. However honored their role, however, they are still expected to contribute to the tribe as everyone else does. Where suitable materials are available to the tribe, the

Zarrhor is charged with recording the tribe's history in writing and drawings.

Medicine men and healers in the tribe are skilled in natural medicine, fruit and plant lore as well as herbology. The jungle that surrounds all villages is a fantastic source of natural medicines, and the Lizard Men make sure that they responsibly utilize all of the resources that are at their disposal.

A Bundarra (Bun-dar-ra) is held at the beginning and end of the wet season. For the entire three days of Bundarra the village celebrates in unison. The true splendor of the Lizard Man lifestyle comes out during this festival. The days are filled with competitions and trials of strength, endurance and skill. Foot, swimming and canoe races are common to most tribes. Fitting in with their warlike culture, there will also be competitions of archery, spear throwing, swordsmanship, bare-hands fighting and ball and chain duels. Rare events such as tree climbing races or memory competitions may only be held by a handful of tribes. The memory competitions are used by the Zarrhor to probe for young Lizard Men who may have the potential to succeed them. Huge bonfires light up the village while the Lizard Men dance and party the night away. With all of the social events and interaction, courtship flourishes during the Bundarra. All of the color, food and activity make for a very exciting time while the Bundarra is running.

Lizard Men lead dangerous lives, and their initiation into adulthood is no different. The young Lizard Man is lent one of the tribe's knives. He must then head out into the jungle, and slay an adult crocodile using only the knife. Some tribes target different types of animals, depending on the wildlife that lives near the village. A couple of soldiers and a priest tail the youngster to observe and attempt to ensure his safety. Upon successful completion of the rite, the adult is presented with the knife to keep. The Hunnsou then tattoos the new initiate with the tribe's insignia across his forearm.



## Examples of Tribal Tattoos

Tattoos play an important part in the society of Lizard Men. More than any other marking they stand to signify rank, status and most importantly, tribe. The soft, scaly skin of the Lizard Men does not hold ink the same way that human skin does. For a tattoo to take hold on a Lizard Man, individual scales must be magically colored. The priests of the tribe are the only ones skilled in this magic. The time consuming tattooing process is always carried out with great ceremony and respect.

Each Lizard Man receives a Military Service tattoo at the completion of the mandatory three years of military service. When a Lizard Man accepts a full-time position in the military, the Military Service tattoo will be expanded to indicate this. Council members and military officials often have large and in-

tricate tattoos, which can cover most of their chest and back. As expected, the Muccnarra, Chyarmon and Hunnsou are adorned with the largest and most intricate tattoos of all. Banished Lizard Men are tattooed with a black band across their forehead, forever marking them as an outcast.

The vast majority of Lizard Men and Women wear little more than a small loincloth. This is due to their love of the water and the difficulty of swimming with clothes on. When dressing up on land, mother of pearl, colorful cloaks and feathers are used for dress, decoration and jewelry. Gold is also occasionally incorporated into their jewelry. However, gold is not especially valued by the Lizard Men. The Lizard Men have been using this to their advantage when they trade with the gold-hungry humans.

Over many years Lizard Men have built up a dislike for outsiders. Always it seems that outsiders end up abusing the good nature of the Lizard Men. In the past, many humans have visited Lizard Man villages with good intentions, however the open and trusting nature of the Lizard Men usually provides the visitor one opportunity too many. With only one wrongdoing the outsider will be ejected from the village, and each time that happens the image of all outsiders is tarnished a little more. At this point in time the Lizard Men are borderline racists. With no solid allies, they prefer to only trust their own kind. The coming war with the Western Empire and the Land of South Winds will probably sway the Lizard Men into full-blown racism against all humans.

## Views from Outside

The Western Empire sees the Lizard Men as a danger to their expansion plans in the Yin-Sloth Jungles. The rivers of the Yin Sloth Jungles will be the lifeblood of any emerging empire. The Western Empire intends to cleanse the Lizard Men from the waterways, so that they may hold sway over the jungles. This plan of action spells doom for the Lizard Men. No matter how hard they fight, they will not be able to repel the Western Empire in the decades of war that are to come. The Land of the South Winds has much the same view, however they will not be quite as brutal as the Western Empire.

Tezcats and the Lizard Men have been fighting since the dawn of time. At least that is how the Shaman of the Tezcats describe the situation. Lizard Men are the enemies who hold territory that should be in the hands of the Tezcats. The Lizard Men are seen as highly aggressive and irrational, with the slightest provocation leading to war. They are a foe that should be destroyed when they can be, and avoided at all other times. For the most part, the two races are balanced, so any triumph in their ongoing war will only be a short-term victory. While they battle for the same territory, war between these two proud races is inevitable.

Lizard Man tribes have a strong sense of identity and see other tribes as very different people. Sometimes war breaks out between tribes, but for the most part, they live separate and happy lives. On rare occasions, two tribes will merge. This occurs most often if one tribe has been so ravaged by war that it is unable to stand alone. Circumstances can also lead two tribes to merge when they share a common border and are competing for

the same resources. The tribes will merge to avoid a long and protracted war from weakening both tribes.

Mostly the other jungle inhabitants simply see the Lizard Men as part of the jungle landscape. A territorial group that is best left alone, however, they do not see the Lizard Men as a source of trouble.

## Lizard Men as Player Characters

Lizard Men who have headed out of their village to explore the world are as varied as their reasons for traveling. It is unlikely that they are searching for riches; though glory is a different matter. It may be that the travel bug has bitten and they just want to explore locations outside of the jungle that they have grown up in. Large cities hold special interest for the Lizard Men. On one hand they love that there are so many people to interact with, on the other hand they worry that there could be a lot of angry and unhappy people to meet. The Lizard Man that joins an adventuring party may also be there because he could not fit into his tribe. These individuals are usually selfish or cannot accept the political structure of their tribe. On rare occasions the Lizard Man will have been banished from his tribe, and is now out wandering the world as a violent rebel without a cause. Those who are banished often give up hope of a happy life. They are dangerous individuals who go through life not fearing death, for they see themselves as dead already. In some ways they are dead; they have given up on life and can never feel joy in anything again.

Regardless of why they are out in the world, all adventuring Lizard Men have some common traits which make for interesting role-playing opportunities. They are untrusting of man — it will take several months before a Lizard Man will fully trust any human companions. As a companion they do make for loyal allies with a strong heart and a friendly smile. However, when their dark side comes out, they can be aggressive, confrontational and a terrible enemy. Their leaning towards violence for conflict resolution can turn a simple situation into a battle for survival. Coinciding with the major seasonal changes, they become even more aggressive and confrontational. The Bundarra held in Lizard Man villages seems to control this extra aggression and it goes mostly unnoticed. Out in the world, though, it causes major headaches for everyone who is near the angry Lizard

Man. All Lizard Men love to be near fresh water, and those who go traveling are no exception. Spending a long time away from water or in dry climates will bring on a bout of homesickness. Hence, traveling Lizard Men tend to stick to coastal areas and rivers. When they do head inland from their homeland they often head north through the jungle and into the Old Kingdom, avoiding the Baalgor Wastelands, as it is too difficult for them to acclimate to the arid environment.

## Lizard Man Campaigns

Running a campaign for a group of characters that are all Lizard Men has many different directions that it could take. The following are some simple suggestions for campaigns exclusively made up of Lizard Men.

- Zarrhor has become very ill and lies near death after being struck down by a rare jungle disease. She has not passed on all her knowledge to Jarlyne, who is training to become the new Zarrhor. If Zarrhor is not saved then much of the tribe's history will be lost forever. Uyth, the tribe's wisest medicine man, has told the council that the only thing that can save Zarrhor is an extremely rare herb that grows only near the Dragon's Gate Mountains. The characters are a small group of trusted Lizard Men who are sent by the council to recover the herb as quickly as they can.
- The Yerthoth tribe is under constant attack from a nearby tribe of Tezcats. The Tezcat tribe is larger than the Lizard Man tribe, and hope is fading that the Yerthoth tribe can win the war. As members of the Yerthoth tribe, the characters must help their tribe to defeat the enemy. How will the smaller tribe triumph? Can the characters find a weakness in the enemy? Is there something that the characters can do to buy time while the leaders of Yerthoth make new alliances with the neighboring Bazala tribe?
- The characters are a group of young, enthusiastic Lizard Men who have recently been on a pilgrimage to the birthplace of their tribe. Upon returning to their village, they find it wiped out. All of the buildings are burnt to the ground and their fellow tribe members gone. There is evidence scattered all around of who committed this atrocity. Once they find out who destroyed their village, what will the characters do about it? This earth-shattering event could twist and turn their minds. Who the actual culprit is, is up to you. It could be another Lizard Man tribe, Tezcats, the Western Empire, or another force.

# The Fires of Korath

## Part Two

An Adventure for the Palladium Fantasy RPG®  
By Michael Long

### Chapter 11 – The Obelisk of Ra

*Leaving the stone tower and its wickedness far behind, your party adventures on, spending the next ten days on the trail without any further misadventures. You travel through the southern confines of the Old Kingdom and onward, into the northern reaches of the Timiro Kingdom. You finally spot your destination, perched atop a distant hillside... like a giant, clawed finger pointing skyward. Hours later your party stands before its massive walls... before the Obelisk of Ra! As you prepare to enter, you each recall the words spoken to you by Horoth Wavestrider: "Second, its might must be stripped from it! Lay the Glaive on its altar and wait until the sun rises... when the sun strikes the altar, the holy light of Ra shall pour down on the Glaive and destroy its power!"*

#### 1) Staircase

This staircase goes up to the Portico (room #3).

#### 2) Staircase

This staircase goes down to the dining hall (room #9).

#### 3) Cloistered Portico

This open-air portico is supported by 45 marble columns. At the base of the two staircases is a large statue of Isis, the mother goddess, while at the top of the staircases is one of Ra, god of light.

#### 4) Vestry

*This small chamber contains two wooden cabinets, which hold the sacred vestments, robes and other religious garments of the Obelisk-Temple of Ra.*

#### 5) Sacristy

*This small room also contains two wooden cabinets, which happen to hold the sacred relics and holy artifacts of the Obelisk-Temple of Ra.*

The following artifacts are located in this room:

##### The Blood of Ra

Small vials of liquid, which will negate any poisons.

##### The Bones of Ra

Three small finger bones. Each has the power to turn 3D6 dead, 2 times/day.

##### The Chalice of Ra

A beautiful, silver cup that has the power to create milk and bread at 4<sup>th</sup> level proficiency, 6 times/day.

##### The Eyes of Ra

Two enormous sapphires, which have the power to see auras, the invisible and wards at 6<sup>th</sup> level proficiency, 6 times/day.

##### The Helmet of Ra

A beautiful helm which creates an aura of protection around the wearer (+5 on all saving throws).

##### The Tears of Ra

A small flask of liquid; each of the 30 drops inside can heal 3D6 Hit Points.

##### The Orb of Ra

A small crystal globe, which glows with a soft golden aura. It glows brighter the closer it comes to evil.

#### 6) Treasury

This small chamber contains three wooden cabinets which hold a total of twelve iron-bound treasure chests. Six are empty and six are full, and contain a total of:

- 9,870 gold crowns.
- 1,840 silver crowns.

#### 7) Entry Hall

*This small antechamber has a large marble statue of Ra at the far end, and a staircase, which leads upwards, to the right. Two gold-robed worshipers of Ra stand in front of the statue, gazing up at it, with their backs to you. As you enter the chamber, they turn in your direction and shout, "You bear the Glaive! Surrender it to us or die!"*

The two "worshipers" are followers of the Old Ones who were sent to the Obelisk to await the Glaive.





## (2) Human Glaiveites — 2<sup>nd</sup> level Human Mercenary Warriors

A.R. 13, 38 S.D.C. (studded leather under their robes), 20 S.D.C., 25 Hit Points, 6 feet (1.8 m) tall.

**Bonuses:** +1 to save vs Horror Factor.

**Attacks:** 2 melee.

**Damage:** Daggers (1D6) and short swords (2D6).

**Alignment:** Diabolic (both).

Each carries a belt pouch with 15 gold crowns in it.

## 8) Sanctum

*Six marble columns support the ceiling of this large chamber. At the far end of the room are two large statues, one of Isis and one of Ra. At the near end of the chamber are two smaller statues of Thoth and Anhur. Eight robe-clad worshipers mill about the room.*

These people are *true* followers of Ra. There are 6 men and 2 women.

## 9) Dining Hall

*Two female servants busily sweep the stone floor of this large chamber. The room contains three wooden tables and twelve stools. Rich wall hangings adorn the stone walls of the chamber.*

## 10) Acolyte's Bedchamber

*A bunk bed and a wooden table surrounded by four chairs are the only furnishings of this room. A young man with an odd-looking glyph tattooed on his forehead leans on his staff and looks out the window. He wears the red and gold robes of a priest of Ra. When you enter, he turns and smiles, before bidding you welcome.*

The acolyte is Enekhra Healtouch, a Priest of Light. He will hear the party out and then escort them to his master, Vilatha Trueheart, to aid you in your quest to destroy the Glaive.

## Enekhra Healtouch — 1<sup>st</sup> level Priest of Light

A.R. 10, 20 S.D.C. (soft leather under his robes), 20 S.D.C., 20 Hit Points, 43 P.P.E., 6.25 feet (1.9 m) tall.

**Attributes:** I.Q. 16, M.E. 16, M.A. 12, P.S. 17, P.P. 15, P.E. 16 and P.B. 14.

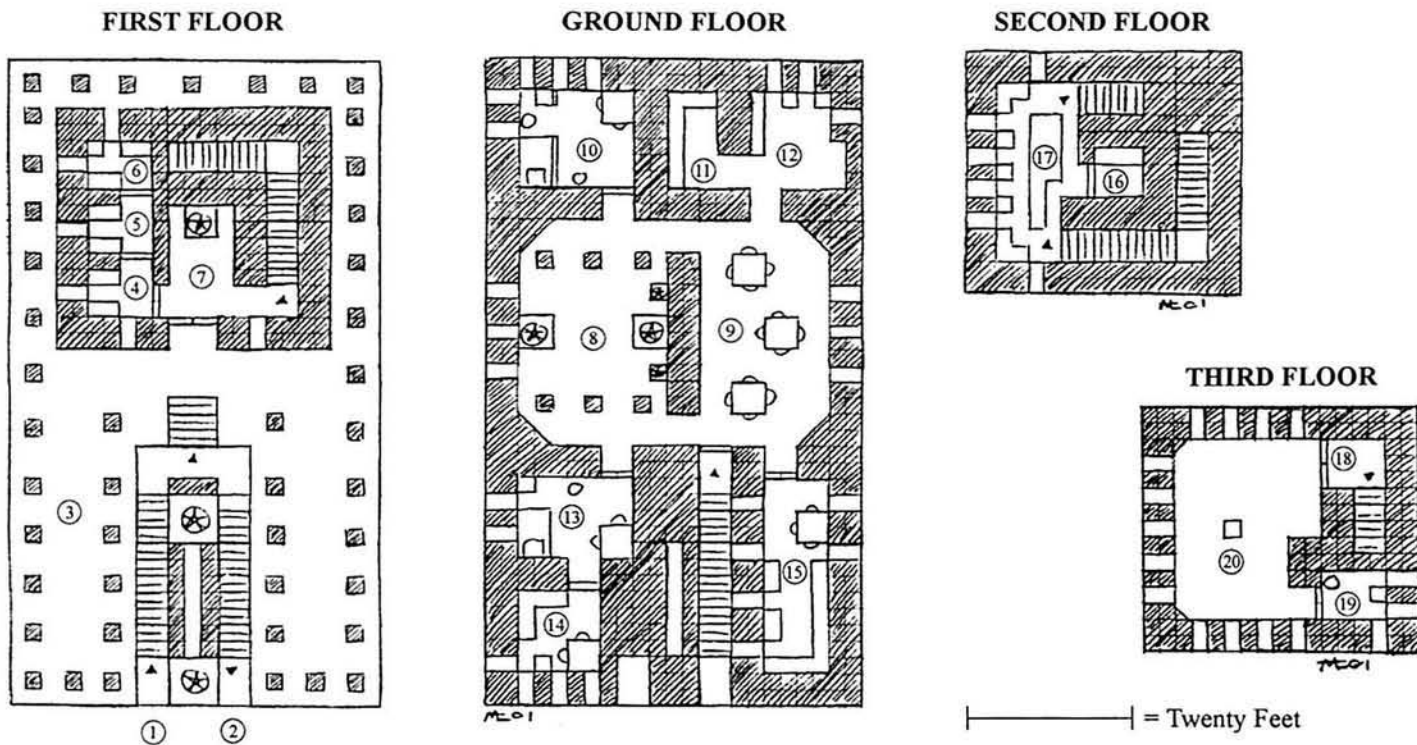
**Attacks:** 2 melee.

**Damage:** Staff (2D6+2).

**Abilities:** Blessings, miracles and prayers 21%, healing touch, exorcism 7%, remove curse 7%, turn dead 20%, and resist thirst for 2 days and hunger for 3.

**Alignment:** Scrupulous.

He has a small belt pouch that contains 50 gold crowns.



### 11) Pantry

This room contains a wooden cabinet filled with a wide variety of dried meats, fruits and vegetables, as well as six kegs of a common wine.

### 12) Kitchen

*A large, matronly-looking cook mills about the room, preparing the evening meal. Food of all kinds clutters the counters of her kitchen.*

This is Idara, the cook of the Obelisk-Temple. She is a very gruff, no-nonsense type of woman.

### 13) Priestess' Bedchamber

*This chamber contains a large, very comfortable bed, a wooden table and three cushioned chairs. In the corner is an iron-bound trunk.*

The chest contains the clothing and personal belongings of the Priestess of Ra, Vilatha Trueheart. Under the clothes is a small leather bag containing 1,000 gold crowns.

### 14) Priestess' Study

*Hundreds of books line the shelves of a large wooden bookcase against the right-hand wall. A small table stand holds a silver statuette of Ra, and in the far corner of the room is a table and two chairs. Seated at the table is a beautiful young woman with long brown hair, and the red and gold robes of a priestess of Ra. As your party enters the room, she rises and bids you welcome.*

Priestess Vilatha has just returned from a journey; her pack, satchel and morning-star are laid on top of the other chair, and

her staff leans against the nearby wall. Vilatha is kind and merciful, but can be stern and relentless in her fight against evil.

## Vilatha Trueheart — 6<sup>th</sup> level Human Priestess of Light

A.R. 14, 50 S.D.C. (cloak of armor), 30 S.D.C., 48 Hit Points, 75 P.P.E., 5.8 feet (1.75 m) tall.

**Bonuses:** +2 to strike, dodge and parry.

**Attributes:** I.Q. 16, M.E. 18, M.A. 16, P.S. 13, P.P. 15, P.E. 12 and P.B. 20.

**Attacks:** 3 melee or 2 magic.

**Damage:** Staff (2D6), morning-star (2D6) or by magic.

**Abilities:** Blessings, miracles and prayers 60%, healing touch, exorcism 42%, remove curse 42%, resurrection 13%, turn dead 45%, and resist thirst for 12 days and hunger for 18.

**Spell Strength:** 12

**Spells:**

- Carpet of Adhesion
- Sense Evil
- Sleep
- Tongues
- Words of Thoth

**Alignment:** Principled.

She carries a small belt pouch with 86 gold crowns in it.

### 15) Library

The room contains three solid oak bookcases, filled with a variety of common books, and a wooden table surrounded by three chairs.

## 16) Store Room

This small room contains a wooden cabinet that holds various items, such as candles, wicks, candle stands, linens, etc.

## 17) Arboretum

*Stone planters full of lush, green vegetation and fragrant flowers line the walls of this room. A man dressed in the red and gold robes of a priest of Ra quietly tends the flowers in the large central planter.*

This acolyte is Kheten Darkbinder, a Priest of Light. He is very protective of his friends and is a brave and fearless man.

## Kheten Darkbinder — 2<sup>nd</sup> level Priest of Light

A.R. 10, 20 S.D.C. (soft leather under his robes), 25 S.D.C., 28 Hit Points, 50 P.P.E., 6 feet (1.8 m) tall.

**Bonuses:** +2 to strike, dodge and parry.

**Attributes:** I.Q. 15, M.E. 17, M.A. 15, P.S. 20, P.P. 16, P.E. 17 and P.B. 14.

**Attacks:** 2 melee.

**Damage:** Staff (2D6+4) or hoe (2D6+4).

**Abilities:** Blessings, miracles and prayers 30%, healing touch, exorcism 14%, remove curse 14%, turn dead 25%, and resist thirst for 2 days and hunger for 3.

**Alignment:** Unprincipled.

He carries a belt pouch with 43 gold crowns inside.

## 18) Stairway

At the top of the stairs are a pair of finely decorated wooden doors.

## 19) Chapel

This small room contains a small stone altar and a wooden stool.

## 20) Sanctuary of Ra

*A three foot (0.9 m) high stone pedestal sits in the center of this huge, well-lit chamber. Three men dressed in gold robes surround it, studying it intently. As your party enters, the men turn to face you. Their leader, a sinister-looking man, shouts to you, "Where is the Glaive of our masters? Give it to us, you fools, or die a slow death!"*

The three men are followers of the Old Ones, sent here to await the Glaive.

## (2) Human Glaiveites — 2<sup>nd</sup> level Mercenary Warriors

A.R. 13, S.D.C. 38 (studded leather under their robes), 25 S.D.C. each, 35 Hit Points each, 6 feet (1.8 m) tall.

**Bonuses:** +1 to save vs Horror Factor.

**Attacks:** 2 melee.

**Damage:** Daggers (1D6) and short swords (2D6).

**Alignment:** Diabolic (both).

Each carries a belt pouch with 10 gold crowns inside.

## Ekheth Lightsbane — 5<sup>th</sup> level Human Psi-Mystic

A.R. 13, 60 S.D.C. (leather of iron under his robes), 25 S.D.C., 35 Hit Points, 117 P.P.E., 130 I.S.P., 5.8 feet (1.75 m) tall.

**Bonuses:** +2 to strike, dodge and parry, and +2 to save vs Horror Factor.

**Attacks:** 3 melee or psychic, or 2 magic.

**Damage:** Longsword (2D6+3), war-flail (2D6+3) or by magic or psionics.

**Spell Strength:** 12

**Spells:**

- Armor of Ithan
- Befuddle
- Blinding Flash
- Decipher Magic
- Energy Bolt
- Fear (Horror Factor 16)
- Globe of Daylight
- Heal Wounds
- Magic Net
- Sense Magic
- Shadow Meld
- Turn Dead

**Psionics:**

- Exorcism
- Meditation
- Mind Block
- Mind Bolt
- See the Invisible
- Sixth Sense
- Telekinesis

**Alignment:** Diabolic.

He carries a belt pouch with 95 gold crowns inside.

*After a long, hard-fought battle, the followers of the Glaive are overcome. You gently place the Glaive on the stone altar just as the sun begins to rise. The sunlight grows stronger and brighter, flooding the chamber with its brilliance. With a flash of blinding light, the power of Ra strips away the Glaive's strength.*

The holy light of Ra rips away the following abilities and powers from the Glaive:

**Spells:**

- Blinding Flash
- Circle of Cold
- Circle of Flame
- Heat Object & Boil Water
- Impervious to Fire
- Wall of Flame

**Psionics:**

- Commune with Spirits
- Sense Good
- Sense Magic

The Glaive now possesses no psionics!

P.P.E. is reduced to 40 and is recovered at a rate of 12 per day.

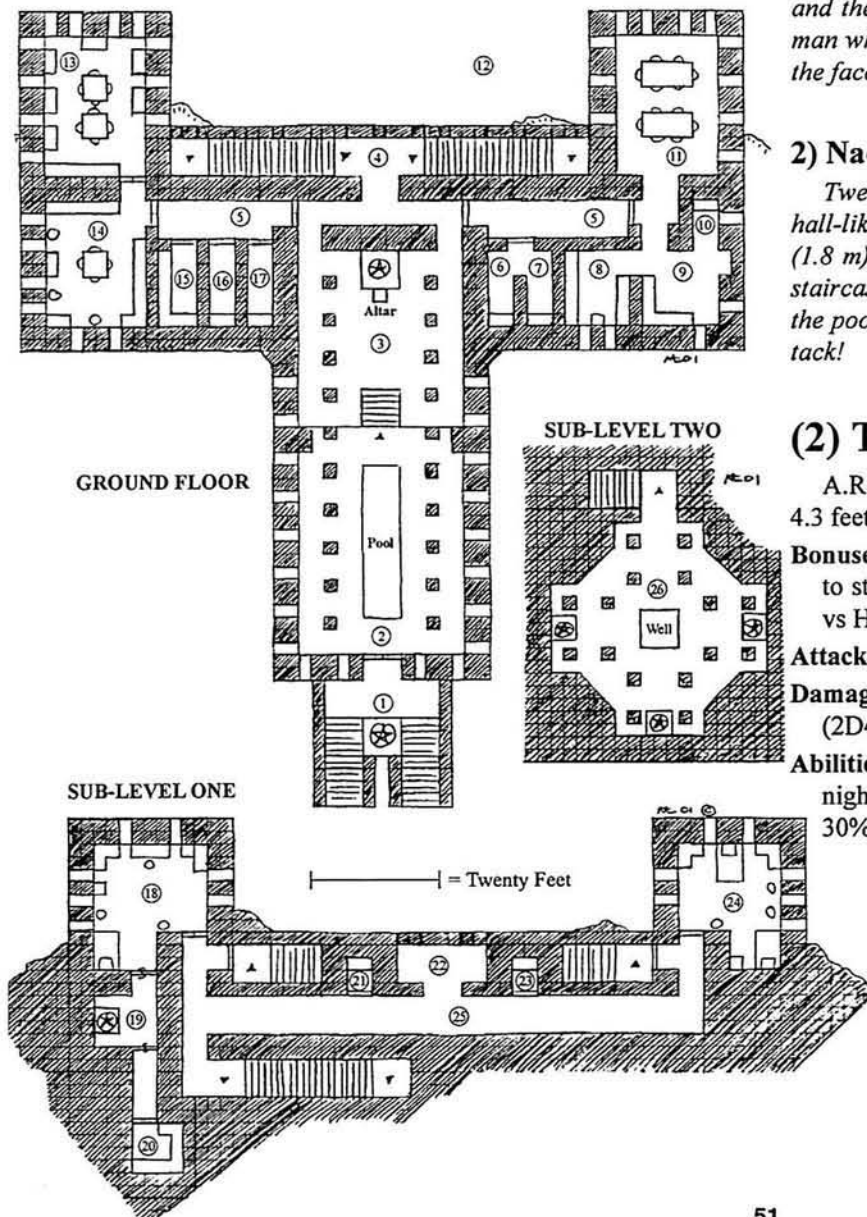
**Damage:** Reduced to 5D6, 6D6 vs the gods of light and double damage against the dragon-gods.

**Other Abilities:** Its I.Q. is reduced to 12 and the chance for a Priest of Darkness or a Chaos Priest to summon one of the Old Ones is lowered to 75%. The runes on the Glaive now glow with ½ their original intensity.

Returning northwards into the Old Kingdom, your group leaves the Obelisk and Temple of Ra far behind. After ten uneventful days on the trail you arrive at a mysterious temple, dedicated to a long-forgotten god, that houses the "well of despair." The temple is built on the edge of a gorge and a portion of the structure is built into the stone walls of the cliff. As you prepare to enter, you recall the words spoken to you by Horoth Wavestrider: "Third, its unholy vision must be blinded! Travel to the Old Kingdom and seek the mountain peak, Mount Eriel. On this peak is a temple devoted to the ancient god, Eriel. Within it is the bottomless 'well of despair' ... go to well and pry the 'eyes' (the rubies set into the surface of the Glaive) of the Glaive out, dropping them into it, thus blinding it forever!"

This was once a thriving temple devoted to Eriel (a god of light) during the Age of Elves. Now it is the lair of monsters and other evil humanoids.

## Chapter 12 – The Temple of Eriel



### 1) Entrance

Two staircases lead up to a landing and a pair of iron-bound doors, which lead into the temple itself. Between the stairs is a large marble statue of Eriel that is badly eroded by both age and the elements. Your party can see the figure of a well-built man who wears a shirt of scale armor... but you can't make out the face of the god.

### 2) Naos

Twelve marble columns support the roof of this large hall-like chamber. In the center of the room is a large, six foot (1.8 m) deep pool and at the far-end of the chamber is a small staircase that leads into the shrine itself. As your party passes the pool, two huge frog-like beasts leap out of the water and attack!

### (2) Timreks

A.R. 8, 30 S.D.C. each, 35 Hit Points each, Horror Factor 13, 4.3 feet (1.3 m) long.

**Bonuses:** +5 on initiative (on the 1<sup>st</sup> attack), +1 on initiative, +1 to strike, +3 to dodge, +4 to save vs poisons, and +6 to save vs Horror Factor.

**Attacks:** 3 melee.

**Damage:** Bite (2D6+6), head-butt (1D6) and forearm punch (2D4+7).

**Abilities:** Hold breath underwater for 20 minutes, swim 96%, nightvision 120 feet (36 m), and prowl 60% (in water) and 30% (on land).

**Alignment:** Diabolic.

At the bottom of their watery lair are:

- 1,650 copper crowns.
- 228 silver crowns.
- 186 gold crowns.

### 3) Shrine

The high ceiling of this chamber is supported by eight pillars. A small stone altar sits in front of a large statue of Eriel. This statue is in better condition than the one outside... Eriel's face is stern yet kind, wise and merciful. Both of his hands seem to glow with a golden aura of power. Before the statue, gazing upon it in wonder, is a small Gnomish adventurer. He wears a suit of leather armor, a pair of boots and a gray, hooded cloak. He wears a short sword at his side and carries four daggers, two strapped to his forearms and two tucked into his boot tops.

This is the great Gnomish thief, Keredon Shatterlock. He is friendly and kind, as well as observant and inquisitive... unfortunately, he is only interested in two things: himself and attaining wealth.



### Keredon Shatterlock — 8<sup>th</sup> level Gnome Thief

A.R. 10, 20 S.D.C. (soft leather armor), 25 S.D.C., 50 Hit Points, 2.5 feet (0.76 m) tall.

**Bonuses:** +1 to strike, +5 to dodge and parry, critical strike on 19-20, and +1 to save vs poisons.

**Attributes:** I.Q. 15, M.E. 10, M.A. 20, P.S. 8, P.P. 21, P.E. 20 and P.B. 20.

**Attacks:** 3 melee.

**Damage:** (4) Daggers (1D3+2) and short sword (1D6+2).

**Abilities:** Nightvision 90 feet (27 m), underground tunneling 70%, underground architecture 60%, underground sense of direction 70%, pick locks 85%, pick pockets 80%, disarm traps 45%, locate secret compartments and doors 75%, and prowl 75%.

**Alignment:** Miscreant.

He has a large shoulder pouch containing 134 gold crowns and 23 small gemstones (each worth 25 gold crowns).

### 4) Balcony

Two staircases with roofed arcades, set into the rocky face of the cliffs, lead down to separate landings, which lead into the lower confines of the temple.

### 5) Hallways

Each of these hallways have three fine wall tapestries covering the walls (each is worth 100 gold crowns).

### 6) Buttery

This room contains a cabinet with 10 kegs of common wine in it.

### 7) Pantry

This room contains a cabinet filled with several crates and barrels of dried fruits, meats and vegetables.

### 8) Scullery

This room contains a large wooden cabinet, a small table and a counter top. The cabinet contains pots, pans, kettles, utensils and other kitchen supplies.

### 9) Kitchen

This room contains several cabinets and counter tops, as well as a large stone hearth.

### 10) Cold Storage

This cool chamber contains a wooden cabinet filled with 8 kegs of chilled wine.

### 11) Refectory

Five armed Goblins mill about this old dining hall. There are two wooden tables, twelve stools and six wall tapestries in the room as well.

Each tapestry is worth 50 gold crowns.

### (5) Goblins — 2<sup>nd</sup> level Vagabonds

A.R. 11, 30 S.D.C. (hard leather armor), 10 S.D.C. each, 18 Hit Points each, 4 feet (1.2 m) tall.

**Bonuses:** +2 to strike, +4 to dodge and parry, +1 to save vs Faerie Magic and +2 to save vs Horror Factor.

**Attacks:** 2 melee.

**Damage:** Daggers (1D6), short swords (2D6) and maces (2D6).

**Abilities:** Nightvision 90 feet (27 m), underground tunneling 40%, underground architecture 20%, and underground sense of direction 30%.

**Alignment:** Miscreant (all).

Each carries a small belt pouch that contains 25 silver crowns.

## 12) Gorge

A 1,350 foot (411.5 m) drop!

## 13) Library

*This large chamber contains seven polished oak bookcases, two wooden tables, eight chairs and an extremely beautiful rug in the center of the room.*

The rug is worth 150 gold crowns, and the books are common and ordinary. On the top of the table is a book entitled *The Book of Eriel*, which contains the names of the forgotten pantheon of Eriel.

- Arlynn, goddess of magic.
- Cedrynn, goddess of fire.
- Cerial, god of war and the sky.
- Eriel, god of light.
- Merynn, goddess of the wood.
- Sariel, god of darkness and death.
- Serlynn, goddess of healing.
- Variel, god of the sea.
- Vedrynn, goddess of the underworld.

## 14) Study

This room contains four bookcases, a wooden table and seven stools.

## 15) Storeroom

This small room contains a wooden cabinet that holds candles, linens and other odds & ends for the temple.

## 16) Sacristy

This room contains an empty wooden cabinet.

## 17) Vestry

This room contains a wooden cabinet that holds several priestly robes and garments.

## 18) Priest's Bedchamber

*This chamber holds two bookcases, a small wooden table, a bed and three stools. Against the wall is a beautiful desk and chair, and on the cold stone floor is a beautiful rug.*

The only items of any value in the room are the rug (worth 500 gold crowns) and a small leather bag inside the desk (which contains 500 gold crowns).

## 19) Chapel

*This small chamber has a beautiful white and blue tiled floor, and contains a small platinum statuette of Eriel on top of a short, marble pedestal.*

The statuette is worth 1,500 gold crowns.

## 20) Magical Treasury

*This chamber contains a wooden cabinet that holds arms & armor of exceptional or perhaps even magical quality, as well as other items of unknown power.*

The following magic items are inside the cabinet:

### Bracers of Protection

Protection from Undead and Globe of Daylight. 3 times/day.

### Cloak of Shadows

As described on page 258, **Palladium Fantasy RPG®**.

### Decanter of Healing

Filled with enough superior healing potion to make 15 doses.

### Gauntlets of Climbing

Climb/scale walls 99%.

### Medallion of Sensing

Sense good/evil, magic and traps. 3 times/day.

### Ring of Stealth

Prowl 90%.

### Rod of Healing

Heals 2D6 Hit Points. 2 times/day.

In addition to these, the following weapons are inside, too:

### Bastard Sword

Dwarven-made. +4 damage. Trimmed in silver. Worth 750 gold crowns.

### Battle-Axe

Dwarven-made. +4 damage. Trimmed in gold. Worth 500 gold crowns.

### Longbow

Elven-made. +2 damage and to strike. +100 feet (30.5 m) range. Made from white oak and worth 1,000 gold crowns.

### Vouge

Eternally sharp. +3 damage. Double damage against all evil creatures.

## Warhammer

Thunder-hammer. 4D6 damage. Returns to the wielder when thrown.

And finally, the following armors are stored inside as well:

## Chain Mail

A.R. 14, 64 S.D.C. (man-sized, S.D.C. enhanced and is lightweight, 20 pounds/9 kg).

## Plate & Chain

A.R. 15, 120 S.D.C. (Dwarf-sized, S.D.C. enhanced, is noiseless, impervious to fire and is lightweight, 26 pounds/11.7 kg).

## Studded Leather

A.R. 13, 58 S.D.C. (man-sized, S.D.C. enhanced, see wards, sense traps and is lightweight, 10 pounds/4.5 kg).

## 21) Treasury

This room contains a wooden cabinet with six iron-bound chests in it, which contain a total of:

- 2,630 silver crowns.
- 968 gold crowns.

## 22) Balcony

## 23) Treasury

This chamber contains an empty wooden cabinet.

## 24) Acolyte's Bedchamber

*This chamber contains two beds, two wooden bookcases, three chairs and a small wooden table. As your party enters the room, two Hobgoblin warriors leap to their feet, snatching up their weapons.*

## (2) Hobgoblins — 4<sup>th</sup> level Soldiers

A.R. 14, 44 S.D.C. (chain mail armor), 20 S.D.C. each, 35 Hit Points each, 5 feet (1.5 m) tall.

**Bonuses:** +1 on initiative, +2 to parry, +3 to dodge, +2 to save vs Horror Factor, psionics and possession, and +1 to save vs Faerie Magic.

**Attacks:** 3 melee.

**Damage:** Daggers (1D6), voulges (4D6) and longswords (2D6).

**Abilities:** Nightvision 40 feet (12 m), keen hearing, underground tunneling 40%, underground architecture 25%, and underground sense of direction 30%.

**Alignment:** Diabolic (all).

They each carry a belt pouch containing 20 gold crowns.

## 25) Hallway

This long passageway is lined with twelve beautiful wall tapestries (each worth 100 gold crowns), which cover its cold stone

walls. Lurking in the shadows at the end of the hall are three Serpent Rats!

## (3) Serpent Rats

A.R. 9, 15 S.D.C. each, 20 Hit Points each, Horror Factor 10, 3 feet (0.9 m) long.

**Bonuses:** +1 on initiative, +1 to strike, +3 to dodge, +2 to save vs Horror Factor, and +4 to save vs poisons.

**Attacks:** 2 melee.

**Damage:** Claws (1D4) and bite (1D6).

**Abilities:** Nightvision 60 feet (18 m), climb 86%, swim 50%, track by scent 30%, prowl 40%, and can chew through wood or clay at a rate of six inches (15 cm) per minute.

## 26) Sanctum

*This large chamber is dominated by three marble statues of Eriel, two on each side of the room and one directly ahead. Sixteen columns fill the room and surround a large well, enclosed by a short stone wall... it is the "Well of Despair"! Standing on the opposite side of the room is a villainous-looking Elf dressed in long red robes. As you enter the chamber he calmly states, "I will take the Glaive now."*

The figure is Verenn Blackmist, an evil Elven Wizard and an ardent follower of the Old Ones!

## Verenn Blackmist — 7<sup>th</sup> level Elven Wizard

A.R. 10, 20 S.D.C. (soft leather armor under his robes), 20 S.D.C., 35 Hit Points, 230 P.P.E., 6.9 feet (2.1 m) tall.

**Bonuses:** +4 to strike, +5 to dodge and parry, +2 to save vs magic, +4 to save vs Horror Factor and critical on 19-20.

**Attributes:** I.Q. 18, M.E. 16, M.A. 10, P.S. 18, P.P. 18, P.E. 15 and P.B. 19.

**Attacks:** 3 melee or magic.

**Damage:** Dagger (1D6+2) and longsword (2D6+2).

**Abilities:** Nightvision 60 feet (18 m), see & use ley lines, ley line drifting, ley line rejuvenation, recognize enchantments 75%, and recognize magic 60%.

**Spell Strength:** 14

**Spells:**

- |                           |                     |
|---------------------------|---------------------|
| • Befuddle                | • Heal Wounds       |
| • Chameleon               | • Increase Weight   |
| • Cloud of Slumber        | • Life Drain        |
| • Decipher Magic          | • Magic Net         |
| • Energy Bolt             | • See the Invisible |
| • Fear (Horror Factor 16) | • Sense Magic       |
| • Fingers of the Wind     | • Shadow Meld       |
| • Fire Fist               | • Telekinesis       |
| • Globe of Daylight       | • Tongues           |

**Alignment:** Aberrant.

He wears a belt pouch that contains 96 gold crowns, and wears a ring of truesight as well.



After the sorcerer is defeated, the unholy "eyes" of the Glaive are pried loose and dropped into the bottomless "Well of Despair." Screams of pain and agony rend the air... after several minutes the screams fade away and the room is silent again.

When the gemstones are pried loose, the Glaive loses the following powers and abilities:

#### Spells:

- See the Invisible.
- Globe of Daylight.

The Glaive now possesses no magic!

**Damage:** Reduced to 4D6, no additional damage to the gods of light or dragon-gods.

**Other Abilities:** Its I.Q. is reduced to 8, and the chance for a Priest of Darkness or a Chaos Priest to summon one of the Old Ones is lowered to 50%. The runes on the Glaive now glow with only one-fourth of their original intensity.

## Chapter 13 – The Temple of Utu

Your party leaves the cool mountains behind and trudges southwestwards into the steamy Yin-Sloth Jungles. After two exhausting weeks of traveling through this miserable place, you finally reach your destination... the hidden temple of Utu, concealed by the thick jungle vegetation and located far from the civilized world. As you prepare to enter, you each recall the words spoken to you by Horoth Wavestrider, "Fourth, its life must be extinguished! Travel to the Yin-Sloth Jungles and seek the Temple of Utu. Place the Glaive on his blood-stained altar and ask Utu to steal its life, and he will do as you ask! But beware... Utu is the god of the dead, so he enjoys taking life and might want to take each of yours as well!"

This is a secret (and hidden) temple dedicated to Utu, the god of death, and stealth must be used by the party or else they will be captured and sacrificed as nonbelievers! The temple is a very dangerous place that is filled with traps and magic wards!

### 1) Portico

Two staircases lead up to a central landing with a large statue of Utu between them.

### 2) Entry Hall

This chamber has a large statue of Utu (dressed in hooded robes and wielding a wicked, long-handled scythe) directly in the center of it.

The statue conceals a horrible trap, which involves the scythe in its hands. Whenever a character steps on a pressure plate beside the statue, Utu's scythe will swing towards the victim's neck with incredible speed! The victim must successfully dodge or else receive 4D6 damage!

### 3) Kitchen

A servant, dressed in the hooded red robes of a follower of Utu, busily prepares the evening's meal. She moves between the wooden cabinets and counter tops, then carries a kettle to the stone hearth.

### 4) Pantry

This small room contains a wooden cabinet that holds several barrels and crates of dried fruits, vegetables and meats.

### 5) Buttery

This small room contains a wooden cabinet that holds 18 kegs of wine, two of which happen to be fine Elven wines (worth 250 gold crowns each).

### 6) Dining Hall

Two red-robed servants are busy moving tables around in this large chamber. The hall contains two large wooden tables, sixteen stools, and on the walls are eight wall tapestries.





The tapestries are well-made but contain dark and disturbing images, and therefore are worthless to most people.

### 7) Acolyte's Bedchamber

This bedchamber contains two beds, two bookcases, a small wooden table, four chairs and a larger table.

### 8) Sacristy

*This small room contains a wooden cabinet filled with candles, goblets, linens and other items used by the temple. There are also five items which are considered holy and sacred to the followers of Utu.*

The holy items are as follows:

#### The Dagger of Utu

3D6 damage and can cast a Life Drain spell at 6<sup>th</sup> level proficiency, once/day.

#### The Goblet of Utu

A gem-covered silver goblet worth 500 gold crowns. It has the power of Restoration at 6<sup>th</sup> level proficiency, once/day.

#### The Heart of Utu

A small silver and gold box worth 500 gold crowns. Can cast a Mist of Death spell at 6<sup>th</sup> level proficiency, 2 times/day.

#### The Skull of Utu

A large skull-shaped emerald worth 250 gold crowns. It has the power of Resurrection at 6<sup>th</sup> level proficiency, once/day.

#### The Staff of Utu

Which can animate & command dead, as well as turn dead at 6<sup>th</sup> level proficiency. Once/day.

### 9) Vestry

This small room contains a wooden cabinet filled with the hooded red and black robes of the priests of Utu.

### 10) Courtyard

*Eight stone columns support the rooftop of two separate galleries, with an open court in between. Another red-robed servant mills about in the courtyard attending his chores.*

### 11) Crypt of Utu

*Darkness fills this chamber... as your party enters, the torches suddenly and mysteriously flare to life! Two pillars support the high ceiling of the chamber. Against the far wall is a stone burial vault with a small statue of Utu on its top. At the base of the vault is a mysterious passage written in blood-red letters. The inscription is ancient Elven and says, "Call on death and darkness, call on death and decay... call on me (Utu) and I shall take whatever life is lain before me!"*

Several wards are affixed to the vault's top, they are: **Inflict + Area Effect + Permanence + Mystic Energy Drain + Magic + Burning Pain**. They have the following effects:

- Will only affect those touching the vault's lid.
- Will drain 2D6 P.P.E. per person per round.
- Will inflict 5D6 damage per round to anyone who is touching the lid of the vault.
- Will remain active for 20 rounds!
- Will drain the life from the Glaive!

### 12) Priest's Bedchamber

This spacious chamber contains a bed, two bookcases, a wooden stool, a desk and a padded chair, as well as a beautiful rug (worth 50 gold crowns).

### 13) Study

*This small room contains two bookcases, a wooden table, a chair and a small statue of Utu. Seated at the table is a black-robed acolyte of Utu! He appears to be taking notes from the book in front of him. As your party enters the chamber, he looks up and meets your gaze... with glowing red eyes!*

The acolyte is Kragar Bloodstone, an evil and bloodthirsty man who will attack the party on sight!

## Kragar Bloodstone — 1<sup>st</sup> level Priest of Darkness

A.R. 10, 20 S.D.C. (soft leather armor), 20 S.D.C., 25 Hit Points, 40 P.P.E., 6.3 feet (1.9 m) tall.

**Attributes:** I.Q. 14, M.E. 12, M.A. 11, P.S. 15, P.P. 15, P.E. 17 and P.B. 10.

**Attacks:** 2 melee.

**Damage:** Mace & chain (3D6+2).

**Abilities:** Prayers 16%, curses 10%, summon (1) minion of darkness twice/day (for 5 minutes) 10%, healing touch, exorcism 7%, remove curse 7%, turn dead 20%, and animate & command 1D4 dead 9%.

**Alignment:** Diabolic.

He also has a belt pouch with 180 gold crowns in it.

## 14) Naos

*Ten massive columns form two rows, which run the length of this large chamber. At the far end of the room is yet another statue of Utu. Before this huge figure is a bloodstained altar. Eight robe-clad worshippers kneel before this altar, watching the Priest and his heavily-muscled acolyte bind their sacrifice, a strongly-built man who carries himself with great dignity, to the onyx altar.*

The eyes of the statue are huge rubies and are worth 500 gold crowns each. The Priest is known as Zereth the Cursed, he is very wicked and rules over his followers through fear. The acolyte

is Sakheth Darkshadow, a massive man, who will immediately attack the party in order to give Zereth the time needed to use his magic.

## Zereth the Cursed — 6<sup>th</sup> level Priest of Darkness

A.R. 15, 55 S.D.C. (scale armor under his robes), 40 S.D.C., 50 Hit Points, 64 P.P.E., 5.7 feet (1.7 m) tall.

**Bonuses:** +2 to strike, dodge and parry.

**Attributes:** I.Q. 18, M.E. 17, M.A. 17, P.S. 12, P.P. 12, P.E. 13 and P.B. 6.

**Attacks:** 3 melee or magic.

**Damage:** Long-handled flaming scythe (5D6), dagger (1D6) or by magic.

**Abilities:** Prayers 60%, curses 50%, summon (5) minions of darkness twice/day (for 30 minutes) 50%, healing touch, exorcism 42%, remove curse 42%, turn dead 45%, and animate & command (6D4) dead 54%.

**Spell Strength:** 13

**Spells:**

- Agony
- Fear (Horror Factor 16)
- Mystic portal
- Tongues

**Alignment:** Aberrant.

He has a small belt pouch with 175 gold crowns inside.



## Sakheth Darkshadow —

### 1<sup>st</sup> level Priest of Darkness

A.R. 14, 44 S.D.C. (chain mail under his robes), 22 S.D.C., 30 Hit Points, 40 P.P.E., 6 feet (1.8 m) tall.

**Attributes:** I.Q. 13, M.E. 14, M.A. 12, P.S. 18, P.P. 15, P.E. 16 and P.B. 14.

**Attacks:** 2 melee.

**Damage:** Hercules club (3D6+5).

**Abilities:** Prayers 16%, curses 10%, summon (1) minion of darkness twice/day (for 5 minutes) 10%, healing touch, exorcism 7%, remove curse 7%, turn dead 20%, and animate & command (1D4) dead 9%.

**Alignment:** Aberrant.

He has a belt pouch with 108 gold crowns in it.

The followers are non-combatants and will flee in terror. The sacrificial victim is an unfortunate Warrior Monk named Galan Blackstaff, who was recently captured while adventuring with his companions.

## Galan Blackstaff —

### 4<sup>th</sup> level Human Warrior Monk

A.R. 5 (unarmed) (his soft leather armor is in room #17), 52 S.D.C., 38 Hit Points, 28 P.P.E., 5.9 feet (1.7 m) tall.

**Bonuses:** +4 to strike, +5 to dodge and parry, +6 to parry with his staff, +2 to save vs Horror Factor, +4 to save vs possession, and +1 to save vs illusions, disease and mind-control.

**Attributes:** I.Q. 16, M.E. 17, M.A. 16, P.S. 17, P.P. 18, P.E. 17 and P.B. 15.

**Attacks:** 3 melee or 4 with his staff.

**Damage:** Punch (1D4+2) and kick (1D6+2). His staff (3D6+2) and shortbow with its quiver of 33 arrows (1D6+2) are all located in room #17.

**Abilities:** Power strike with his staff (18-20, +1D6 damage), parry arrows (-2 penalty), spirit strike (triple damage!), disarm 18-20, deep meditation (for up to 4 hours, restores I.S.P./P.P.E. at triple the normal rate!), begging 32%, and fasting 52% (can survive 2 weeks without food, but needs water, and can survive 3 days without food and water before taking damage).

**Alignment:** Principled.

The blood-stained stone altar has the power to summon Utu to steal the Glaive's life just as the ward does in the crypt (room #11.) If the party decides to lay the Glaive on the altar rather than the vault-lid in the crypt, read the following passage to them:

*After the long battle your party approaches and places the Glaive on its surface. As you call on the Lord of Death (Utu), the statue seems to come alive... Utu looks down at your party, his face hidden by his dark hood. A rasping and sinister voice asks you, "What do you want of me?"*

After the party have informed him of their desires, he continues:

*"You have just visited my enemies... Thoth and Ra! Why then should I help you?"*

The characters should inform him that if the Glaive isn't destroyed, it will ultimately usurp his authority over life and death! When he learns of this, he will become very irate and will gladly take the life of the Glaive.

When the Lord of the Dead (Utu) has drained the life from the Glaive, he has a 10% chance of immediately attacking the party (seeking to steal their lives as well!).

## 15) Servants' Quarters

This chamber contains three bunk-beds, a long wooden table and six stools. It also has two lounging servants in it. They are non-combatants and will flee if confronted.

## 16) Guardroom

*Two guards lounge on their bunks, laughing at a crude joke. When they spot your party they spring to their feet, weapons in hand!*

## (2) Human Guardsmen —

### 3<sup>rd</sup> level Mercenary Warriors

A.R. 13, 38 S.D.C. (studded leather), 25 S.D.C. each, 30 Hit Points each, 6 feet (1.8 m) tall.

**Bonuses:** +3 to save vs Horror Factor and +3 to dodge and parry.

**Attacks:** 2 melee.

**Damage:** Daggers (1D6), halberds (3D6) and longswords (2D6).

**Alignment:** Diabolic (both).

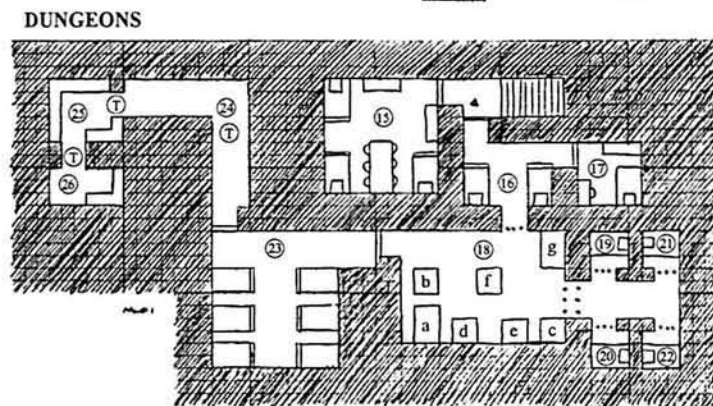
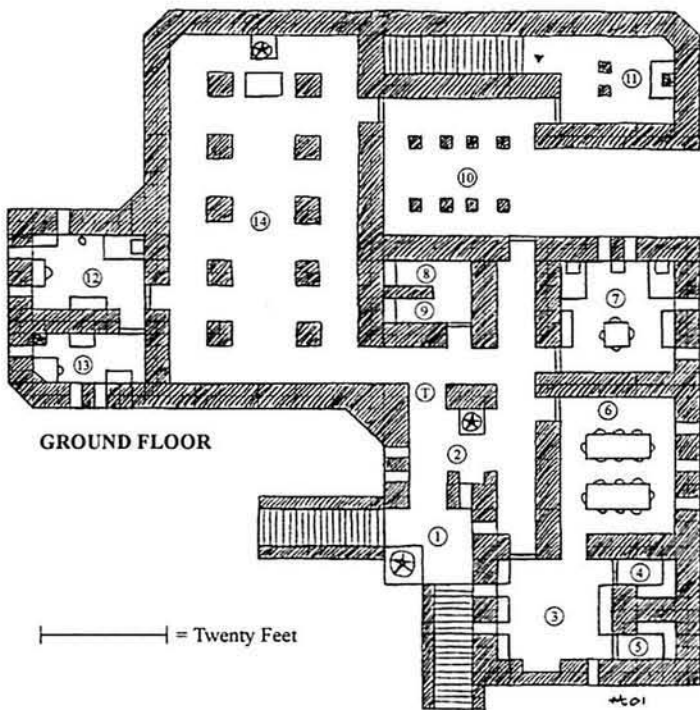
Each carries a small belt pouch with 20 gold crowns in it, and a small ring of keys (which open rooms #18-22).

## 17) Torturer's Bedchamber

*This chamber contains a bed, a wooden cabinet, and a desk and chair. In the cabinet are the belongings of the four prisoners of the temple.*

The cabinet contains the following items:

- A suit of soft leather armor
- A suit of studded leather armor
- A suit of centaur chain mail
- (2) longbows
- A shortbow
- (4) quivers: (2) with 42 arrows, (1) with 37 arrows and (1) with 33 arrows.
- (2) staves
- A dagger
- A voulge
- A longsword



### 18) Torture Chamber

This large chamber contains several implements of torture. To the left is a six foot (1.8 m) deep water trough (used to drown its victims). Ahead is a stone block to which an Elf is bound and is being whipped by an evil-looking guard. To their right is a sinister iron maiden and against the far wall are several more instruments of torture: the rack, a crow's cage that hangs from the ceiling by a heavy iron chain, and a huge cauldron of boiling oil. A huge Rotton laughs with glee as he pulls a pair of hot irons from a nearby brazier and slowly approaches a bound and wounded Centaur.

The following key is used on the map to indicate the locations of these torture devices:

- a: the rack.
- b: the iron maiden.
- c: the crow's cage.
- d: the brazier and hot irons.
- e: the cauldron of boiling oil.
- f: the whipping post.
- g: the water trough.

The guard is currently whipping the Elven Longbowman, Derwynn Broadarrow. The fearless archer was captured recently with his companions: Evekhon Silverbow, Kauronn Mendwell and Galan Blackstaff.



### Human Torturer — 3rd level Mercenary Warrior

A.R. 13, 38 S.D.C. (studded leather), 25 S.D.C., 30 Hit Points, 6 feet (1.8 m) tall.

**Bonuses:** +3 to save vs Horror Factor, and +3 to dodge and parry.

**Attacks:** 2 melee.

**Damage:** Dagger (1D6), longsword (2D6) and whip (2D6).

**Alignment:** Diabolic.

He carries a belt pouch with 30 gold crowns inside.

### Derwynn Broadarrow — 3rd level Elven Longbowman

A.R. 5 (unarmed; his studded leather A.R. 13, 38 S.D.C. is located in room #17), 30 S.D.C., 32 Hit Points (however, due to his recent torture, his Hit Points are reduced to 22). 6.1 feet (1.8 m) tall.

**Bonuses:** +5 to strike, +7 to dodge and parry.

**Attributes:** I.Q. 13, M.E. 12, M.A. 11, P.S. 18, P.P. 19, P.E. 16 and P.B. 21.

**Attacks:** 2 melee or 4 with his longbow.

**Damage:** Punch (1D4+2) or kick (1D6+2). His longsword (2D6+2) and his longbow with its quiver of 37 arrows (2D6+2), are located in room #17.

**Abilities:** Nightvision 60 feet (18.3 m), dodge and parry arrows (-3 penalty), and longbow mastery (+75 feet/23 m range, and a special called-shot attack: +8 to strike, counts as two attacks!).

**Alignment:** Unprincipled.

The Ratton torturer is Fehran Splinterspine. He is sadistic and merciless. His victim is a Centaur Ranger named Evekhon Silverbow, who was recently captured. He is very strong and is trying to break his bonds!

## Evekhon Silverbow —

### 2<sup>nd</sup> level Centaur Ranger

A.R. 5 (natural; his suit of chain mail A.R. 14, 44 S.D.C. is located in room #17), 50 S.D.C., 40 Hit Points (however, due to his imprisonment, they are reduced to 30), Horror Factor 10, 7.7 feet (2.3 m) tall.

**Bonuses:** +2 to save vs Horror Factor, +3 to strike, and +5 to dodge and parry.

**Attributes:** I.Q. 14, M.E. 10, M.A. 11, P.S. 21, P.P. 20, P.E. 28 and P.B. 16.

**Attacks:** 3 melee.

**Damage:** Foreleg kick (2D6+10), hind leg kick (4D6+10) or trample (5D6+10). His voulge (5D6+10) and longbow with its quiver of 42 arrows (3D6+10) are both located in room #17.

**Abilities:** Prowl 75%, track 90% and swim 70%.

**Alignment:** Principled.

## Fehran Splinterspine —

### 6<sup>th</sup> level Ratton Soldier (Torturer)

A.R. 13, 38 S.D.C. (studded leather armor), 47 S.D.C., 50 Hit Points, Horror Factor 9, 6.5 feet (2 m) tall.

**Bonuses:** +2 to save vs Horror Factor, +5 to dodge and parry, critical strike 19-20, and +4 to strike.

**Attributes:** I.Q. 9, M.E. 8, M.A. 12, P.S. 21, P.P. 20, P.E. 20 and P.B. 11.

**Attacks:** 3 melee.

**Damage:** Claws (2D6+5), poisonous bite (1D12+2), dagger (1D6+5), longsword (2D6+5) and hot irons (2D6+5).

**Abilities:** Nightvision 120 feet (37 m), swim 60% and track by scent 65%.

**Alignment:** Diabolic.

He has a small belt pouch which contains 156 gold crowns and a ring of keys that open rooms #18-22. He also wears three silver earrings (each worth 50 gold crowns).

## 19) Prison Cell

This small cell contains a lumpy bed and nothing more... its entrance is barred by a heavy iron portcullis.

## 20) Prison Cell

*A very bored looking Lizard Man sits on the small bed in this cell.*

The Lizard Man is the Psi-Healer, Kauronn Mendwell. He was captured with his three companions not long ago.

## Kauronn Mendwell —

### 3<sup>rd</sup> level Lizard Man Psi-Healer

A.R. 9, 35 S.D.C., 50 Hit Points (currently reduced to 43), Horror Factor 13, 135 I.S.P., 4.5 feet (1.4 m) tall.

**Bonuses:** +2 to dodge and parry, +2 to save vs Horror Factor, +4 to save vs psionics, and +7 to save vs possession.

**Attributes:** I.Q. 16, M.E. 12, M.A. 15, P.S. 15, P.P. 16, P.E. 15 and P.B. 16.

**Attacks:** 2 melee.

**Damage:** Claws (1D6) and bite (1D6). His staff (2D6) and dagger (1D6) are located in room #17.

**Abilities:** Breathe underwater, swim 85%, climb/scale walls 70%, and wilderness survival 80%.

**Psionics:**

- Bio-Regeneration
- Deaden Pain
- Empathy
- Exorcism
- Healing Touch
- Increased Healing
- Psychic Diagnosis
- Psychic Purification
- Psychic Surgery
- Resist Fatigue
- See Aura

**Alignment:** Scrupulous.

## 21) Prison Cell

Identical to room #19.

## 22) Prison Cell

Identical to room #19.

## 23) Charnel House

*Twelve shelves fill this dimly-lit chamber, which apparently serves as a storeroom for dead bodies... until they can be disposed of properly. The horrific stench of rotting flesh fills your nostrils. There are seven humanoid bodies lying on these shelves. Without warning, four of the bodies lurch to their feet and begin to approach the party! As they get closer and closer, you can make out three Ghouls and a hideous Corpse Creature!*

### (3) Ghouls

A.R. 12, 20 S.D.C. each, 45 Hit Points each, Horror Factor 8, 5.5 feet (1.7 m) tall.

**Bonuses:** +1 to strike and parry, +2 to dodge, +8 to save vs Horror Factor and +1 on all other saving throws.

**Attacks:** 3 melee.

**Damage:** Claws (2D6) and bite (1D6).

**Abilities:** Nightvision 300 feet (91 m), see the invisible, underground tunneling 35%, resistant to fire and cold, prowl 55%, dimensional teleport 21%, magically knows all languages, and bio-regenerates 1D6 Hit Points every round!

**Alignment:** Diabolic.

### Corpse Creature

A.R. 10, 30 S.D.C., 50 Hit Points, Horror Factor 16, 7 feet (2.1 m) tall.

**Bonuses:** +4 to strike, +1 to dodge and parry, impervious to normal weapons, poisons and psionics.

**Attacks:** 2 melee.

**Damage:** Stranglehold (3D6+6) and body slam (1D6).

**Abilities:** Detect movement within a 20 foot (6 m) radius, smell blood scent up to 1 mile (1.6 km) away and follow it to its source, play dead 100%, and nightvision 30 feet (9 m).

**Vulnerabilities:** Holy, magic, rune or silver weapons do normal damage!

**Alignment:** Diabolic.

### 24) Hallway

There are eight wall tapestries in this hall, each is worth 50 gold crowns. There is also a sliding block wall trap! When a character steps on a pressure plate, it activates the trap, causing a stone block to slide out from the wall and crush its victims (unless they are successful at dodging it!), causing 4D6 points of damage.

### 25) Treasury

This chamber holds two wooden cabinets that contain 35 iron-bound treasure chests. It also contains a poison gas trap, which activates as the party enters and disperses in 10 minutes. Each person in the room must successfully save vs lethal poison (14 or higher) or take 4D6 damage! Those who save only take 2D6 points of damage.

Fourteen of the chests are empty, while the other twenty-one are full. They contain a total of:

- 3,840 gold crowns.
- 8,438 silver crowns.
- 1,680 small gemstones (worth 5 gold crowns each).

### 26) Cimeliarch

This chamber contains a wooden cabinet that holds several non-magical holy and sacred items of the temple. It also has the power to drain the life of the Glaive! It contains several unseen wards affixed to the stone floor, they are: **Inflict + Area Effect + Death**. They have the following effects:

- They will affect everyone in the chamber!
- They will inflict 1D6 points of damage, directly to their victim's Hit Points, every round spent in the room!
- Will remain active for 5 rounds.
- Will drain the life of the Glaive!

### Draining the Life from the Glaive

The Glaive becomes an ordinary magical weapon, and the following powers and abilities are stripped from it:

**Damage:** Reduced to 3D6.

**Clerical Abilities:**

- Animate & Command Dead.
- Heal.
- Remove Curse.
- Turn Dead.

**The Glaive now possesses no clerical powers!**

**Other Abilities:** Its I.Q. is reduced to 0 and the chance for a Priest of Darkness or a Chaos Priest to summon one of the Old Ones is lowered to 25%. The glowing red runes of the Glaive no longer shine... they have been extinguished forever!

## Chapter 14 – The Temple of Korath

*Your party has finally made it to the last leg of your quest. Now you must take the nearly destroyed Glaive to the temple on Mount Korath, in the Baalgor Wastelands, and cast it into the fiery volcano there!*

*Long after leaving the temple of Utu behind, you arrive at your final destination... the volcanic peak known as Mount Korath. Built at the lip of the volcanic caldera is the long-forgotten Temple of Korath.*

Many millennia ago, the Elves, Dwarves and many others here worshiped the great god of light, Korath.

### 1) Shrine

*Six marble columns support the high roof of this large chamber. Against the far wall are three large statues... the one in the center (Korath) is that of a humanoid made entirely of flames. The other two are so badly worn that their features are indistinguishable. As you enter the room, you are brought up short by a black-robed Necromancer!*

The evil Necromancer is known as Nekhren Darkshroud.

### Nekhren Darkshroud — 5th level Human Necromancer

A.R. 10, 20 S.D.C. (soft leather armor under his robes), 20 S.D.C., 40 Hit Points, Horror Factor 8, 125 P.P.E., 6.2 feet (1.9 m) tall.



**Bonuses:** +6 to save vs Horror Factor, +1 to strike, and +2 to dodge and parry.

**Attributes:** I.Q. 15, M.E. 19, M.A. 15, P.S. 15, P.P. 16, P.E. 16 and P.B. 8.

**Attacks:** 3 melee or magic.

**Damage:** Claws (1D6+8), dagger (1D6), scimitar (2D6) or by magic.

**Abilities:** Impervious to vampires, animate & command 16 skeletons or corpses (for 40 minutes), augment & add appendages, and union with dead (for 40 minutes. Has feline claws on hand: +4 to strike, and +5 to parry, +20% to climb/scale walls and +10% to Prowl!).

**Spell Strength:** 12

**Spells:**

- Command Ghouls
- Death Trance
- Fear (Horror Factor 16)
- Object Read the Dead
- Recognize the Undead
- Sense Good
- Sense Magic
- Shadow Meld
- Stench of the Dead
- Turn Dead

**Alignment:** Diabolic.

He has a belt pouch containing 152 gold crowns and a ruby the size of a fist (worth 250 gold crowns).

## 2) Refectory

There are three long, wooden tables and twenty-four stools in this large dining hall.

## 3) Buttery

This chamber contains a wooden cabinet filled with 20 kegs of wine, five of which are an excellent Dwarven mead (worth 50 gold crowns each).

## 4) Pantry

This chamber contains a small wooden cabinet filled with crates and boxes of dried fruits, meats and vegetables.

## 5) Kitchen

This large chamber contains several wooden cabinets and counter tops, as well as a large stone hearth.

## 6) Reception Hall

*This large chamber, apparently a reception hall or such, contains a wooden table and seven chairs. Three exceptional rugs cover the stone tiles of the floor, and seven wall tapestries cover the walls. In an alcove near the table is a small marble statue of Korath. As your party enters the room... you spot a hideous leonine beast lounging in the center of the chamber. It has the body of a lion, the face of a man and a wicked, barbed tail... it's a fierce and deadly manticore!*

The rugs are worth 75 gold crowns each and the tapestries are worth 100 gold crowns each. The statue of Korath is 4 feet (1.2 m) tall and is worth 250 gold crowns. In a niche near the statue the manticore has stashed its hoard, consisting of:

- 1,636 gold crowns.
- 862 silver crowns.
- 112 small gemstones (each worth 10 gold crowns).

## Manticore

A.R. 8, 60 S.D.C., 60 Hit Points, Horror Factor 16, 8 feet (2.4 m) long.

**Bonuses:** +1 on initiative, +8 to strike, +9 to dodge and parry, +5 to save vs poison, and +6 to save vs Horror Factor.

**Attacks:** 4 melee.

**Damage:** Claws (2D6+10), bite (2D4) and poisoned tail-barbs (2D4 plus 6D6 from poison, unless the victim successfully saves against lethal poison, 14 or higher. If they are successful then they will only take 1D6 damage.).

**Abilities:** Nightvision 60 feet (18.3 m), prowl 50%, swim 50%, climb 30%, and track by scent 55%.

**Alignment:** Diabolic.

## 7) Priest's Bedchamber

This spacious chamber contains a bed, a wooden cabinet, and a desk and chair.

## 8) Hallway

*Faded and worn tapestries cover the stone walls of this dark hallway. Without warning, before you've gone more than three steps, you are beset by four tiny, insect-like demons, known as Lasae.*

## (4) Lasae

A.R. 10, 25 S.D.C. each, 25 Hit Points each, Horror Factor 10, 75 P.P.E., 2 feet (0.6 m) tall.

**Bonuses:** +2 on initiative, +3 to strike, +1 to parry, +4 to dodge, +2 on all saving throws and +10 to save vs Horror Factor.

**Attacks:** 4 melee.

**Damage:** Claws (1D6), kick (2D6) and bite (1D4).

**Abilities:** Hawk-like vision, nightvision 60 feet (18 m), see the invisible, turn invisible at will, impervious to fire (magic fire does ½ damage!), prowl 71%, climb/scale walls 90%, dimensional teleport 23%, magically knows all languages, and bio-regenerates 2D6 Hit Points every round.

**Alignment:** Diabolic.

## 9) Library

This large chamber contains a long, wooden bookcase, a table, two stools and a small granite statue of Korath.

## 10) Storeroom

This small room contains a wooden cabinet filled with such things as candles, linens, tools, utensils, and other miscellaneous items used by the temple.

## 11) Volcano

This is the caldera, or mouth, of the volcano. It is extremely hot — so hot, in fact, that it would normally melt the temple and suffocate everyone inside with its poison gases, if not for one thing: the protection of Korath himself!

## 12) Sacristy

This small room contains an empty wooden cabinet.

## 13) Vestry

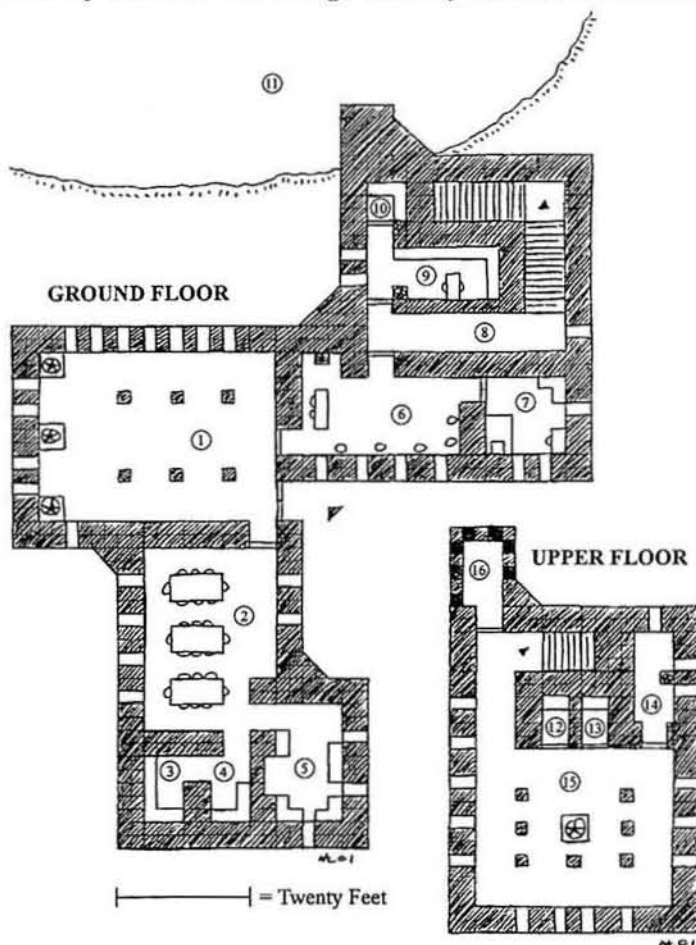
This small room contains an empty wooden cabinet.

## 14) Chapel

This long, narrow hall-like chamber contains a small silver statuette of Korath, which is worth 100 gold crowns.

## 15) Sanctum

*Seven marble columns support the vaulted ceiling of this large chamber. Several wall tapestries hang on the cold, stone walls of the room and a large statue of Korath stands in the*





*midst of the columns. A huge Minotaur, dressed in the black robes of a Chaos Priest, stands with his massive arms crossed... glaring at your party with contempt. In a deep and ominous voice, he informs you, "I'll be taking the Glaive now! I shall free my masters and the world will be remade in their unholy image. Ha, ha, ha! The world shall be at their mercy and all life shall become their playthings, to live or die at their whim! Ha, ha, ha, ha! Now, surrender the Glaive and perhaps I shall let you live long enough to see the return of the Old Ones!*

The tapestries are each worth 50 gold crowns.

The Minotaur is a wicked Chaos Priest, known as Minoth Soulbreaker, who seeks to free his masters, the Old Ones, from their imprisonment.

## **Minoth Soulbreaker — 11<sup>th</sup> level Minotaur Chaos Priest**

A.R. 12, 90 S.D.C., 75 Hit Points, Horror Factor 14, 125 P.P.E., 10.5 feet (3.2 m) tall.

**Bonuses:** +5 to strike, +7 to dodge and parry, critical strike on a 19-20, and +3 save vs Horror Factor.

**Attributes:** I.Q. 12, M.E. 16, M.A. 11, P.S. 28, P.P. 20, P.E. 25 and P.B. 12.

**Attacks:** 4 melee or 2 magic.

**Damage:** Claws (2D6+13), kick (3D6+13), head-butt (3D6+13), charge/trample attack (5D6+13 plus a 60% chance to knockdown his foe!), or battle-axe (4D6+13).

**Abilities:** Nightvision 60 feet (18 m), recognize scent 22%, track blood scent 54%, resistant to fire and cold, prayers 96%, summon (11) minions of darkness (for 1 hour) 2 times/day 90%, curses 70%, healing touch, resurrection 28%, turn dead 70%, animate & command (11D4) dead 99%, soul-searching and touch of evil 54%.

**Spell Strength:** 13

**Spells:**

- Befuddle
- Compulsion
- Constrain Being
- Domination
- Fear (Horror Factor 16)
- Fire Touch
- Globe of Daylight
- See the Invisible
- Tongues

**Alignment:** Aberrant.

He wears (2) golden arm-rings (each worth 250 gold crowns), and a black adamantite medallion of the Old Ones (worth 5,000 gold crowns, but only to a follower of the Old Ones! Others would shun it as being cursed).

### **16) Balcony**

*Your party walks to the short wall that surrounds the edge of the balcony and gazes into the fiery depths of the volcano. One of your party raises the Glaive high overhead and casts it into the smoldering core of the volcano. As the Glaive hits the lava with a loud hiss, it begins to melt... until nothing remains of it! With this one final act, your quest is at an end... the Glaive of the Old Ones has been destroyed by the fires of Korath!*

The fiery lava of the volcano destroys the already weakened Glaive... forever!

# **Epilogue – The Homecoming**

*Finally! After a long and weary journey, your party has returned to the Eastern Territory and the kingdom of Valadon... where your quest began months ago. You've returned to collect your promised reward of 25,000 gold crowns from Draxx Silvercrown, the priest of light who sent you on this quest.*

*Returning to the "Roaring Dragon," you find the stately Elven priest sitting near the fireplace... several bulging leather bags sit on the stone floor near his feet. As you approach, he stands up and smiles warmly at each of you and quietly says, "I've been expecting you."*

*"As have I!" Says a voice from behind you. You turn to see who spoke... it's none other than Horoth Wavestrider, the other priest of light!*

*As your party stands there in confusion, the inn begins to shimmer and dissolve, revealing a landscape of woods and hills! Draxx and Horoth also begin to shimmer as their illusions are dispelled and both are revealed to be enormous dragons! Draxx has dark blue scales and great wings, his green eyes are very wise... there are distortions in the air around him, as powerful magical energy flows through! Horoth has white scales and horns, his silvery eyes seem kind and noble... he has a calm sense of serenity that just seems to surround him. Both tower more than two hundred and fifty feet (76 m) above you and are awesome to behold!*

*The dragon once known as Draxx lowers his head and speaks to your party, "Mortal Ones, I am the dragon-god, Kym-Nark-Mar! The one you knew as Horoth Wavestrider is the dragon-god, Kormath. We and the gods of light thank you! You've done well... the Old Ones sleep once more! The Glaive, which you destroyed, slew many dragon-gods and gods of light during the war against the Old Ones. We were forbidden by powers which you would not understand to take any part in destroying the Glaive ourselves. If we had... the gods of darkness and their unholy allies would have confronted us, and war would have broken out once more. If the Old Ones had been allowed to escape, they would have enslaved the world... and life would have served them! You have earned your reward... Behold!"*

*At his word, a heavily-laden sack of coins appears at each of your feet. Kormath takes up where Kym-Nark-Mar left off, "Wherever you find a priest or priestess of light, or a priest or priestess of the dragonwright... they will know of you! You will be entitled to food and shelter, and any aid that you might require! Once again, little ones... thank you!"*

*As Kormath finishes speaking, he and his fellow dragon-god quietly fade into nothingness, leaving your party standing there... bags of gold at your feet!*

Each survivor receives a bag of 25,000 gold crowns and enough experience points to go up two levels of experience!

**The End.**



# Rifts®: Mutants

## Optional Rules for the Rifts® RPG

By Jason Richards

Rifts Earth is full of mutants, brushing shoulders with player characters and giving them grief at the behest of Game Masters the world over. For all the relevance and prominence that they may potentially have, they seem to be highly under-represented in most of our Rifts experiences. Herein lies some additional game mechanics and source information to help you include these excellent and important characters in your games.

### Special Thanks

I would like to send special thanks to the Palladium Think Tank for all of its help in developing this work. Such dedication and time from my fellow gamers has made this ten times better than when I started and has kept me motivated to turn it out. Thanks, guys and gals.

### Putting Mutants in Context

Most of us who play Palladium games watch science fiction movies or read comic books, so we view mutants in an interesting light. My earliest days as a role-player were spent hunched over dog-eared copies of both *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles®* and *Other Strangeness* and *Heroes Unlimited™*. In those days I could have instantly told you what I pictured when I heard the word “mutant.” I thought about humanoid animals battling Doc Feral, or teams of heroes fighting for justice with their super abilities, and I still do (despite the efforts of several biology professors since). While far from scientifically accurate, I would be willing to bet that most everyone out there conjures up similar images.

Rifts is a game that is unique because it transcends genres, bringing every concept imaginable into one game. All the necessary elements are there to build a terrific stage for mutants to play on, so why not? Like high-fantasy Elves and Dwarves, high-technology mecha and weaponry, or high-suspense ghosts and monsters, mutants can be pulled from their homes in other Palladium games and add a great deal to the Rifts world found both in your imagination and strewn across your kitchen table.

Also, like other genre-hopping elements of *Rifts®*, it probably isn't wise to yank the whole *Heroes Unlimited™* or *After the Bomb®* universe through a Rift and plant it randomly somewhere on Earth. Instead, it is best to take the bits and pieces most suited to the game and integrate them selectively so as not to disrupt the balance or flow of the world. This can be done easily by paying a little extra care and when creating mutant characters for *Rifts®*.

### Mutants from the Beginning

Mutants, or “Mutoids” as they are often called in Rifts, were originally staples of the *Rifts® Role-Playing Game* as shown throughout the core book. Kevin Siembieda told us in the opening notes of Rifts that he had “originally intended to include many more mutants.” An optional table on page 18 showed that 10% of characters were Earth natives with a history of psionic mutation, and between 7% and 8% were Earth Mutants with unusual characteristics. In *Traversing Our Modern World*, Erin Tarn wrote about feudal kingdoms spread about North America who employed “mages, psychics, mutants, and even monsters” as champions. She also wrote that “bandits and mutoids are especially common” in the West. A full quarter of the Kingsdale mercenary army was said to be made up of “warrior mutants.” In the small villages that surround Fort El Dorado there lived 16,000 “loyal D-Bees and mutants,” and the Mantistique Imperium was 30% D-Bees and Mutoids around 100 P.A. In the current timeline (109 P.A.) there is nothing to indicate any change in these demographics, so it can be assumed that they still hold true.

### Mutants in Rifts®

Mutants seem to be more common in some parts of the world than others. North America has huge populations of Psi-Stalkers, larger than any in the world. Mutant animals are also extremely common in North America due to the vast numbers produced by the Coalition States. It is also home to some mutants that are unique to specific areas. For example, the Keepers of the Desert in pre-Rifts Utah are the bizarre result of exposure to both magic and radiation, and the Sea Titans, creatures of magical mutation, swim the oceans off the Southern coasts. North America is the supposed home of the Auto-G's, but with their unique mutation and metamorphosis ability it is hard to say for sure.

South America's mutant population stems from the pre-Rifts genetics program known as the Achilles Project. The scientists at Achilles produced a variety of mutant animals and even the race of genetically modified humans known as Neo-Humans, all of which survived to the time of Rifts.

Australia has a very large mutant population, but not in the same manifestation as other parts of the world. Whether it is be-

cause of radiation problems unique to the region or the influence of what the Aborigines call the Dreamtime, mutation in Australia is severe and drastic, resulting in either human mutation into animal-like creatures or gross disfigurement of their human form.

In old Eastern Europe the Gene-Splicers mutate and alter the bodies of humans as part of their strange experiments. With the exception of Psi-Stalkers (in numbers far lower than in North America), there are very few other mutants in Europe.

Psychics are common across the globe, and 25% of the world's population is a minor or major psionic. Master psionics can also be found worldwide, although some specific types are more common in one particular area or another. All human psychics *are* mutants, though many do not look like stereotypical mutations and are nearly impossible to tell apart from normal people.

For whatever reason, North America seems to have the majority of "Mutoids" and the rest of the planet is relatively devoid of them. It may be that only in the relatively low population density of the old American Empire could mutants that emerged after the Coming of the Rifts find niches to hide and thrive in their own communities, or that pre-Rifts conditions in North America were just somehow a better environment for mutation to occur; the people of Rifts Earth may never know or understand.

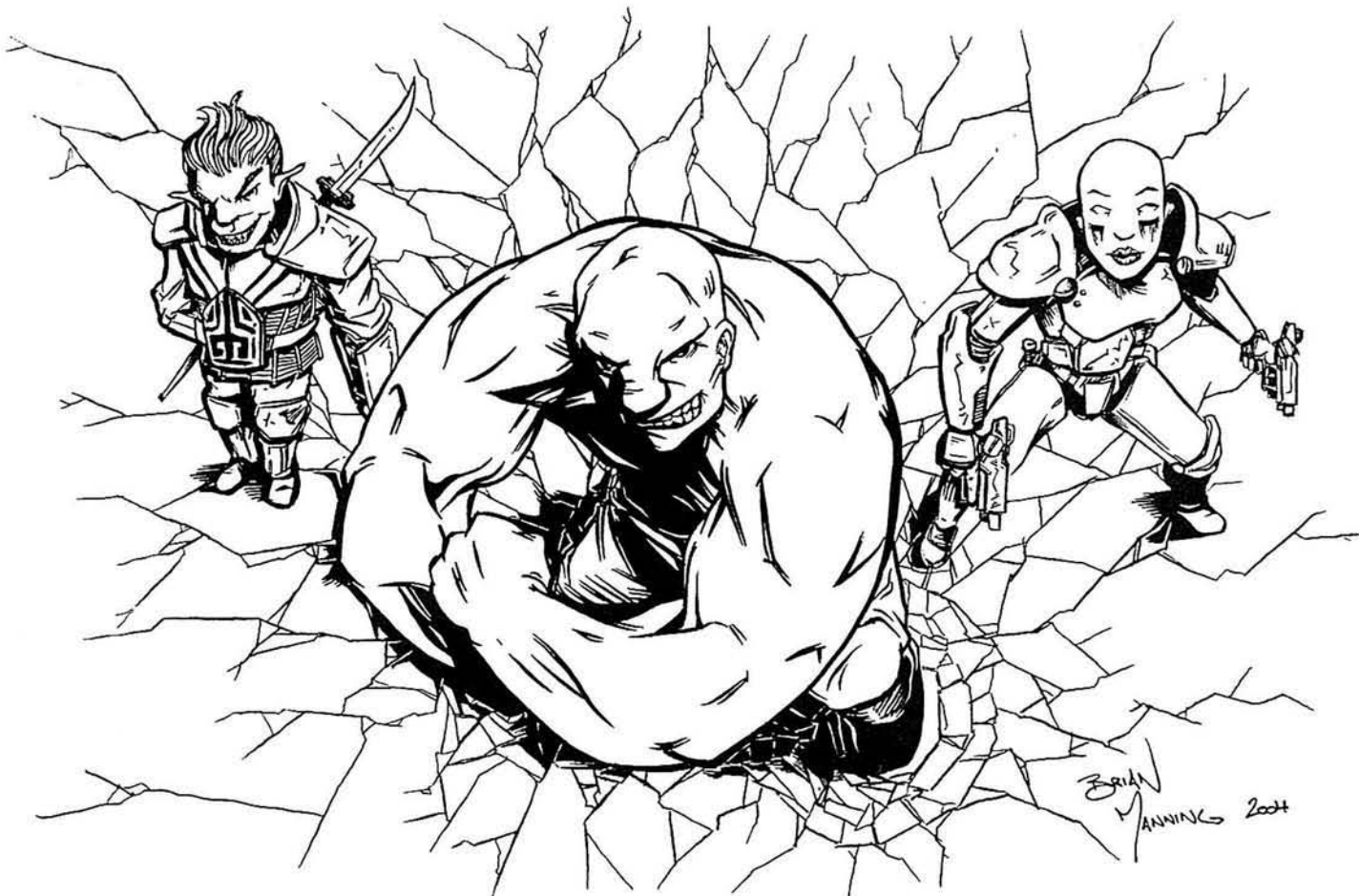
## Mutants Across Dimensions

Mutants don't exist only on Rifts Earth. Any alien race, or even humans from other planets and dimensions, can be mutants. **Rifts® Dimension Book 4: Skraypers™** is obviously a story of super-powered mutants fighting for freedom. The planet of Wormwood has many of the same conditions as Rifts Earth, and mutation may be possible there due to magical energy or encounters with supernatural beings. Phase World can see a myriad of mutants strewn across the universe, or these rules can alternately be used to create near-human aliens from worlds far away. Feel free to adapt these rules for any of these other settings as well.

## Mutant Culture

The social impact of being a mutant varies with geographic location. Depending on the part of the world one lives in, or even the specific village, it may be considered anything from a blessing to a curse to be born a mutant.

Many mutants are really nothing more than a race of their own, out in the world trying to survive. As with any human population, if a mutant marries another mutant, genetic traits become pooled together and some show up in their children. Over several generations, staying mostly in the same region, a status quo develops and the once-abnormal feature or ability becomes the defining trait of the community. This can be anything from blue hair, to horns and a tail, or psychic abilities. In any case, it becomes "normal" to be a mutant with those particular traits. Such environments can be very isolationist, with terrible memo-



ries of persecution by humans in years past. Ironically, they can also be terribly prejudiced against mutants with different traits or even normal humans. More than one recessive “normal human” child has been outcast because it was simply too different from everyone else.

Other mutants are a true leap in human development, combining highly obscure and rare recessive genetic traits from both parents that result in mutant characteristics, abilities, or powers in some form or another. Mutants born to human parents are often a source of fear and paranoia by all who know the child’s nature. Parental instincts generally rule and parents take their unique child out of hateful communities, leaving careers, friends, and family behind to make a new life in a place more accepting. If the child’s mutations are relatively minor, he or she may continue to live among humans and learn to hide the differences. Disguises and deception may allow the mutant to pass as human even into adulthood, but recognition as a mutant hiding in secret can carry a terrible cost. To many, the only thing worse than a Mutoid or D-Bee, is one who pretends to be human.

In many cases, characteristics and abilities do not manifest themselves until the mutant is older. This is often at puberty, or even older if the change is brought on by experimentation or a violent and dramatic encounter of some kind. Mutants who experience such things often leave their homes due to embarrassment or fear of what others will think of them. Many violently carry a self-hate that pushes them into seclusion. These late-blooming mutants may live their lives in isolation in the wilderness, seek others like them, or constantly attempt to achieve equality in a human population.

For mutant animals the choice is usually a simpler one. If a unique creature with self-consciousness, it must simply decide whether to stay in the wilderness to live as an animal or try to enter the civilizations established by the other sentient races of Earth. Mutant animals that are either born to mutant parents or are members of a mass mutation tend to stay in such communities, but may leave for any of the many reasons so many human children flee the nest.

## Character Creation

Creating a mutant character is fundamentally unchanged from putting together any inhabitant of Rifts Earth. However, the normal system does require a little bit of tweaking when it comes time to determine psionics and a character class (Steps 4 and 5 in the *Rifts® RPG*). Simply carry out the following steps:

1. Determine the type of mutant.
2. Determine the cause of mutation.
3. Determine any mutant characteristics, abilities, and psionic or super powers.
4. Choose an O.C.C. from those available for the mutant type.

Explanations of these steps follow.

# 1. Determine the Type of Mutant

Looking at mutants from the broadest perspective, there are two types: mutant humans and mutant animals. Mutant animals see various degrees of mutation and extraordinary abilities, but from a character creation standpoint they are all basically the same. Mutant humans, however, have a wider range of classification and vary much more in the way a character is created.

Players may pick or roll from the following table:

01-50 Mutant Human.

01-70 Mutoid.

71-95 Psychic Mutant.

96-00 Super Mutant.

51-00 Mutant Animal.

## Mutant Humans

There are three basic types of mutant humans, each with its own advantages and disadvantages. Each also has its own table to randomly determine the number of abilities and characteristics. If you look carefully at the table, you will notice that Mutoids tend to have more of these traits than Psychic Mutants, and that Super Mutants have the least. This is done for two reasons, the first of which is game balance. Mutoids typically will have the largest number of minor abilities and unusual characteristics, and have the greatest choice of character classes. Psychic Mutants will have fewer randomly determined mutant abilities and characteristics, but gain power and further mutation in the form of psychic power. Super Mutants have the fewest characteristics and virtually no minor abilities, because their mutations take the form of impressive psychic power or super abilities. To reduce the number of mutations in a Mutoid is to remove their uniqueness, while increasing the mutation of Super Mutants risks giving them too much.

Secondly, there is precedent buried deep within the many mutant character classes that already exist. The most powerful mutants such as Psi-Stalkers, Neo-Humans, Sea Titans, and various master psionic classes are usually indistinguishable from normal humans, or characteristics are very minor. Less powerful mutants are common and take no special consideration during character creation.

## Mutoids

Mutoids are basically mutant humans without any substantial special powers. They are not psychic and do not possess any super abilities, but may have unique characteristics or special abilities that set them apart from normal humans in one way or another. Mutoids are by far the largest category of mutants in *Rifts®*, and most people do not distinguish them from D-Bees.

To determine the number of mutant characteristics and abilities for a Mutoid, roll on the following table or pick one. Specific characteristics and abilities are selected later in the character creation process.

- 01-20% 1D4 characteristics (no abilities).
- 21-40% 1D4+1 characteristics (no abilities).
- 41-60% 1D4+2 characteristics (no abilities).
- 61-80% 1D4+3 characteristics and 1 ability.
- 81-00% 1D4+3 characteristics and 2 abilities.

## Psychic Mutants

Virtually any *Rifts*® character has a chance of possessing at least minor psionics. While many psionic humans are not burdened with mutations other than their natural psychic ability, many also possess unusual characteristics like those of Mutoids. Even completely normal looking psychics are truly mutants and do not enjoy equality with humans in societies such as the Coalition States, where they are cataloged, tagged, monitored, and generally distrusted for their differences. Most CS citizens and their ilk view psychics as “not quite human” and a little too similar to the many supernatural menaces that plague the Earth. While time and service to humanity can earn normal-looking psychics respect and equality from all but the most dedicated human supremacists, the same can not be said for their less human-looking kin. They will always be viewed as Mutoids and D-Bees by the majority.

For the purposes of this discussion, it is assumed that the player is interested in creating a character who is truly a mutant with the associated traits and abilities. For those who just want characters with psionic abilities without the burden of other mutations, see Step 4: How to Determine Psionics on page 12 of the *Rifts*® RPG or pick an existing psychic character class and skip being a mutant entirely. To determine the number of mutant characteristics and abilities for Psychic Mutants, roll on the following table or pick one. Specific characteristics and abilities are selected later in the character creation process.

- 01-60% 1D4 characteristics (no abilities).
- 61-70% 1D4+1 characteristics (no abilities).
- 71-80% 1D4+2 characteristics and 1 ability.
- 81-90% 1D4+3 characteristics and 1 ability.
- 91-00% 1D4+3 characteristics and 2 abilities.

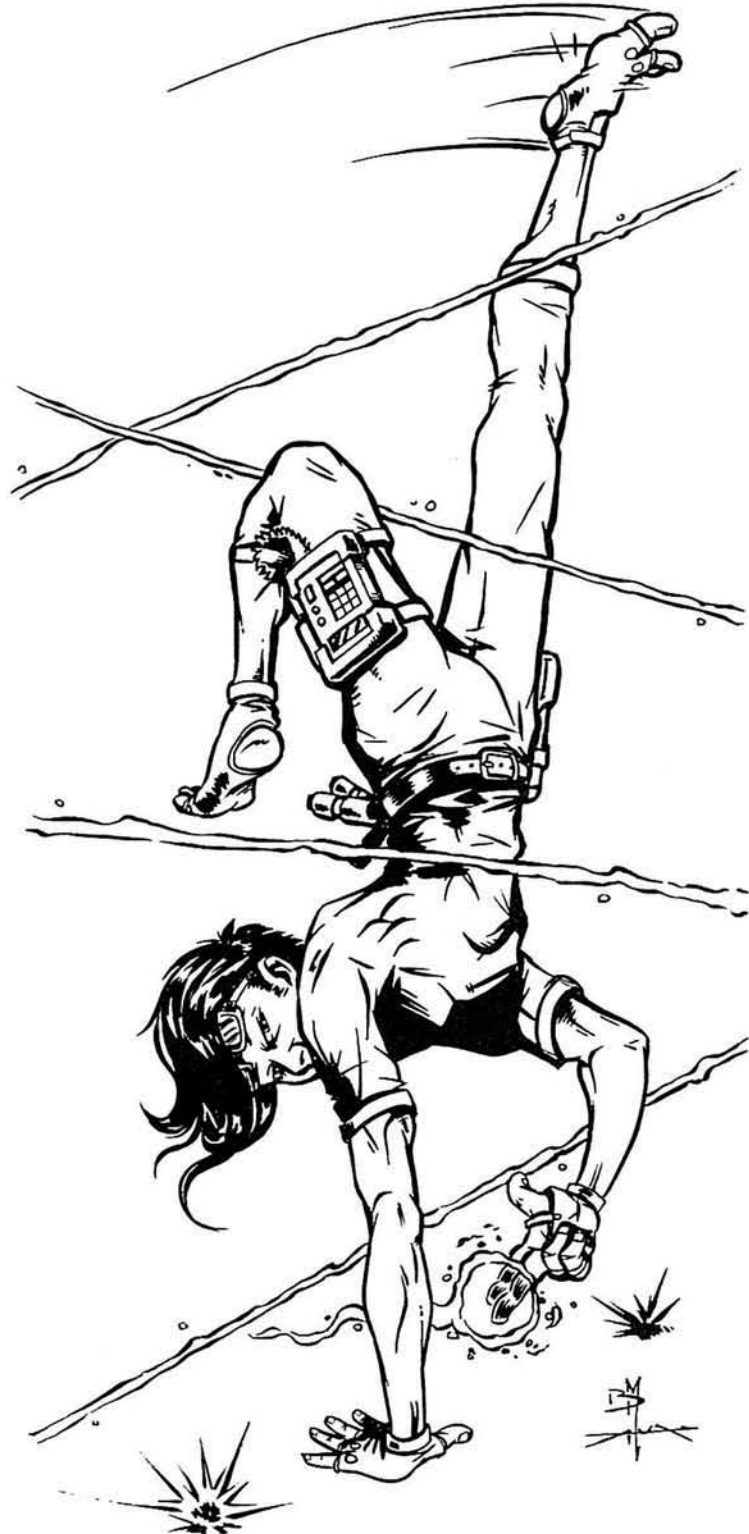
## Super Mutants

Super Mutants are the rarest of the rare, least like normal humans in ability, but usually the most like humans in appearance. These are the comic book heroes and villains, the master psionics, and the powerful beings that push all definitions of humanity. They are likely to be considered as non-humans and D-Bees by the masses, even if they look more or less like normal people. Examples of these include Psi-Stalkers (*Rifts*® RPG), Keepers of the Desert (*New West*), Auto-G's (*Siege on Tolkeen 3*), Sea Titans (*Rifts*® *Underseas*), Neo-Humans (*South America 2*), and most master psionics. Their nature is alien to the common person and they have powers that boggle the mind. They are, in fact, no longer really human, but something more (or less, depending on one's point of view).

O.C.C. selection is dealt with in the final stage of mutant character creation, but there are a few things that need to be ad-

ressed prior to selecting characteristics and abilities. Super Mutant character classes are chosen in one of three ways. The first type of Super Mutant is a *Heroes Unlimited*- or *Skrappers*-style mutant with psionic or super powers. Roll on the tables below to determine mutant characteristics and type of powers.

Secondly, the character may simply take a master psionic R.C.C. and determine unique characteristics as detailed below, and bypass rolling for super abilities. This character type's abilities are those of a master psionic R.C.C. The player of this character may, if he or she wishes, skip any or all of the tables below at his or her own discretion and simply play the R.C.C. without the extra mutations.



Finally, the character may take an R.C.C. that is, by nature, a mutant such as any of those mentioned above (Psi-Stalker, Keeper of the Desert, Auto-G, etc.). For this third case, ignore any unusual characteristics, abilities, or origins as determined below and roll up the R.C.C. as normal. None of these tables, charts, or histories apply to these well-defined races.

### Characteristics and Abilities:

01-40% 1D4 characteristics.

41-55% 1D6 characteristics.

56-75% 2 characteristics.

76-90% 3 characteristics.

91-00% 3 characteristics and 1 ability.

### Super Abilities:

*Note:* Tables and power quantities found in **Heroes Unlimited™**, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, **Skrapers™**, **Rifts® Conversion Book One (Revised)**, or elsewhere in the Palladium Megaverse may be substituted for the following with Game Master approval. Game Masters may not wish to allow combinations of psionics and super abilities as found here and in **Heroes Unlimited™**, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition and should feel free to exclude such an option if they feel it necessary.

01-10% Four Minor Super Abilities only (no Major powers).

11-30% One Major Super Ability and two Minor Super Abilities.

31-50% Two Major Super Abilities and one Minor Super Ability.

51-60% Two Major Super Abilities and three Minor Super Abilities.

61-70% Three Major Super Abilities only (no Minor powers).

71-80% 1D4+2 Minor Psionic Powers (any, except Super) and one Major Super Ability *or* 1 Super Psionic Power, two Minor Psionic Powers, and one Major Super Ability. Considered a Major Psionic.

81-00% Psychic Mutant with 1D4 psionic powers from each of the three Minor Psionic Power categories (roll once for each category, three times total) and one from Super-Psionics. Select two additional Minor Psionic Powers per additional level of experience *or* one Super-Psionic ability. Considered a Master Psionic.

*Note:* A character with the Vagabond O.C.C. receives an additional Minor Super Ability *or* two additional lesser psionic powers if no super abilities are present. This is due to the extra time put into developing one's powers instead of a profession.

## Mutant Animals

It would fill 20 pages to detail all the possibilities for mutant animal characters in *Rifts®*. Their incorporation into the game is fairly easy, as there are already a number of mutant animals roaming the post-apocalyptic Earth. The classic example of this is the CS Dog Boy, a key component to *Rifts®* that has certainly affected every group of characters to wander North America since the origin of the game. Mutant animals are also prevalent

in South America, and Australia has many animal-like mutations. They can, of course, come from any part of the world given the proper conditions for mutation.

Creating mutant animals is best done in one of three ways: by choosing an existing R.C.C., porting in rules from other Palladium games, or the quick and dirty method for those who don't have other books at their disposal.

### Choose an Existing R.C.C.

The first, and probably easiest, way to create a mutant animal character is to simply take a mutant animal R.C.C. already found in the *Rifts®* world. The classic Dog Boy R.C.C. is found in the **Rifts® RPG** and expanded in **World Book 13: Lone Star**. *Lone Star* also contains four additional mutant canine R.C.C.s, two R.C.C.s for mutant felines, three for monkeys and apes, plus mutant bats, bears, and rats. **Rifts® South America** has six feline R.C.C.s and **South America 2** has four more mutant classes of varying types.

While many of these mutants might need modification for any given campaign, they are a good source for those wishing to play mutant animal characters. Even if the skills are not the best fit for the character, it should be fairly easy to pull out the natural abilities common to all mutant animals of that type from the class-specific powers and skills, and then assign a new O.C.C.

### After the Bomb®-Style Mutant Animals

Rules for creating mutants of this type are found in **Heroes Unlimited™** and the new, complete **After the Bomb® RPG**. Each contains rules and guidelines for the creation of dozens of types of mutant animals of varying degrees of development,



from the very animal-like to the very human. It also includes special animal abilities and psionics not available to humans or other mutants, creating a truly unique character class. Such characters may be built as normal.

## “Quick and Dirty” Mutant Animal Generation Method

The third method of creating a mutant animal is to follow these basic guidelines. Heavy Game Master supervision and final approval are highly recommended. All animals built through this quick and dirty method are assumed to have full human hands (opposable thumb with three or four fingers) and build (stands and walks upright), but no human looks (e.g. a Psi-Hound has humanoid features, but still looks like a dog). Follow these simple steps:

1. Choose an animal and list its natural abilities and traits such as claws, teeth, armor, speed, agility, etc. A good source for this type of information is *Monsters and Animals* for the *Palladium Fantasy RPG*®.

2. The player may apply a total of two six-sided dice to what the player and Game Master feel are the most important attributes of the animal in the wild. These two dice may be split between two attributes or added to just one. A deer might apply both dice to Speed while a bear might apply them both to P.S. A lion or tiger might apply 1D6 to P.S. and 1D6 to P.P. There are definitely animals that have more than two superior attributes, but it can be assumed that these superior qualities were lost in mutation or didn't develop along with the rest of the animal. These dice represent a superior physical or mental area enjoyed by the mutant over humans and most other beings on Rifts Earth thanks to their primal advantages.

3. Many animals enjoy natural defensive or offensive features that help them survive in the wild, many of which may still remain with the mutant character. All bonuses granted or damage dealt from any animal trait are S.D.C. Use the following as basic guidelines for assigning stats to these characteristics (if using *Monsters and Animals* you may use the stats directly from the animal in question):

- Natural weapons (teeth, claws, antlers, etc.) typically do between 1D6 and 2D6 S.D.C. (occasionally 3D6 for large predators).
- Heightened senses give bonuses similar to various super abilities, spells, or cybernetic enhancements, with effects often halved. For example, a mutant eagle might have vision equal to the Telescopic Vision cybernetic eye or the Minor Super Ability, Advanced Vision, at half the normal range and bonuses.
- Natural body armor will provide S.D.C. bonuses from 20 to 80 (roll 2D4x10 or choose an appropriate value) with an A.R. of 10 to 16 (roll 2D4+8 or choose an appropriate value).

4. Animals smaller than human size tend to grow, while those normally larger tend to get smaller. Small animals like rodents, frogs and birds grow to around three or four feet (0.9-1.2 m) tall. Medium-sized animals such as dogs, cats, otters, and goats usually grow to about five feet (1.5 m) tall. Large animals such as lions, deer, kangaroos and crocodiles tend to be roughly

human size, averaging around six feet (1.8 m) tall. Large animals like horses, cattle, rhinoceros and grizzly bears can be seven to eight feet (2.1-2.4 m) tall. Some very large animals like elephants and some dinosaurs can tower ten feet (3 m) tall, possibly taller.

It may only be a sketch, but the picture it draws is good enough to illustrate a basic mutant animal character for *Rifts*® without the benefit of having other sources on which to draw.



## 2. Determine the Cause of Mutation Human Mutation

According to *Heroes Unlimited*™, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, there are several ways that one “becomes” a mutant, or at least discovers one’s powers. It may be an accidental encounter with “strange stuff,” deliberate experimentation, exposure to chemicals or radiation, a born genetic aberration, or a complete mystery. For *Rifts*® these basics still hold, but exact methods or reasoning may differ due to unique setting conditions. Mutation causes are basically the same whether a Mutoid, Psychic, or Super Mutant. Players may roll on the following table or pick one:

01-20% An unknown, random element. A complete mystery. (Note: If the player picks or rolls this option, the Game Master

may opt to pick or roll again and keep the origin secret from the player until the time is appropriate.)

**21-40%** An accidental encounter with radiation, chemicals, or other made-made substance. The change may be a result of the encounter, or the substance may have triggered some unknown "x-factor" within the mutant's genetics. It could be a one-time encounter or continued exposure over a period of time (radiation leak, contaminated water, etc.).

**41-60%** An accidental encounter with magic or psychic energy. This could be any number of things, including ley line storms, unexpected effects of magic or psionics, a supernatural being or god, or Rift activity. It may be a one-time event that brings out the mutation, or just the state of living in the P.P.E.-rich environment that is Rifts Earth. As above, this unexpected encounter may cause the resulting traits and powers to develop, or it may trigger some "x-factor."

**61-65%** Deliberate scientific experimentation. Experiments may have imbued the character with his or her mutation(s). The results could be intentional or accidental, but chances are slim of creating another mutant being (01% chance, not likely to be identical, 02-60% will kill the subject). If the experiment is performed by a surviving pre-Rifts organization with full knowledge and equipment, the chance of creating another mutant is 5%, with a 2% chance of creating an identical subject. (01-02% creates an identical mutant, 03-05% creates a different mutant, a roll of 06-40% results in the death of the subject, anything else has no effect). Possible points of origin include the CS Lone Star complex, Gene Splicers in old Eastern Europe, the remnants of the Achilles Project in South America, and similar.

**66-70%** Deliberate magical or psionic experimentation. In this case, magic or psychic processes resulted in the character's mutation. Chances are virtually nil of creating another mutant through random experimentation. Specific psionic abilities or magic spells, abilities, and circles may exist that can cause what may be considered mutations and would be subject to standard penalties and saving throws that apply to such situations, but none are known to exist on Earth.

**71-90%** Genetic aberration. The character was just born different, possibly possessing bizarre features or abilities. Powers and traits may have existed at birth or developed later in life, most likely at puberty or during times of extreme stress, pain, or trauma.

**91-00%** Legacy. The character has inherited a genetic mutation, though any traits or powers may have skipped one or several generations. Powers and traits may differ from those that have come before the character, or may be specific to the mutant heritage.

## Animal Mutation

Mutant animals vary in one important way from mutant humans: they begin life as an animal and mutate into a more human-like form. Often the animal in question was already highly intelligent or "special" in some way before its mutation, but something triggers the change later in life. Alternately, a mutant animal character may be the offspring of these original mutations.

Animal mutations occur through more or less the same means as a human mutant in most respects, meaning that the mutation can be caused by a random act, accidental encounter with "strange stuff" or supernatural forces, a deliberate experiment, or through birth to other mutant animals.

In *Rifts*®, most mutant animals are the creations of scientific experiments, or their offspring. The predominant creator of such creatures in North America is the Coalition State of Lone Star. In South America, many of the descendants of the Achilles Project are effectively mutant animals, while in Europe the primary source of such experimentation is from the Gene Splicers, although they tend to favor experimentation on humans over animals. The following table is primarily for use with characters in North America, but can easily be modified for use in other regions of the world where mutant animals are far less common. Players may roll on the following table or pick one:

**01-20%** An unknown, random element. A complete mystery. (Note: If the player picks or rolls this option, the Game Master may opt to pick or roll again and keep the origin secret from the player until the time is appropriate.)

**21-30%** An accidental encounter with radiation, chemicals, or other made-made substance. It could be a one-time encounter or continued exposure over a period of time to environmental conditions (radiation leak, contaminated water, etc.), given which there is a high probability that other mutants exist. If other mutants do exist, it is possible the character left, was thrown out, etc., at some earlier time and has been on his or her





own since. Roll or pick on the following sub-table to see what other mutants exist, if any:

01-20% A single litter, family group or small number of individuals (1D6) of the same species as the character.

21-35% Widespread mutation, 1D6 similar to the character plus another 5D6 of other species. May live together in a sort of village or community, or may be enemies.

36-50% Massive mutated population. 1D6+2 species have mutated in a small area for a mutant population of 3D4x10. Different species live in individual groups, some are friendly toward each other and some are not. Such large concentrations tend to dissipate over time and go their separate ways, sticking with their own kind in a search for a place of their own.

51-00% If there are other mutants like the character, he or she doesn't know. Either the character was mutated individually or did not gain self-consciousness until leaving the rest of the group.

31-40% An accidental encounter with magic or psychic energy. This could be any number of things, including ley line storms, unexpected effects of magic or psionics, a supernatural being or god, or Rift activity. It may be a one-time event that brings out the mutation, or just the state of living in the P.P.E.-rich environment that is Rifts Earth. If the latter is the case, other mutants may exist. Roll on the sub-table found immediately above.

41-75% Deliberate scientific experimentation imbued the character with his or her mutation(s). The results could be intentional or accidental, but chances are slim of creating another mutant animal (01-03% chance, not likely to be identical, 04-60% will kill the subject). Chances can easily increase with trial and error, and level of sophistication. If the experiment is done by a surviving pre-Rifts organization with full knowledge and equipment, the chance of creating another mutant can be as high as 95%! Very few on Rifts Earth possess such knowledge, but the Coalition States regularly carries out such experiments on a variety of animals.

76-80% Deliberate magical or psionic experimentation resulted in the character's mutation. Chances are virtually nil of creating another mutant through random experimentation. Specific psionic abilities or magic spells, abilities, and circles may exist that can cause what may be considered mutations and would be subject to standard penalties and saving throws that apply to such situations, but none are known to exist on Earth.

81-00% Born mutant. The character was born the child of mutant animals and raised by them (or by whomever may control the parents, as is the case with CS Dog Boys). While born a mutant, any special abilities (psionics, animal abilities, etc.) may be unique to the character.

## 3. Determine Mutant Characteristics and Abilities

Selecting mutant characteristics can be tricky, especially in Rifts® where non-humans are so often persecuted. While some mutant characteristics are very advantageous, others can easily turn the character into something to be considered a D-Bee by most, and therefore make his or her life much more difficult.

Many Game Masters allow players to pick traits for their characters, particularly if it fits an acceptable character concept. For instance, a player whose character had the super ability of Alter Physical Structure: Fire might want dark, bronze skin with bright red hair. Or, a player whose character has some form of superior vision ability may want one or more unusual eye characteristics. Players and Game Masters should feel free to allow such selection if both agree that it is best for the character.

Other Game Masters and players insist on sticking with random rolls for the selection of traits. Random selection is always a fun and exciting way to flesh out a character and can add a lot of depth to the role-playing experience.

### Characteristics vs Abilities

What is a characteristic? Almost everybody in today's world has things about them that are unique or unusual, be it a birthmark, streak in their hair, or particularly unusual eye color. Some people even have features that may be considered very unusual or strange (and often very "cool") like different colored eyes, a hairless body, or pointed ears. Mutant characteristics start beyond what we consider "very unusual" and extend into the extreme. Virtually any part of the body or human feature may be altered, exaggerated, or diminished as a mutant trait, but all run within one basic rule: mutant characteristics make you stand out.

While many can be hidden or disguised fairly easily, they are still a burden to a mutant trying to walk around in a crowd of humans. Whatever the characteristic, it is almost always unusual enough to make people give a second look to the character, stare, or even wonder "what's with that guy?" So, having purple eyes is probably not really a mutant characteristic. Having purple eyes that glow definitely is, or even having eyes that are *entirely* purple (iris, cornea, pupil and all). Keep in mind that when most "normal" people see mutants, they see D-Bees and aliens, not humans. So, if a character has an "extremely slender build," that means slender to the degree that they seem inhuman. Characteristics should reflect that.

What makes an ability? Abilities are mutations that are not outwardly noticeable or are more along the lines of the natural evolution of the human genetic code. They also tend to carry with them minor bonuses and perks without alteration of the character's appearance. Abilities are generally more "desired"

than characteristics, and are more likely the goal of experimentation or evolution rather than random chance.

## Mutant Characteristics

Below is a table of mutant characteristics. This generalized list is intended to spark the creativity of the player and Game Master and to help direct the development of mutant characters. It includes some new characteristics not seen before and some particularly suited to the *Rifts*® environment. More specific tables of characteristics are found in many Palladium games and supplements, including *Heroes Unlimited*™, *Rifts*® RPG, and issue 18 of *The Rifter*®. Any of those lists may be used to replace or supplement the following. Roll percentile to determine or pick characteristics as appropriate according to the mutant type (as identified above):

- 01-05% Strange ears.
- 06-10% Unusual eyes.
- 11-15% Odd facial features.
- 16-20% Sharp teeth, fangs, or an unusual tongue.
- 21-25% Textured, scaly, or lumpy skin.
- 26-30% Odd skin color and/or pattern.
- 31-35% Odd hair color and/or pattern.
- 36-40% Extreme amount of body hair.
- 41-45% Fur covers the body.
- 46-50% Very little or no body hair.
- 51-55% Small horns, antennae, or spikes.
- 56-60% Prehensile tail or tentacles.
- 61-65% Prehensile feet/toes.
- 66-70% Clawed hands or feet.
- 71-75% Extremely stocky or slender build.
- 76-80% Tall. Minimum height is 6 feet, 6 inches (1.98 m).
- 81-85% Short. Maximum height is 5 feet (1.52 m).

86-87% Secondary respiration via a set of gills, or any means of respiration besides normal lungs. While the most common manifestation of this attribute is the ability to breathe underwater, others may exist such as the ability to breathe a different gas (nitrogen, carbon dioxide, etc.), or respiration through a unique organ (breathing through the skin, gills in the neck, etc.).

88-89% Chemical secretion. The character has developed basic secondary communication measures via chemical secretion like an insect. The nature of this characteristic is left up to the player and Game Master, but in any case it cannot be easily shielded from Dog Boys or others with a heightened sense of smell. It can be used to communicate with other similar mutants, insects, and insect-like D-Bees that possess similar abilities, but is restricted to general signals or emotions such as fear, danger, death, or mate attractors.

90-91% P.P.E. sponge. The character, when exposed to high P.P.E. energy (at a ley line or within 1 mile/1.6 km of a nexus), soaks up the mystic power source and then for 24 hours will leak P.P.E. radiation unless personal P.P.E. levels are totally reduced to zero. This energy can be sensed by any number of P.P.E. vampires and practitioners of magic as well. The character will register as magic to any abilities that detect such things, even if the character has no magic powers. As long as the char-

acter is leaking the magic energy, Dog Boys can track as if he or she were casting a spell. On the up side, the character adds 50% to his P.P.E. base.

92-94% P.P.E. vampire. The character, like a Psi-Stalker, requires P.P.E. for nourishment. The death of the victim may or may not be required, and the character may or may not be able to live on ambient energy or that from ley lines. Game Masters should work with players to determine specifics.

95-97% Unusual aura. The mutant's aura shows him or her to be blatantly non-human, and shows some incorrect aspects of the character's features. It may show immense magical power when the character has none, or indicate that the character is possessed. Any of the normal things indicated by a See Aura (magical or psionic) may be changed, but they are always the same and the character has no control over it. Alter Aura is effective, but for half the duration.

98-00% Psionically invisible. Due to unusual brain chemistry, the character does not register to any form of psionic detection or mind-reading, including Telepathy, Empathy, Presence Sense, Sixth Sense, etc. All other abilities, including Mind Control, Mind Wipe, Mind Bond, Bio-Manipulation, and even Empathic Transmission, affect the character normally. Does not affect the character's resistance to magic in any form. If the character is psionic, do not take this characteristic; re-roll.



## Mutant Abilities

Below is a table of mutant abilities derived from various Palladium games and supplements, with some new ones thrown in

as well. Except for new abilities, all can be found starting on page 96 of *Rifts® World Book 13: Lone Star* in the section on Mutant Humans. Some may be found in additional locations such as *Heroes Unlimited™* and *The Rifter® #18*. These are intended to spark ideas and creativity and by no means cover the full spectrum of possibilities. Feel free to add to this table.

Roll percentile to determine or pick abilities from the below according to the type of mutant (as identified above):

- 01-03% Perfect vision and observant.
- 04-06% Double-jointed.
- 07-09% Aggressive and driven.
- 10-12% Excellent memory.
- 13-15% Ambidextrous.
- 16-18% Alert and quick response.
- 19-20% Resistance to Horror Factor.
- 21-23% Resistance to disease.
- 24-28% A head for numbers.
- 29-31% An eye for art.
- 32-36% Exceptional endurance.
- 37-42% Speed thrill junkie.
- 43-47% Insatiable desire to learn.
- 48-51% Defined talent.
- 52-55% Dominant personality.
- 56-60% Exceptionally charismatic.
- 61-64% Indomitable will.
- 65-68% Unusually strong. Add 1D6 to P.S. (New)
- 69-72% Unusually fast. Add 2D6 to Spd. (New)
- 73-76% Unusually quick and agile. Add 1D4 to Spd. and 1D4 to P.P. (New)
- 77-80% Unusually intelligent. Add 1D6 to I.Q. or raise to 17. (New)
- 81-84% Unusually attractive. Add 1D6 to P.B. or raise to 17. (New)
- 85-87% Logical mind. Add +4 save vs magical, psionic, and drug-induced illusions and hallucinations of all kinds. The character has the uncanny ability to reason through difficult situations and resist illusions. (New)
- 88-89% Closed mind. The character has developed natural defenses to psionics; add +2 to save. The character will not know if he is being psionically attacked or probed, but is simply naturally resistant. (New)
- 90-92% Suspension of disbelief. The character is one of the few who can use Techno-Wizard devices intuitively and has limited control over his or her personal P.P.E. The character simply maintains the innate ability to use such devices normally lost at adulthood, and also maintains childhood levels of P.P.E. Add 3D6+6 to base P.P.E., the character may donate all of his or her P.P.E. base to practitioners of magic (instead of the normal 70%), and can not be drained against his or her will by men of magic or P.P.E. vampires, except at death. (New)
- 93-94% Fearless. The character is completely immune to all effects of fear and Horror Factor. He or she tends to be very cold and calm when others panic, but is also completely unafraid of death, injury, personal loss, etc. This means that the character will pay little attention when in mortal danger and will

continue to fight to the death even against impossible odds unless pulled back by a comrade. It is not a death wish, but the fact that the thought of running away or saving one's self never enters the mind. (New)

95-97% Exceptional hearing. While nowhere near that of a Dog Boy or cybernetic implant, the character can hear a conversation across a room, even through a din of other voices. Clarity and range is roughly twice that of a human. +2 to initiative, and it is very difficult to sneak up on the character. (New)

98-00% Exceptional sense of touch. Extra-sensitive nerves in the fingertips allow the character to do fine work much more easily. +5% to all skills requiring a delicate, light touch such as Pick Pockets, Pick Locks, Palming, etc. (New)

## Choosing Super Abilities

Super Mutants who get psionics should have no trouble finding abilities to choose from. They are available in the *Rifts® RPG, World Book 12: Pyscape*, and collected in the *Rifts® Game Master Guide*. Psionic powers are also available in most Palladium games, including *Heroes Unlimited™*, *Palladium Fantasy RPG®*, *Beyond the Supernatural™*, and *Nightbane®*.

Super Mutants who get super abilities may choose them from any applicable source, including *Heroes Unlimited™*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition and its supplements, *Rifts® Dimension Book 4: Skraypers*, or *Rifts® Conversion Book One (Revised)*. Various issues of *The Rifter®* also contain extra super abilities.

*Rifts®*, while a game of magic, psionics, monsters and other fantastic occurrences, doesn't scream "Metropolis," and player characters are likely to be less than "Supermen." A character shooting energy from his hands is somehow less fitting in *Rifts®* than a mage casting fire bolts. Super abilities best suited for *Rifts®* are those that fit one of a couple of criteria:

1. They are less "super" than many of the powers listed in the pages of *Heroes Unlimited™*, or...

2. Their "super" nature is described not only as a mutant power, but is laced with an equally exotic but somehow more believable magic or psionic ability.

Take, for example, powers such as Flight: Glide, Animal Abilities, or any of the "extraordinary attribute" powers. Each of these could be explained reasonably well as natural mutations. While awesome and powerful in their own right, they lack the incredibility of Sonic Speed or an Alter Physical Structure.

On the other hand, even extraordinary powers can become somehow more plausible in the world of *Rifts®* due to psionic or magic influence. The N.P.C. "The Alias Man," below, was a psionic who had some of his powers mutate into super abilities after an intense encounter with a ley line storm. Super abilities such as Control Kinetic Energy, Manipulate Kinetic Energy, Wingless Flight, or even an enhanced strength could be explained as a mutated form of the psionic or magical ability of Telekinesis. Energy Expulsion could be a focused blast of mystic or psychic power. Even the fantastic seems reasonable in *Rifts®* given proper context.

If having characters that fly under their own power, can turn to ice or vibrate through walls doesn't throw the Game Master or the players for a loop, then that's okay too. Many players

carry the ability to suspend their disbelief to that level and find that it melds well with *Rifts*®, and are all the better for it. There are certainly no hard and fast rules in *Rifts*®.

## Mutant Animal Characteristics and Abilities

Mutant animals do not get characteristics and abilities in the same manner as mutant humans. All unique features and powers are determined during character creation and are directly derivative from their animal nature. See the section on mutant animals above for more information.

## 4. Choose an O.C.C.

Different types of mutants have different options when it comes to selecting a character class. Generally speaking, the more powerful the mutant, the more restricted his or her choices.

### Mutoids

Mutoids are very free in their selection of O.C.C.s and can freely pick from among most generally available character classes. Note that Coalition and other military O.C.C.s are not applicable, but equivalents may be available from other kingdoms or militaries at the Game Master's discretion. Psychic character classes may not be selected (see *Psychic Mutants* and *Super Mutants*). Common O.C.C.s include any adventurers, men of magic, and men at arms. Mutoids can be found in virtually any non-psychic character class and a great number of them are simple Villagers, Cowboys, Vagabonds, and other "normal people" classes.

### Psychic Mutants

Psychic Mutants may be virtually any O.C.C. that allows psionic abilities, but those with major psionics are still subject to the reduction in skills and bonuses as usual. Mutants that are master psionics are categorized as *Super Mutants*. A Game Master may allow a player to choose minor or major psionic abilities, or may make the player roll to randomly determine the degree of his or her character's ability (01-36 Major Psionic, 37-00 Minor Psionic). A Psychic Mutant can also simply choose an O.C.C. that has psionic powers. Common O.C.C.s include *Cyber-Knight* and other chivalrous classes, *Operator*, *Techno-Wizard*, *Body Fixer*, *Rogue Scholar* or *Scientist*, *Gambler*, *City Rats*, *Head Hunters*, and virtually any class where psionic and mutant abilities would be advantageous and mutant characteristics overlooked.



# Super Mutants

Super Mutant O.C.C.s have been mentioned previously, but are addressed here in more detail. Characters that have opted for a master psionic or other mutant R.C.C. obviously have no worries when it comes to choosing a character class, as they have already done so. Other Super Mutants, those with super or psionic abilities rolled in the table above, have a few O.C.C. options. These characters may choose from any scholar and adventurer O.C.C.s, but no other. Some of the most common of these include Wilderness Scouts, Explorers, Thieves, and City Rats. The vast majority of Super Mutants are Vagabonds who developed their powers instead of a profession. Also remember that they can not have more than partial bionic reconstruction without losing their powers.

## Mutant Animals

Most animals may pick from virtually any available O.C.C.s including scholars and adventurers, men at arms, practitioners of magic, and psychics. Availability of any given O.C.C. to a mutant animal depends on the type of animal, the specific character class, and Game Master discretion. As noted above, a number of mutant animal R.C.C.s already exist and may be used as they are, or the skills and class-specific abilities dropped in favor of a different O.C.C. Notable O.C.C.s that are not generally available include all Juicer and Crazy O.C.C.s, both of which have an extremely high probability of killing or otherwise destroying the mutant in the process.

Mutant animals with *After the Bomb*®-style psychic powers can not choose a psychic R.C.C. or have any *Rifts*®-style psionic abilities. Any mutant animal without such abilities may choose a psychic R.C.C. or roll for random psionics as a normal *Rifts*® character as in Step 4: How to Determine Psionics on page 12 of the *Rifts*® RPG.

## Conclusion

While mutants are clearly out and about in the *Rifts*® world, they are often drastically underused. Most are not anything over the top, simply D-Bees to most humans who fear or shun them. These offshoots of human or animal growth and development add an interesting bit of color to an already incredibly diverse tapestry, and add another element of political and social discord. *Rifts* Earth is a world of vast wilderness, not just of overgrown ruins and demolished cities, but also a jungle of growth and possibility for the future. In many ways, mutants represent a million different worlds for the future, in a future linked with a million different worlds.

## Recommended Sources

Palladium Books, Inc. publishes a number of titles dealing with mutants across the Megaverse®. Among these, the most prominent are:

*Rifts*® Conversion Book One (Revised)

*Rifts*® Dimension Book 4: Skraypers™

Heroes Unlimited™, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition

Heroes Unlimited™: Mutant Underground™

*After the Bomb*®, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition and its supplements

Specific mutant races, abilities, and characteristics can be found in any number of *Rifts*® and other Palladium titles.

# Non-Player Characters

Several N.P.C.s are included here to help to more thoroughly integrate mutants into *Rifts*®. Each falls into a different category and illustrates a different background and character concept. They include:

- Doris Heller, a Mutoid Body Fixer struggling to hide among humans.
- Tricky Timmy Thigpen, a Psychic Mutant and Professional Gambler who uses his psionics to gain a competitive edge.
- The Alias Man, a Super Mutant assassin and Super-Spy with formidable psionic and super abilities.
- Slinky, a Techno-Wizard genius and CS-created mutant ferret who fears the world.

## Dr. Doris Heller Mutoid Body Fixer

Doris Heller was born in a small shack in the poor section of El Dorado. Her wealthy mother bore the pain of childbirth on a table tended by little more than a midwife. Doris' father, an officer in the CS military, stood by and anxiously watched the birth dressed as a peasant. After hours of labor the new mother wept with her husband both in joy and fear for their new child, a baby girl. Doris Heller was born in a small shack in the poor section of El Dorado, a mutant doomed to a life of pain and strife.

Doris' father, Donovan Heller, was a captain in the CS Air Force based out of Lone Star. His wife, Rebecca, was the well-respected daughter of a wealthy oil merchant from Amarillo. Donovan was a rarity in the CS officer corps in that he was well-educated in history and literature at a small college in Whykin prior to his enlistment. In his youth he even wrote a book, *The Legends and Legacy of Old America*. He joined the military as a bid for citizenship in the Coalition States and was quickly swept into the skies with the Air Force. Stationed at Lone Star, he met Rebecca and instantly fell for her.

Upon their meeting, Rebecca also fell in love at first sight but was not quick to accept the dashing Donovan's pursuits. All her life, she had been different and forced to hide her nature from the world. She was a Mutoid, even though her characteristics were slight and mostly corrected by cosmetic surgery when she was young. Her parents hid her nature to protect her from harm and maintain their own political relationship with the Coalition



by hiring a surgeon to re-shape her pointed ears and replace her solid-white eyes with bio-systems. Rebecca always knew that she could pass her mutant genes on to any children she had, and so decided early on to never marry. But her love for the scholarly Captain Heller proved too much for her, and she risked everything by telling him her secret. Donovan, a thinker of the caliber of those found in the universities of Lazlo, accepted her as she was and they were immediately married. They had their first and only child, Doris, in secret in El Dorado during the winter of 52 P.A.

Doris proved to be a mutant, her traits very different from her mother's and not so easily hidden. The hair on her head was long, growing over an inch per day, and her skin was a light shade of blue. From the day she was born, her life was extremely difficult. Doris grew up learning how to hide her characteristics well, and continues with the routine her parents taught her. She cuts her hair daily and wears it so that the growth is not easily noticed; up in the morning and then let down in the early afternoon. She always wears long pants and sleeves and a thick, skin-tone makeup that covers the blue tint in her skin.

Growing up in an atmosphere of love and compassion, Doris turned early in life toward a career in medicine to pass such caring on to others less fortunate than herself. She made it through a basic nursing and paramedic program in the Lone Star 'Burbs and then found a mentor with whom to hone her skills. When

she was 30 (82 P.A.) she moved North to the 'Burbs of New Chillicothe and began using her skills to help the D-Bee and mutant population there.

In order to not be ousted by Coalition patrols, she is forced to keep up her facade. CS soldiers do not allow an educated D-Bee or Mutoid to run a medical practice, but to a human they give a little slack. When working, she wears long gloves and long-sleeve smocks to help hide her characteristics even when she has to scrub for surgery. Fortunately, most of her medical work is that of a family practitioner, providing basic care to the poor in the 'Burbs. She is getting older and still works hard trying to better the lives of others. Dr. Heller is a kind woman, now aging and worn by time. While she tries to extend her compassion to all, it is getting harder for her to keep up her game, and she is getting a little bit paranoid. She also holds no love for the Coalition and their soldiers, but feels her duty as a physician requires her to help them when the situation arises. Her aid to Coalition Troops in need has actually helped to keep her protected and off the radar of the ISS and others in the CS who would normally give her grief.

**Adventure Notes:** Dr. Doris Heller is most likely to be encountered in the 'Burbs of New Chillicothe at or near her clinic (her location could easily be moved to any major city or kingdom to suit the Game Master's campaign). Some possible encounters include the following:

1. A character (possibly a mutant, D-Bee, magic user, etc.) is wounded in battle or an attempted bushwhacking in the streets of the New Chillicothe 'Burbs. Dr. Heller may be the only person who can help. If nothing else, she can be a recurring source of aid and safety for the player characters.

2. Rumors circulate about Dr. Heller that she is a mage or psychic. Her somewhat secretive and private nature, added to her talent as a healer, lead many to speculate that she may have supernatural gifts. While these are false tales, they hit dangerously close to the mark if human supremacists decide to check it out more closely. Allies and friends of Doris may have to step in to protect her.

3. Doris Heller is exposed! Whether in a sudden lack of judgment or a terrible risk gone wrong, somebody sees Dr. Heller without her makeup on and recognizes her. This may actually have been a willing sacrifice, with the good doctor rushing into the streets to help someone who is severely injured despite not having her disguise fully applied. In any case, the Coalition is not pleased that this Mutoid has spent years pretending to be a real human, and is out to get her. Can a lifetime of good works produce enough allies to get her out of the city and to safety? She may even have help from sympathetic CS soldiers who she has aided in the past.

**Race:** Mutant Human (Mutoid).

**Alignment:** Principled.

**Attributes:** I.Q. 15, M.E. 13, M.A. 13, P.S. 11, P.P. 12, P.E. 11, P.B. 15, Spd. 13 (some physical attributes lowered to reflect her age).

**Hit Points:** 56, S.D.C.: 24.

**Weight:** 103 pounds (47 kg). **Height:** 5 feet, 4 inches (1.6 m).

**Age:** 57

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

**Experience Level:** 11th level Body Fixer (see *Rifts® RPG* for more details).

**Skills of Note:**

O.C.C. Skills: Language: American (98%), Medical Doctor, Biology, Pathology, Chemistry, Math: Basic, Literacy: American, Language: Spanish, Pilot Automobile, all at 98%. Athletics (General), Body Building, W.P. Knife.

Medical: Paramedic (98%).

Science: Anthropology (80%).

Technical: Computer Operation (98%), History (90%), Literacy: Spanish (90%), Lore: D-Bees (85%).

**Mutant Characteristics:** Doris has light blue skin and an extreme amount of hair on her head (grows over an inch/2.5 cm every day).

**Combat Training:** None.

**Attacks Per Melee:** 3, or 6 non-combat "actions."

**Combat Bonuses:** +1 to parry, +2 to dodge, +1 to roll with punch/fall/impact.

**Weapons:** Doris is a fairly non-violent person, though she does have an NG-33 Laser Pistol (1D6 M.D.C. with 11 shots left on the E-Clip) hidden in her office in the New Chillicothe 'Burbs in case anybody ever tried to start trouble (nobody ever has, as the kind doctor has a number of people who keep an eye out on her behalf). She also has a Wilk's Laser Scalpel (1 to 1D6 S.D.C. damage) and a number of surgical tools.

**Body Armor:** None.

**Other Equipment:** Doris has a fairly well-stocked medical practice where she can see patients and perform a number of types of surgery. She is well-stocked with aspirin, healing ointments and balms, basic diagnostic equipment, a handheld computer, and several Internal Robot Micro-Surgeon System (IRMSS) and Robot Medical Kit (RMK) sets. Expensive equipment like the IRMSS is not easily replaced and is saved for emergencies.

**Allies of Note:** The doctor has saved a number of lives, ranging from CS soldiers bushwhacked on patrol in the 'Burbs to vile, demon-like creatures from the Rifts. Many are in her debt and would stick their neck out to help her. No one even suspects that she is a mutant, but some suggest that the doctor is overly secretive. Most assume it is because she doesn't want to draw CS attention to her aiding D-Bees in her practice.

**Enemies:** If the CS were to find out that Doris Heller is a mutant in disguise, they would shut her down and execute her on the spot. A mutant pretending to be human is unacceptable in the eyes of the Coalition.

**Money:** Doris has very little money. What she gets from her fees and the donations she receives goes into her private practice to pay rent, buy medicine and new equipment, and maintain the building. She never wants for anything, but actually owns nothing more than the clothes on her back and the building she works in.

# Tricky Timmy Thigpen

## Psychic Mutant Gambler

*"Cheat? Never. Just lucky I guess!" — a common utterance of "Tricky" Timmy Thigpen.*

Some people are good at what they do. Some people could even be considered gifted. Then there's Tricky Timmy Thigpen, a true master. When it comes to any form of competitive card playing, Timmy is as good as they get. A notorious Gambler, Timmy travels the New West with a deck of cards and a smile.

Tricky Tim's parents were mutants, but of the more random breed. His father was a minor psychic with glowing yellow eyes and his mother a simple, impish-looking woman with acute features, pointed ears, and greenish skin. They lived in a community of assorted oddities and misfits and had a child that was unique in his characteristics. While both of his parents were fairly obviously humanoid, their son was born with more extreme mutations. He has always had dark grey streaks in his skin; almost stripes, with prehensile feet and no hair anywhere on his body. As he grew older it became apparent that his teeth were pointed, that his ears were about half normal size and he grew a series of half a dozen small, one-inch spikes from the back of his head down the back of his neck. Such deformities made childhood difficult for both Timmy and his parents, and at an early age he turned to the streets of his home in Silvereno. There he used his frightening appearance, fearless attitude and incredible strength to keep others at arm's length while he plied a successful trade as a pickpocket, gambler, and all-out rogue. By the time he hit his early teens he was raking in cash in street games, and by the time he was 17 he was cleaning out saloon bums and cowboys. By the tender age of 20 he strolled with confidence into the most disreputable establishments in the West and walked out laden with other people's cash.

The reality behind his success is that Thigpen is a major psychic sensitive with powers that allow him to gain insight into the cards of his opponents, including Telepathy, Empathy, and Total Recall. While no level of psychic power can guarantee victory 100 percent of the time, it certainly allows him to know when to hold them and know when to fold them. For this reason, Timmy's favorite game is blackjack, which allows him the greatest advantages when using his powers.

Tricky Tim's modus operandi is very simple. He walks into a bar or casino, checks out what looks to be a good game with See Aura to ensure he has no supernatural competition, then grabs a chair. Thigpen is good enough that he doesn't always use his abilities, but when the stakes are just right he always seems to come out on top.

There are certainly others around the country who pull similar stunts, many of whom have died at the wrong end of a cheated laser pistol. To this end Thigpen is always very careful and prepared. He can hold his own in a fight and has put more than one person who accused him of cheating down for the count. To be sure, Thigpen doesn't care about anybody.

Tricky Timmy would love to head East to try his hand at some of the bigger casinos in the Chi-Town 'Burbs, Kingsdale, and other more civilized places of the world. It is his mutant nature that makes him think twice. Thigpen isn't the most schol-

arly or well-read of individuals, but he's heard stories about the atrocities committed against Mutoids and unregistered psychics in the States and would prefer to steer clear. He has also had a fair number of run-ins with Psi-Stalkers and Dog Boys who can tell he's psychic if he's not careful, and the thought of those types working for the law would keep things a little too honest for his taste.

Timmy is happy-go-lucky, and loves to have a good time whether it is drinking, playing cards, or raising hell. He is extremely bold and loves to insult people to their face while laughing about it. The gambler is not a real troublemaker, mostly because he looks alien and tough enough for others to give him some space.

**Adventure Notes:** Tricky Tim works well as a villain, ally, or just a one-time plot hook. He may be encountered in one of the following ways, or Game Masters may come up with ideas of their own:

1. In a bar, casino, or other place where gambling is taking place, Tricky Tim can be found dealing away and raking in the dough. Players could find themselves the victims of his talents in a high-stakes game, suckered by a master con man.

2. Characters may find out Timmy's secret gift! They may somehow learn it themselves or hear about it from another. They could turn him in, avoid him at the tables, or call him on it right in the middle of a game! Such knowledge is very sensitive and Timmy might pay big bucks to keep it quiet. Or, he might murder the finks in their sleep. In any case, he doesn't want word getting out or he's likely to become a dead man himself.

3. Conning the con man... there is nothing sweeter. Through expert playing, use of magic or psionics, or just plain dumb luck, the characters may be able to take Tricky Timmy Thigpen for all he's worth. He certainly wouldn't be pleased by such a turn as it would hurt his reputation and pride. Hardly a nice guy, Timmy might blackmail, rough-up, or threaten the characters to get his money back. He might also hire others to do his dirty work for him so that he can keep his hands clean.

**Real Name:** Timothy Thigpen.

**Aliases:** Tricky Timmy Thigpen, Tricky Tim.

**Race:** Mutant Human (Psionic Mutant).

**Alignment:** Anarchist.

**Attributes:** I.Q. 13, M.E. 12, M.A. 12, P.S. 23, P.P. 23, P.E. 11, P.B. 6, Spd. 9.

**Hit Points:** 50, **S.D.C.:** 31.

**Weight:** 210 pounds (95 kg). **Height:** 6 feet, 2 inches (1.88 m).

**Age:** 28

**P.P.E.:** 9, **I.S.P.:** 50.

**Experience Level:** 8th level Professional Gambler (see *New West*™ for more details).

**Skills of Note:**

**O.C.C. Skills:** Language: American (98%), Language: Spanish (95%), Literacy: American (97%), Math: Basic (98%), Dance (75%), Law (70%), Cardsharp (66%), Palming (65%), Concealment (56%), Pick Pockets (73%), Disguise (70%), Escape Artist (72%), Seduction (47%), Streetwise (65%), Pilot: Hover Craft (90%), Recognize Weapon



Quality (65%), W.P. Revolver (includes Derringer), W.P. Energy Pistol, W.P. Grenade Launcher.

**Pilot:** Horsemanship: General (71%/51%).

**Technical:** Lore: D-Bees (60%), Lore: Indians (60%), Lore: Psychics and Psionics (65%).

**W.P.s:** W.P. Knife.

**Mutant Characteristics:** Timmy looks more like a D-Bee than a human and most people view him as such. He has dark streaks of grey across all of his skin, sharp pointed teeth, no body hair, small ears and a row of one-inch horns running from the back of his head down to his top vertebrae. He also has prehensile toes and often goes barefoot or in very large and strange-looking boots.

**Special Abilities:**

**Mutant Abilities:** Resist Horror Factor and Unusually Strong. All bonuses are already included.

**Mastery of Card Sharpening:** The Gambler can recognize cheating and marked cards equal to his Cardsharp skill -10% for a total of 56%. He also has +2 extra melee actions per round involving the palming, concealment, stacking, and dealing of cards. Enjoys an additional +2 initiative when palming, picking pockets, or concealing. Generally cool under fire.

**Quick-Draw Initiative: Throwing Knives:** See Other Combat Info, below.

**Tolerance to Alcohol:** Can drink twice as much as the average person without feeling the effects. See *New West*™, pages 121-122.

**Reputation:** Going up against a Professional Gambler can be unnerving, meaning average characters are -10% to any gambling or cardsharp skills and are -10% to pick pockets, palm,



or conceal anything from Tricky Timmy provided they know who he is.

**Special! Psionics and Cardsharp:** Tricky Tim is a good card player, but there are more skilled ones out there. The real secret to his success is the cunning use of psionics during the game. Telepathy can be used to pull surface thoughts off of other players' minds and Empathy can tell how players respond to their hands, to bluffs, or even to threats. Total Recall is more or less the ultimate card-counting skill and can't be shrugged off by a Mind Block or a lucky save vs psionics. In game terms, the following bonuses are granted when Timmy uses his various powers:

- Telepathy grants a +15% bonus to any gambling skill when playing multi-player games such as five card draw, or in games where three or more hidden cards are involved like stud or gin rummy. In games where very few cards are held, like blackjack, it grants a +20% bonus (there are fewer cards therefore the opponent is more likely to be thinking about the important ones). It also grants a +25% bonus to team games such as dominos, spades, or bridge (+35% if both players are telepathic). Telepathy does not help in games of random chance such as roulette or dice, except perhaps to see if the game is rigged by reading the thoughts of the person running the table.
- Empathy grants a +10% bonus in games where bluffing is important, such as any form of poker. It also grants this bonus to any game to determine if a player is cheating.
- Total Recall is mostly used in games that use a single deck for multiple hands, like blackjack, or games where there is a lot of discarding such as dominos, spades, or bridge. It grants a +15% bonus if only one or two decks are used, +10% if three to five decks are used, and only +5% if the dealer is using more than five decks.

Bonuses are used to show an advantage when powers are being used, and bonuses do stack with each other. Control over the game is still somewhat left to chance even when psionics are used to gain an advantage because the player has no control over what cards are dealt. There's still an element of random chance involved.

**Psionics:** Major Psionic. Empathy (4), Mask I.S.P. and Psionics (7), Mind Block (4), See Aura (6), Sense Magic (3), Sixth Sense (2), Telepathy (4), and Total Recall (2).

**Combat Training:** Hand to Hand: Expert.

**Attacks Per Melee:** 5

**Combat Bonuses:** +2 on initiative (+4 when palming or concealing), +5 to strike, +6 to parry and dodge, +8 to damage, +2 to roll with punch/fall/impact, +3 to pull punch, +1 to disarm.

**Other Combat Info:** Kick attack: 1D6, critical strike: 18-20, paired weapons (all), body throw/flip.

**Special combat bonuses with throwing knives:** +3 to initiative and can do double damage on a called shot when thrown.

**Other Bonuses:** +9 to save vs Horror Factor.

**Weapons:** Timmy's most-used weapon is by far the Vibro-Blade (Damage: 1D6 M.D.C.), of which he carries no fewer than six at any given time (two typically on his belt, the other four hidden on his person). His favorite weapon is a

TW Fire Dagger he picked up in a long, hard-won poker game in the Barony of Charity (Damage: 2D6 M.D.C.). He also carries a Wilk's 210 "Pocket Pistol" (1D6 M.D.C., 3 shots), a Bandito Arms knock-off of the C-5 Pump Pistol (4D6 M.D.C., 5 shots), and a silver .45 revolver with silver bullets (4D6 S.D.C., 6 shots).

**Body Armor: NG "Range Rider" Riding Armor:** Timmy wears his armor most of the time. He has two sets, one for traveling and riding and another fancy set for swanky casinos and parties. **M.D.C.:** Helmet 35, Arms 12 each, Legs 15 each, Main Body 30 M.D.C. Often wears the "Range Rider" hat with 10 M.D.C. instead of the helmet.

**Other Equipment:** When he can't wear armor, Tricky Tim wears western-cut suits with silver buttons and his silver revolver. He has two decks of marked cards and always has plenty of strong liquor handy which he freely shares with those he is gambling against. Loves to smoke cigars, and always has at least a dozen on his person. He doesn't have a vehicle of his own, preferring to keep his assets liquid and winning or stealing a vehicle if needs be.

**Allies of Note:** Timmy sometimes hires people to either watch his back or to help him cheat at cards if he feels it necessary. Timmy sometimes travels with a minor psionic Saloon Bum named Fat Sam to whom he provides a bottomless mug of beer in exchange for a little peeking at the cards of his opponents. Fat Sam has the powers of Telepathy and Telekinesis.

**Enemies:** If anyone were to catch Tricky Tim in his game and make the accusation stick, there would be a line as long as the Rio Grande of people who wanted a piece of the mutant. As it stands, he has plenty of people who hate his guts, but few who are actively out to get him.

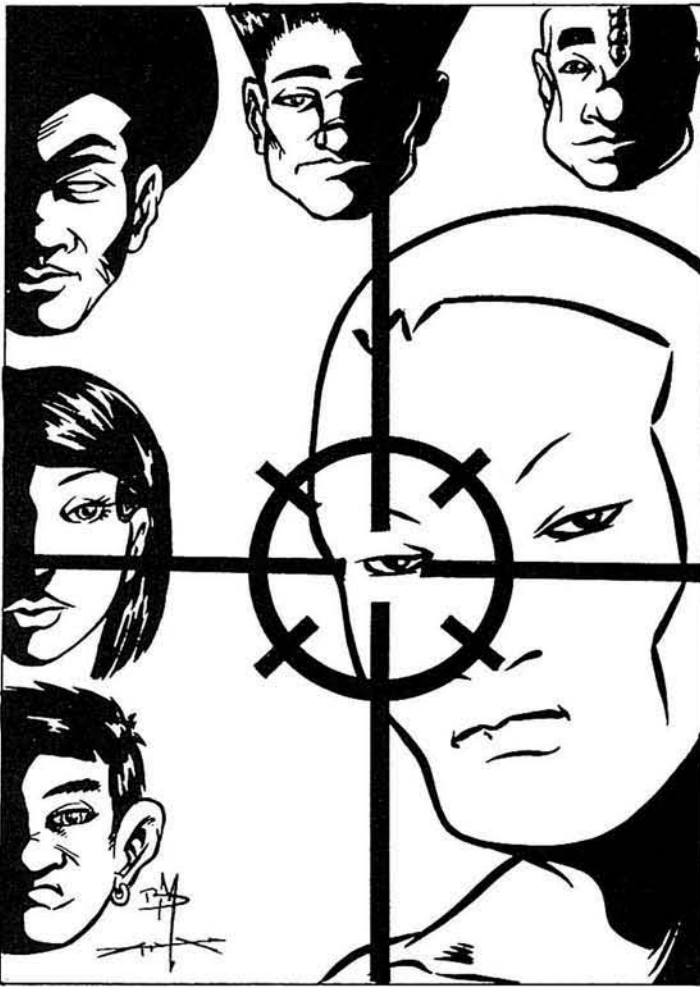
**Money:** Timmy spends most of his money living a luxurious lifestyle. He can walk into virtually any bar, club, or casino in the New West and as long as he has enough cash to get started, he'll make enough at the tables to fund a duration of stay of days, weeks, or even more. Tricky Tim rarely has less than 100,000 Black Market credits on him at any time, and usually has another 100,000 credits' worth of Black Market items or other valuables (gold, gems, watches, jewelry, etc.) picked up from those who had debts to pay and not enough cash.

## The Alias Man

### Mutant Assassin and Super-Spy

*It was the middle of the night when Cassandra Munsford walked out of her small, comfortable apartment on level 20 of the Ironheart mega-city, and down Victory Boulevard toward her office there. Her ISS Lieutenant's badge was shined and her uniform pressed despite the late hour, as it should be if one's department is on call 24 hours a day. The two enlisted men sitting at the guardhouse saluted her as she entered, then grinned at each other as they caught her stifling a yawn. The Lieutenant never liked to look even the slightest bit unkempt.*

*She entered the ISS headquarters, took two lefts and a right, then cleared security and walked past the sentry into the briefing room. The CO was already there, stooped over a map of the*



lower levels of the city and stroking his goatee. Without looking up, he noted the Lieutenant's arrival and began to think aloud.

"I'm glad you're here, Lieutenant. We've got some kind of mess, I just can't figure it... a bomb in the lower levels. Not sure why yet. Any thoughts?"

"Maybe it's a diversion," she suggested matter-of-factly.

The Major looked concerned. "Maybe, but for what?" He looked up at the Lieutenant as she walked toward him. His face took on a puzzled expression as she placed her hand on his and a strange tickling sensation rushed through his brain. Suddenly aware of the assassin and its intentions, the major pulled away, but it was too late. A single, silent laser blast seared through his skull and he slumped to the floor like a marionette cut from its strings.

Lieutenant Munsford's stature and complexion changed, from thin and olive skinned to stocky and pale white before changing to short and dark. A thin beard and mustache grew as the assassin spoke into the intercom.

"Guard, admit no one to this room, except under my order."

"Yes, Major," came the snappy reply.

Within minutes the assailant was fastening the gold buttons on his uniform and looking at his reflection in the polished hardwood table. As he left the room and sealed it behind him, he returned the Corporal's salute. "Dawkins, make sure that nobody enters this room unless I'm with them. The information in there is very sensitive and I've left the Lieutenant to stand watch."

"Sir, what should I tell the other officers when they arrive for the briefing?"

"Tell them the situation has changed." He put on his hat and adjusted his sidearm. "I have to go see the General."

The assassin known simply as "The Alias Man" by CS intelligence has been a successful hit man throughout the Midwest for almost five years. Reports issued to ISS, NTSET, and other agencies within the States claim that he is responsible for some 120 known assassinations in his career. The number is actually closer to 30, impressive nonetheless considering at least a dozen were field-grade Coalition or Tolkeen officers. In addition to his murderous habits, he finds employment as a spy as well. He has worked unofficially for the CS in the past, but is currently on retainer for the remnants of the Tolkeen government.

The Alias Man is a mutant, altered by the extreme levels of psychic energy in the Ohio River Valley, which diverted his already significant psychic development in a new direction. Already employed as a spy thanks to his powers of Telepathy and Ectoplasmic Disguise among others, he was struck by lightning during a ley line storm while on the job in the Magic Zone. His body metamorphed wildly and when he regained control, he found his body and mind had become a blank canvas on which he could paint virtually anything. The loss of all body hair, skin pigmentation, and facial features was a small price to pay for the miscreant's ability to take the appearance of anyone he chooses.

The Alias Man charges, and receives, extraordinary rates for his services. Common murder is not his style; he specializes in military targets and other big shots. He charges 1 million credits up front for non-commissioned officers and lieutenants, 1.5 million for mid-grade officers, and 3 million for Lieutenant Colonels and higher ranks. Generals are a rare target, generally running 5 to 10 million, all in advance. He will perform no more than three hits in a single place within a given year (risks just get too high) and prefers to perform multiple, related jobs at one time. He also reserves the right to kill others, at his own discretion, in his pursuit of a target.

It's a noteworthy fact that five of his kills were fellow assassins. All were people using his name and reputation to get the big jobs. This isn't difficult for a copycat to do because nobody knows for sure what The Alias Man looks like, and any job given him is very faith-based. Still, the word is out about the last guys who tried it, and people have decided the risk is a little too great.

It is known that The Alias Man is psychic (registers as major) and a shape-changer, but the details of his abilities are sketchy. It is understood that his morphing abilities include the ability to alter his voice and fingerprints, two rare gifts even in the bizarre world of Rifts®.

Above all else, The Alias Man is intelligent, cold, and calculating. He never walks into a room he doesn't have a way out of, and he never trusts anyone.

**Adventure Notes:** The Alias Man can cause any number of problems for adventurers, soldiers, and any denizens of Rifts Earth, including but not limited to the following:

1. As an assassin (and an especially good one) he may gun for one or more of the characters, paid by a recurring or emerging villain. As a spy, he may track their movements for a third party and set up traps, ambushes, and all sorts of other trouble.

2. The shoe may very well be on the other foot as well. The Alias Man has a number of enemies across North America, and makes more with every contract he carries out. Player characters may be hired to grease The Alias Man, or to spy on him to report his whereabouts.

3. Another possibility is the characters could have some level of personal involvement with the assassin. They could unknowingly wrong him and get on his bad side, or just as likely help him in some way so he decides to return the favor. Men like The Alias Man are rarely comfortable as enemies or friends.

**Real Name:** Unknown.

**Aliases:** The Alias Man.

**Race:** Mutant Human (Super Mutant).

**Alignment:** Miscreant.

**Attributes:** I.Q.: 14, M.E.: 23, M.A.: 17, P.S.: 11, P.P.: 9, P.E.: 12, P.B.: 3, Spd.: 15.

**Hit Points:** 27, S.D.C.: 33.

**Weight:** 160 pounds (72 kg). **Height:** 5 feet, 10 inches (1.78 m).

**Age:** 30

**P.P.E.:** 8, I.S.P.: 82.

**Experience Level:** 5th level Super-Spy (See *Rifts® Mercenaries* for more details).

**Skills of Note:**

O.C.C. Skills: Language: American (98%), Radio: Basic (75%), Radio: Scramblers (65%), Cryptography (55%), Math: Basic (85%), Literacy: American (60%), Language: Euro (90%), Language: Dragonese (90%), Intelligence (63%), Pick Locks (60%), Disguise (60%), Forgery (45%), Prowl (55%), Computer Operation (65%), W.P. Energy Pistol, W.P. Energy Rifle.

Additional Skills: Granted by super ability and treated as O.C.C. Related Skills. Language: Spanish (70%), Language: Old Canadian French (70%), Impersonation 70%. (SPECIAL! Basically an advanced version of Imitate Voices & Impersonation skill.)

Military: Military Etiquette (55%).

Pilot: Hover Craft (70%).

Technical: Literacy: Euro (50%), Literacy: Dragonese (45%), Literacy: Spanish (45%), Research (60%).

Secondary Skills: Streetwise (42%), Lore: Magic (55%), Lore: D-Bees (55%), Pilot: Automobile (68%).

**Mutant Characteristics:** No body hair, skin pigmentation, or facial features in his unaltered state. He has only small, beady eyes, and slits for a nose and mouth. All physical abnormalities can be disguised with his super ability, and thus change his P.B. to match his new identity as well.

**Special Abilities:**

Alter Facial Features and Physical Stature:

1. Alter Facial Features. Indefinite duration, 10 times per day. The character can alter his face in any and every way, even hiding his unusual characteristics. He can grow or shorten hair of various natural colors, change eye shape and color, grow and change the appearance of ears, etc. The Alias Man can, within one melee round, completely change his

face and even impersonate an individual as long as he has materials to study (or the genuine article).

2. Alter Physical Stature/Shape & Size. Indefinite duration, 10 times per day. Height can be increased or decreased by one foot (0.3 m). Any aspect of physical stature including build, age, and unique characteristics can be created or copied exactly given proper reference. This change can take place simultaneously with the alteration of facial features and still take only one melee round to perform. Gender-specific characteristics can be altered, reduced, or exaggerated but may require make-up, padding, etc., to make a complete and convincing change.

3. Photographic Picture Memory. Indefinite duration. Exact and completely accurate recollection is possible at 60%. The Alias Man can remember even the slightest factual data and can thus redevelop a personality over and over again without reference after the initial mimic.

4. Alter Voice. Indefinite duration, 20 times per day. Specific voices may be imitated at 60% (-25% if a woman's voice) as long as The Alias Man has heard him or her speak for several minutes or has a quality recording. Changing to a non-specific voice can be accomplished at 90%.

5. Alter Finger and Hand Prints. Indefinite duration, 10 times per day. Copying another's fingerprints can be done at 55% (-10% without good materials to study from). May also alter prints of the toes and feet.

Note: Also see Psionics.

**Psionics:** Considered a Major Psionic. Mind Bond (10), Alter Aura (2), and Mind Block (4).

**Combat Training:** Hand to Hand: Basic.

**Attacks Per Melee:** 5

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

**Other Bonuses:** +4 to save vs psionics, 45% to trust/intimidate.

**Allies of Note:** None.

**Enemies:** Is wanted by the Coalition States for a number of assassinations and is generally disliked and mistrusted, even by those he has worked for.

**Weapons & Equipment of Note:** Has no standard gear, so to speak, as he is almost always impersonating someone else and thus uses stolen clothes, armor, weapons, and equipment. Given the choice, he prefers small, silent lasers with S.D.C. and M.D.C. settings when working.

**Money:** Has millions of credits in various secure locations. He lost at least 4 million with the fall of Tolkeen, but has another 5 million in secure CS accounts under at least 6 different names (each with different fingerprints and ID's). Has another 3.5 million in Black Market currency stashed away in various safe-houses and generally has 200,000 credits on him at any given time.

## Slinky

### Techno-Wizard Ferret

Slinky is a mutant ferret who has lived most of his life in the care and tutelage of an adventuring Techno-Wizard named Sean



Therrin. After his many years of adventuring, Therrin returned to his home in Wild Woods, a small village in what was once Northern Kentucky. He brought with him a rescued creature taken by most to be a D-Bee, to whom he offered a home and family. Sean had no children and brought up the young mutant as his apprentice and heir, teaching him all the wonders of Techno-Wizardry. For 20 years the two served the people of Wild Woods by operating a general repair and weapons shop using their TW skills, and lived in relative peace and harmony. Often Sean's former companions would visit, stock up, and relive old times. Immediately following the Coalition war with Tolkeen, they visited again and begged him to join the party on one final errand of vital importance. His blood hot with the thrill of adventure once again, he agreed and left Slinky in charge of the shop. He never returned.

The young mutant has been at a loss since his friend and teacher left him alone all those months ago. Always reserved and withdrawn, he since has become a recluse. He leaves his small hut only to perform major work needed in the town (his sense of service to others is well-established) and to tend the adjacent store when he can gather up the nerve. All in the village pity him and do what they can to help, but only a few truly call him friend. These few Slinky befriends don't even realize the level of his devotion, as he holds friendship as the highest virtue and privilege.

Despite his insecurities, Slinky is truly brilliant. As far as Techno-Wizards go, he is a highly imaginative conceptualist who loves to design new and innovative equipment, the more complicated and detailed the better. He has a working knowledge of power conversion and weapon construction, but has little practical experience with such things since his devices are usually made for the practical benefit of the townspeople. Very

few of Slinky's designs are ever built, because he lacks the materials to create them and doesn't dare venture out into the dangerous world to collect or purchase more. When he does construct something, it usually requires the cannibalization of one or more other inventions for parts.

Slinky was created by the Coalition at Lone Star as an attempt to breed a soldier with the desirable attributes of a rodent with the friendlier, controllable, and trusting instincts of a canine. Ferrets are highly intelligent and eager to please, and accept humans as masters almost as easily as mutant dogs. He was considered a failure. His small size made him ineffective as a soldier, and his general good nature precluded him from service as a spy or assassin. He was mistreated terribly and scheduled for destruction before a raid by adventurers on part of the Lone Star Complex inadvertently freed him. In the chaos, Slinky managed to escape only to be pursued, caught, and nearly killed by a vicious Dog Pack before those who attacked the base rescued him, quite literally, from their jaws. He was taken in, nursed back to health, and adopted by the Techno-Wizard, Sean.

The Coalition States both emotionally and physically scarred Slinky. His shiny brown coat permanently displays gaps due to scar tissue along his right leg and back from the teeth of the Dog Boys who pursued him, and he walks with a limp due to permanent muscle damage. He is fundamentally distrusting of all humans until they earn his loyalty, which he will never betray thereafter. His general fear of the world is surpassed only by his fear of dogs, especially humanoid dogs such as Psi-Hounds, Wolfen, and other dog-like D-Bees.

**Adventure Notes:** Slinky isn't one to go rushing off on an adventure for fame, glory, or treasure. Getting him out of his hut can be difficult. However, there are ways that he could have a great impact on many adventurers and perhaps even venture out himself.

1. A strong lead to Slinky's master, Sean Therrin, would get him to pick up his armor and trek out even to meet certain death. Therrin may be held by the Coalition for suspected involvement in the Tolkeen War, or by a magic cult as forced labor. Any number of dangers in the world could have the old Techno-Wizard in over his head, and any of those dangers could spark a bit of courage in the ferret.

2. Slinky might not be willing to go out into the wild, but he's a darn good Techno-Wizard. If the players are willing to get the components he needs, he might be able to build them just the right gadget for whatever their current problem is.

3. Characters may befriend the pitiful mutant and move along their way, only to get into big trouble. Slinky always gives back kindness tenfold and could even come to the players' rescue when they least expect it.

**Race:** Mutant Ferret.

**Alignment:** Scrupulous.

**Attributes:** I.Q. 23, M.E. 13, M.A. 7, P.S. 13, P.P. 14, P.E. 11, P.B. 9, Spd. 7.

**Hit Points:** 50, S.D.C.: 31.

**Weight:** 59 pounds (27 kg). **Height:** 4 feet, 10 inches (1.47 m).

**Age:** 22

**P.P.E.:** 66, I.S.P.: 27.

**Insanity:** Phobia: mutant dogs (like Dog Boys) and dog-like beings such as Wolfen, Werewolves, etc. Afraid of dogs in general, but not to the point of phobia.

**Experience Level:** 3rd level Techno-Wizard.

**Skills of Note:**

O.C.C. Skills: Language: American (98%), Literacy: American (59%), Radio: Basic (74%), Carpentry (54%), Computer Operation (64%), Computer Programming (54%), Computer Repair (49%), Basic Electronics (64%), Automotive Mechanics (54%), Read Sensory Equipment (59%), Math: Basic (84%), Land Navigation (58%), Language: Dragonese (84%), Language: Techno-Can (84%).

Domestic: Cook (54%), Recycle (49%).

Medical: First Aid (64%).

Technical: Art, specifically concept drawings and drafting (64%), General Repair and Maintenance (64%), Literacy: Techno-Can (59%), Lore: Magic (54%).

**Mutant Characteristics:** Slinky has all the features of a ferret, but is as large as a human. He is a full biped and has fully articulated hands with three fingers and a thumb. The mutant has a brown coat with bits of white along his snout and over the top of his head.

**Special Abilities:**

Natural Weapons: Slinky has sharp, pointed teeth that do 2D4 S.D.C. damage with a bite.

Advanced Hearing: Slinky's hearing is very developed and gives the following bonuses: Can hear very faint sounds (light footsteps, small animals breathing, etc.) and can hear even quiet conversations from a considerable distance. +1 on initiative (bonus included in "Combat Bonuses" below).

Advanced Smell: Track by smell (60%), can recognize distinct scents and smells of individuals, and can detect when people are experiencing extreme emotions (64%).

Techno-Wizard Skills: Techno-Wizard Piloting Skill (87%), Techno-Wizard Construction Skill (83%, see "Techno-Wizardry: Form and Function" in **The Rifter® #21** for details).

**Psionics:** Major Psionic. Mind Block (4), Speed Reading (2), Total Recall (2), and Telemechanics (10).

**Spell Knowledge:** Spells can be found in either the **Rifts® RPG** or **World Book 16: Federation of Magic™**. All spells are collected in the **Rifts® Book of Magic**. (Note: If using the optional P.P.E. Channeling rules, Slinky can channel 8 P.P.E. per action for the purposes of spell casting or 15 P.P.E. per action when using TW devices. See **The Rifter® #21** for details.)

Level One: Blinding Flash (1), Globe of Daylight (2), Sense Magic (4), Sense Evil (2).

Level Two: Befuddle (6), Cleanse (6), Extinguish Fire (4), Manipulate Objects (2+).

Level Three: Armor of Ithan (10), Energy Bolt (5), Fuel Flame (5), Ignite Fire (6), Impervious to Fire (5), Telekinisis (8).

Level Four: Fire Bolt (7), Energy Field (10), Seal (7).

Level Five: Energy Disruption (12), Featherlight (10), Mend the Broken (10+).

Level Six: Call Lightning (15), Create Water (15), Impervious to Energy (20).

Level Seven: Negate Mechanics (20), Sub-Particle Acceleration (20).

**Combat Training:** None.

**Attacks Per Melee:** 2 attacks or non-combat actions per melee round.

**Combat Bonuses:** +1 on initiative, +1 to dodge.

**Other Combat Info:** Bite does 2D4 S.D.C. damage.

**Other Bonuses:** +9% I.Q. bonus on all skills (already included), +2 to save vs Horror Factor, +1 to save vs magic.

**Weapons:** Slinky's weapon collection always varies. At the shop there is always a fair supply of TW converted energy pistols and rifles and most items found in the Techno-Wizard section of the **Rifts® RPG** plus a good supply of E-Clips, L-20 laser rifles, and basic mundane equipment. Always has a variety of prototypes on-hand, usually just useful equipment over weapons, armor, and vehicles. These devices are rarely intact for long, as they are cannibalized to make new inventions.

**Body Armor:** Has a used, but quality set of Huntsman armor, but almost never wears it. It has an Armor of Ithan enhancement that provides an extra 30 M.D.C. of protection.

**Other Equipment:** Slinky has access to a sophisticated Techno-Wizard workshop with computers, power tools, and all of the equipment necessary to create his devices. He can usually be found hunched over his large drafting table with colored pencils, drawing or editing schematics and concept drawings, or transferring his creations from paper to his computer (all told the computer is probably worth hundreds of thousands of credits to any Techno-Wizard for the excellent, creative, and detailed schematics and construction guidelines found within). Slinky also has access to all of the equipment and gear available at the shop he operates.

**Allies of Note:** The people of Wild Woods look out for Slinky and make sure that he doesn't want for anything. He is a friend of most of the children in the small community, and has built relationships with many of the townspeople whom he has helped with his inventions or repair work. His number one ally would have to be his master and friend, Sean Therrin; Slinky anxiously awaits his return and will not consider the possibility that he is not coming back.

**Enemies:** The Coalition wouldn't be too happy to run into him, and Slinky faces the normal prejudice against mutants and D-Bees. Other than that, he has no enemies.

**Money:** Virtually none. What little (very little) is made on the store goes into helping the town or is invested in gems, bits of gold and silver, weapon shells, and other TW components. The value of the store if liquidated would be scarcely 500,000 credits, and the TW items that he has stashed away could garner another 700,000, give or take 20%.

# The Hammer of the Forge

By James M.G. Cannon

## Chapter Twenty-Six

### Red Dawn Over Thelag Vohann

*"With the Naruni in the CCW's back pocket, cranking out weaponry for them, the Transgalactic Empire decided it needed something similar to counter Naruni's tech. The Kreeghor are hindered by the fact that they don't have a tri-galactic weapons manufacturer of equal stature in any of the systems they control, but they can't afford to lose out in the arms race to the soft and weak Consortium of Civilized Worlds.*

*"Which is where the 'dubya-arr-dubyas' come in: Weapons Research Worlds. Whole planets set aside for TGE scientists to perfect new ways of killing folks. The techs are provided with every amenity, huge cash prizes, and plenty of open space and guinea pigs upon which to experiment. That's the bad news. The good news is that there's a substantial gap between development of an idea and realization of that idea, and the Kreeghor are not known for patience. They're looking for instant solutions and they aren't going to get any — R&D isn't something that happens overnight. When those techs can't produce on time, the Kreeghor are going to hang them out to dry and start all over. They're never going to get far doing that, I guarantee."*

*- Wolf Harker, mercenary captain*

"Commander, there it is again."

The Kreeghor officer leaned over the ensign's shoulder and looked closely at the screen. His large, yellow eyes narrowed. "What am I looking at, Ensign?" The commander's voice was a low growl.

The human barely noticed his commanding officer's irritation. "This blip here, sir. It keeps appearing and disappearing from my screen, then appearing again another hundred meters closer to the planet. I can't get any of the sensors to focus long enough on it to figure out what it is."

The commander snorted. "Probably just a meteor," he said. "Still, we are tasked with guarding this world from any and all possible infiltration. Have the k-sats fan out and target this 'blip.' The next time it reappears I want it vaporized."

Without waiting for an affirmative, the commander turned smartly and left to inform his captain. The TGE dreadnought *Tyrant* was one of the largest and deadliest ships in the Empire's armada, and her crew among the best trained and most vicious. But rather than patrolling the border with the CCW or quelling rebellion within the Empire's confines, the *Tyrant* was stuck babysitting Thelag Vohann. They were joined by two other similarly well-armed and well-staffed dreadnoughts, slowly orbiting the planet. Not much happened here, so deep within Empire space. Even a meteorite could prove enough of a diversion to make an otherwise dull day momentarily interesting.

And if it wasn't a meteorite... well, there were approximately 64,000 itchy trigger fingers stationed here, looking for something to do. The commander almost wished it was an incursion of some kind.

\* \* \*

On the planet's nightside surface, blissfully unaware of events transpiring in Thelag Vohann's upper atmosphere, Vodal Kee burned the midnight oil in his workspace. Kee was a Sinestrian, a species of serpentine sentients who made up for their lack of limbs by making use of cunningly designed waldoes, robotic arms, to manipulate fine objects. Sinestrians were widely regarded within the TGE as technical geniuses, a reputation the Sinestrians did little to contradict. It made them valuable to the Kreeghor at any rate, and a valuable species was an extant species.

He wasn't working; not exactly. Kee arrived on Thelag Vohann almost two years previously, forcibly relocated from his lab on Settee Seven by imperial decree. Based on a paper he had written in university, Kee had been drafted to work on one of the TGE's top secret weapons design projects. Not wishing to be reduced to his component atoms, Kee followed orders.

Mostly.

He was supposed to be reverse-engineering stolen T'zee nanotechnology. Nanites were the subject of that paper he had written ages ago, and someone in military command must have remembered it when those T'zee guns had crossed their desk. But Kee's work had all been theoretical, and he was largely unprepared for practical study. The timetable his superiors had given him was preposterous, but he had nodded and smiled and hunkered down like a good little drizbit.

What else was he to do? Failure meant annihilation. Yet success was impossible.

He set to work immediately, but his mind was only partly focused on the nanite problem. The rest of it was spent trying to figure out how to escape his predicament. Escape was what he eventually came up with, a clean break from the Kreeghor and a quick run out of TGE space. The CCW would pay handsomely for any information taken from Thelag Vohann, and they might be willing to finance a rescue operation. If they could be contacted. If Kee could get around the insanely tight security the Kreeghor imposed. If he could manage to find worthwhile information without being found out and executed.

Those were a lot of "ifs," but the certainty of his project's failure and his assured demise gave him the courage to try. It wasn't easy. While surreptitiously spying and recording the efforts of other research teams, Kee had to also make seeming progress on his own project. But he was smart, and he was careful, and he was almost ready to make good his escape.

Even now, sequestered in his lab, surrounded by the artifacts of his profession, Kee was focussed on his clandestine mission. The T'zee nano guns lay dismantled and carefully arranged on a work table. The nanite goop that functioned as the ammunition

sat nearby, held in oddly shaped glass containers. A dozen microscopes of increasing power and complexity were set neatly around the room. The shelves bulged with raw materials and tools. But a careful observer would note a fine layer of dust across all of these items.

Vodal Kee coiled before his trideo monitor, brow furrowed in concentration as his mechanical fingers flew across the controls and he navigated his way carefully through Thelag Vohann's computer network. Billions of creds were floating around in the system, financing both the research projects and the security forces that guarded them. Kee was financing his retirement by skimming off a little bit of those billions, funneling them into a dummy account he had created and hidden within the system. When the time was right, he would download the account into his personal computer. He hoped the exchange rate in the CCW wouldn't be too harsh.

In truth, the larger portion of his ill-gotten gains would line the pockets of the —

A light flickered at the side of the computer console, distracting Kee from his work. The blinking light originated from a small comm unit that was definitely not TGE standard issue. Kee stared at the comm for a long moment, not blinking, hardly breathing, and then finally he reached out with a waldo and picked it up. The hand did not tremble, solely because it was mechanical. He keyed the switch, and a short text message scrawled across the tiny screen: "It's time. Rendezvous in twenty minutes."

Kee almost dropped the comm. He felt his hearts thundering in his chest. Now, after years of planning and subterfuge, this was his chance for freedom. He let himself relish the feeling for a moment or two before going back to work. He needed that money, and now he could afford to be a little less careful. His mechanical fingers flew across the console, ransacking the station's financial system and dumping all he could into his dummy account. Alarms would be raising shortly, but Kee knew he had a few minutes still to do what was necessary. He jacked his PDD into the console and downloaded the dummy program, adding it to a considerable number of stolen files. He shut down the console, clipped his PDD to his belt, grabbed the blinking comm, and allowed himself one final look around the lab.

He wasn't going to miss this place a bit. He felt a twinge at having to leave some of his personal belongings behind, but there wouldn't be time to stop by his quarters. Kee glanced at the chron on his PDD and released a hiss of concern. Tail undulating, he hurried for the door.

Outside, the hallway was dimmed to conserve power, but an orange glow still shone through the large bay windows on the corridor's north side. Thelag Vohann was never a dark world; an immense sea of liquid sulfur bubbled beneath the planet's thin crust, and a network of volcanoes stretched across the planet's surface, venting the superheated liquid into the atmosphere at semi-regular intervals. By day, the sky shimmered with a bright yellow light as the sunlight filtered through sulfur clouds, and even at night, the sky held a warm light.

A skimmer buzzed past the windows, a dark silhouette against the bright sky. A patrol, Kee recognized. There were always patrols. The Kreeghor protected their secrets with efficient brutality. Kee suppressed a shiver. Perhaps the patrol was after him, perhaps his hacking had triggered some alert after all. With a grimace, Kee raced for the lift.

The doors scissored open even as Kee rounded the corner. He forced himself to slow, forced himself to adopt a calm expression, to look casual and reserved. All his efforts were for naught. The blood drained from Kee's face, and he felt his jaw drop open. It took an effort of will to snap it shut.



Out of the lift stepped an Imperial Guardsman and three Legionnaires. The Guardsman was a hugely muscled human, with a neatly trimmed beard and a gold hoop through his lower lip, visible through his open faced helm. The Legionnaires were Ciphers, bulky humanoids in red and black lacquered armor, cradling heavy blaster rifles. Kee's hearts actually stopped beating for the several moments it took for the soldiers to brush past him. He felt the Guardsman's sneer like a physical blow.

But then they were past him, and Kee had a free pass to the lift. He sprinted across the last few meters of hallway and nearly bounced off the walls of the lift. With manic speed the fingers of his waldo flew across the control panel. He was all but free and clear, when to his horror the Guardsman paused before turning the corner and looked at him closely. A baleful glimmer showed in the human's eyes as the lift's doors closed, and Kee knew that he was doomed.

\* \* \*

The commander returned to the ensign's post. "Any news on that meteorite?"

"Negative, Sir," the ensign said, unable to hide the stammer in his voice. "The blip did not reappear. But if it stayed on that trajectory, it would have passed into the upper atmosphere of the planet by now. It probably burned up on entry."

The commander's clawed right hand curled around the back of the ensign's chair. "If? Probably?"

The ensign swallowed nervously. "The instruments —" he began, but a back handed swipe from the commander silenced him, and sent him sprawling to the deck.

"Results, Ensign," the commander growled. "Not excuses." He keyed the comm badge on his uniform. "I want sligo flight prepped for a planetary sweep. Something slipped through our defenses, and I want it caught before it does anything more."

\* \* \*

The lift door opened up on the roof, and Kee slid out, trying not to think about the Imperial Guardsman. The normal authorities were terrible enough, but the Guardsmen were the cream of the TGE crop, cold-blooded sadists pumped up with biotechnology into superpowered monsters. Imperial Guardsmen were designed to check Cosmo-Knights. Kee was no Cosmo-Knight. He was just a scientist, in way over his head.

The skimmer lot was on the roof. A bored looking attendant stood nearby, tapping a stun club against his leg. Kee adjusted the breath mask he wore — the sulfur rich atmosphere was poisonous to most carbon-based lifeforms — and moved purposely towards one of the skimmers parked on the tarmac.

The attendant stepped in front of him immediately. "Where you headed there, Doctor... uh... Vodal?" The fellow paused as he read Kee's nametag, mispronouncing his surname.

Kee hefted his PDD and hoped his voice did not betray his anxiety. "Running some specs over to CENTCOMM. The Director wants to see me posthaste."

The attendant stared at Kee for a long moment. "That's kind of irregular, Doc. Do you have a pass?"

"There wasn't time, I'm afraid. I could go back and get one, I suppose, but then I might be late for the meeting. I'll be sure to tell the Director you did such a good job. He does hate to wait, but I'm sure he'll understand." Kee made as if to leave. If his bluff didn't work, he didn't know what he would do. Violence or bribery? Kee wasn't terribly accomplished at either.

He needn't have worried. "Um, I suppose if the Director is expecting you, it's okay." Kee masked a grin and undulated towards the skimmers. "I'll be noting this in my log," the attendant added, but Kee barely heard him. He was already popping the door open to a sleek matte black machine and slipping inside. It was a four-seater, designed for bipeds, and mildly uncomfortable for Kee. He had to pull the seat up in order for his waldoes to reach the controls, but that forced his tail to bunch up under the seat.

*Nothing ever goes right,* Kee thought to himself.

The universe, always crueller than it needed to be, added another complication. The lift doors scissored open again, spilling the Imperial Guardsman and his sidekicks onto the roof. The Guardsman pointed at Kee in the skimmer and barked an order at the attendant. The attendant's confusion was buying Kee a few seconds, but the Legionnaires shouldered their rifles. They would fire momentarily. Not that they really worried Kee. It was the Guardsman that did; if he was one of those ones who could fly under his own power or shoot lightning from his eyes, then Kee had no chance.

He started the skimmer, watching the soldiers while the engine warmed up. The Guardsman shoved the attendant aside, sending the man sprawling halfway across the roof, and stormed Kee's skimmer. Laser bolts buzzed past the skimmer's canopy. Warning shots.

Kee took a deep breath and aimed the skimmer skyward. The Guardsman leapt up at the craft, but his hands grasped empty air. The impact of laser fire shook the skimmer and the engine screamed. Kee lashed at the pedals and the machine dove over the side of the building, plummeting a dozen stories before Kee leveled off and shot forward. His stomach was in his throat, but no more laser fire targeted the skimmer. For a moment, Kee allowed himself to think he had made good his escape.

But the skimmer's aft cameras picked up his pursuit almost immediately, two patrol craft flashing red lights. They would be armed as well, with quad-linked laser cannons and a bank of mini-missiles, enough to crack open Kee's skimmer like an egg. Kee felt bile rise in his throat as he realized his death was imminent.

The skimmer's comm crackled to life. "Attention, criminal. Power down your vehicle and surrender or you will be obliterated."

Kee grimaced. He was as good as dead, no matter what he did. Continue to flee, and he would be shot down. Give up and land, and they would put a blaster bolt through the back of his head anyway. Kee pressed hard on the accelerator. The engine whined and the skimmer warbled, but it moved. Kee wasn't about to try anything fancy, he didn't have the skills or the aptitude, but he hoped his lighter craft would be able to outrun the military models. It was a slim hope, Kee admitted to himself, but he had to believe in something.

Kee wove around buildings, avoiding the normal skimmer pathways, trying to keep as many walls as possible between himself and his pursuers. The skimmer's sensors picked up a half dozen more enemy craft, rapidly approaching. The vehicle's computer identified five military craft and another civilian model, like the one Kee himself was flying. Which could only mean that the Imperial Guardsman and his sidekicks had joined the chase as well. Kee released a low keening noise. Sinestrians didn't have tear ducts; they responded to stress vocally, and Kee was feeling quite a bit of stress.

Crimson light flashed past Kee's craft. The military police were out of patience. Kee barely managed to maneuver out of the way in time. The beam cut through the side of a building, shearing through ferrocrete and megasteel with a tremendous explosion. Kee thought his hearts might rupture. It was time to break radio silence. With one waldo gripping the controls, Kee grabbed his personal comm with the other. "Orak," he said through gritted teeth, "this is Vodal. I'm under attack. I need help."

Another laser blast sizzled past the skimmer's canopy. With a start, Kee realized that these were deliberate warning shots. They were trying to force him down, to find out who he was and what secrets he might be carrying. It was his greatest edge. But not the only one.

The comm chirped. "Vodal," a dry, mechanical voice said, "you're lucky I need you alive. You weren't supposed to bring a Kreeghor convoy to the rendezvous point."



"Couldn't be helped," Kee snapped. "Are you going to help me or not?"

Something like a sigh echoed over the comm. "Lead them here. I'll take care of them."

*Lead them here*, Kee thought. *Easy for him to say*. Kee dropped his altitude another dozen stories, into one of the skimmer paths. The patrols followed, more gracefully than Kee, and the gap between their skimmers and Kee's was narrowing.

"Attention, criminal. Escape is impossible. The port is already locked down. You cannot outrun us. Surrender or be destroyed."

An idea blossomed in Kee's mind suddenly, as desperate and half-baked as any he had ever devised. He thumbed the skimmer's comm. "Uh, sure thing. I'm just... I'd like to set down outside the city." He didn't try to mask the fear in his voice. They were near the outskirts of the city already. Maybe they would humor him, out of curiosity if nothing else.

No response came, but as Kee dropped closer to the planet's surface and eased back on the speed, the patrol craft moved up to flank him. Through the canopy he could see their helmeted, blank faces, watching him intently. Their weapons tracked his skimmer closely. Kee hoped Orak knew what he was doing.

Beneath Kee's skimmer, the research city finally fell away. The yellow plains of Thelag Vohann appeared, riddled with the signs of volcanic activity. Low lying clouds of sulfur blanketed the plains, obscuring most of the view. Ridges of molten rock, frozen waves of stone, rose up out of the clouds like little islands. Kee dropped lower, into the yellow clouds. His escort stayed with him, close enough to track him through the mist. Beads of acidic rain appeared on the canopy and burned into the skimmer's chassis.

Kee landed clumsily. The skimmer thumped against the ground alarmingly. According to the coordinates provided by Orak, this was supposed to be the spot. But there was no ship here, no sign of life. Just a massive hump of blackened rock rising out of the plain, partially obscured by the mist.

The patrol craft circled for a moment, red lights stabbing through the clouds angrily, while the civilian skimmer landed beside Kee's. The bearded visage of the Imperial Guardsman looked out at Kee from behind the skimmer's canopy. The Guardsman grinned widely, an expression that sent a chill down Kee's spine.

Suddenly, the black rock shifted, and beams of blue-white light flashed through the mist, slicing through the patrol craft. Each one exploded in a shower of sparks. Carbon-scored chunks of wreckage peppered the ground and caromed off the canopy of Kee's skimmer. He looked around wildly, and for the first time remembered that Thelag Vohann's geology was too sulfur rich to turn black, even with the tremendous heat generated by the volcanoes. That rock was... Orak's ship. Kee began to laugh, a sound tinged with hysteria, as another beam of light lanced from the ship and cut through the remaining skimmer. It detonated spectacularly, taking the Legionnaires and the Imperial Guardsman with it.

Kee slammed the canopy release and slid out of the skimmer. He dropped unsteadily to the ground, checking to be sure he still had everything on him. The hump of rock — *the ship*, Kee reminded himself — shifted, rising slightly into the air and stirring

up a cloud of yellow dust. An airlock cycled open, a silver light in the pockmarked expanse of the ship's hull. A figure appeared, momentarily blocking the light before dropping lightly to the ground.

This would be Sammadar Orak, famed bounty hunter and Galactic Tracer, one of the best and most expensive in the business. But worth every cred, obviously. Kee hurried to meet him and tried not to be disappointed when they finally met. Orak was clad in a suit of power armor, slim frame encased in a lightly designed suit that offered speed as well as strength. The armor looked vaguely insect-like, smooth limbed with slightly rounded edges, painted in a dazzling array of day-glo colors. Here and there nicks and scrapes in the armor's surface showed the bright silvery sheen of the metal's original color. There were no obvious weapon systems, but the narrow visor in the helm still gave Orak an ominous and dangerous look.

"You are a handful, Vodal Kee," Orak said, mechanical voice echoing oddly through the helmet's speaker. "Let's get aboard and on our way before we attract any more attention."

Kee was about to respond when they both heard the scrape of metal on metal, of a great weight being shifted. Kee and Orak turned as one. The Guardsman had risen from the wreckage of the destroyed skimmer, tossing aside bits of its shattered chassis casually. Firelight reflected off his skin, turned hard and cold and metallic. Kee quailed, and cursed himself for a fool. Of course the Imperial Guardsman was unharmed. A direct hit from a starship cannon wouldn't kill one of them!

"Wait here," Orak said. He appeared unconcerned.

The Imperial Guardsman was nonplused as well, striding towards them with an even gait. "You're both dead," the Guardsman said.

"Mmm, we'll see about that," Orak muttered. He raised his right hand, and the panels along the upper arm and forearm rearranged themselves and reformatted, stretching out past the hand and wrist, forming the muzzle of a gun. As Kee watched, a helix of pale blue and violet light erupted from the gun and slammed into the Guardsman's chest. The Guardsman staggered and rocked back a step. Again the beam flashed, and again the Guardsman stood there and took it. Now another contraption folded up and over Orak's shoulder, and a volley of mini-missiles flashed towards the Guardsman. The explosions knocked him off his feet, flat on his back.

But the Guardsman was on his feet in an instant, his distinctive red and black armor in tatters but his metallic body showing no sign of strain. With a roar, the Guardsman flexed his legs and leapt fifteen meters up and across, slamming into the ground where Orak had stood only a heartbeat before. Kee staggered backwards, waldoes flailing, clearly out of his depth. He looked around for the bounty hunter, and found him floating serenely in the air, meters above the fray. Blue and violet light flashed, burning across the Guardsman's bearded face.

Kee dove beneath the skimmer, squirming to get away from the battle. He saw the Guardsman's legs buckle, and his heavy frame drop to the ground. Orak's slim ankles appeared in the frame next, and Kee heard several sharp impacts and then something that sounded like an explosion. The Guardsman's body slumped completely to the ground, his metal face dented and carbon scored.

Orak ducked down and looked under the skimmer. Amusement crackled in his mechanical voice. "Anything singed, Vodal?"

"Uh... no, no, I'm alright."

"Good. Then maybe we can get out of here before one of those dreadnoughts circling overhead decides to flash this zone."

That got Kee to move. He slithered out from under the skimmer and aimed a strained smile at the bounty hunter. Orak ignored him, heading for the strange rock ship. Kee spared a glance at the Guardsman. He knew Orak was good, that was why he contacted the bounty hunter and hired him, but Kee had never seen anyone defeat an Invincible Guardsman so handily, so quickly, so decidedly. Invincibility was implicit in their very name, and yet Orak had taken the man apart as easily as Kee navigated cyberspace.

With Orak's help, Kee climbed up the side of the ship and through the airlock. Despite its rough exterior, the inside of the ship was gleaming chrome and brightly colored metal. The lighting was actually a bit bright to Kee's eyes, but he did not complain. He followed Orak wordlessly through a series of corridors, deeper and deeper into the craft, until they came to a rounded chamber filled with viewscreens and consoles. Orak stepped onto a dais in the center of the room and strapped himself into the pilot's frame that stood upon the dais. Tendrils snaked out from Orak's power armor and interfaced with the ship. Beneath his tail, Kee felt the ship's engines thrum to life. An all too familiar and distasteful rumble in Kee's stomach told him that the artificial gravity had kicked in and the ship was rising from the planet's surface.

The viewscreens flickered to life, showing the planet dropping away beneath them. The atmosphere flamed around them momentarily, and then they were blasting into space.

"I burned out the cloak on the way in," Orak said. "Had to arrive at the edge of the system and creep in to the center as slowly as possible to keep from triggering any alarms. Even so, it started to fail just as I reached Thelag Vohann."

"Why are you mentioning this?" Kee asked anxiously.

Orak's visor looked at Kee emotionlessly. "I just wanted to let you know that it's going to be a bumpy ride getting out of here." As the bounty hunter spoke, a hundred bright lights blossomed on the viewscreens. Most of them were blue, indicating the ring of heavily armed satellites that orbited the planet. The red lights were the ones that really scared Kee, however; a trio of fully armed and operational TGE dreadnoughts, nearly enough power to reduce Thelag Vohann itself to so much slag.

Two of those red lights were maneuvering to intercept Orak's ship. The other, at least, was on the other side of the planet. Yet two dreadnoughts were more than enough to cut short Kee's escape.

Orak's ship shook as it came under fire, a barrage emanating from the nearest satellites. Orak said nothing, but his hands balled into fists. Silver white beams of light flashed from the rock ship in answer to the attack, and a dozen of the blue lights winked out. Then they were past the cordon and one step closer to open space. Kee examined the viewscreens closely and noted the scrolling text of information running along one side. Shields were holding, but they were still too close to the planet to en-

gage the FTL drive. The dreadnoughts were closing, and it looked like they would reach them before the rock ship was sufficiently far from Thelag Vohann's gravity well.

Kee's waldoes clutched helplessly at empty air. It had been a good attempt, at least. And he would die in space, not on Thelag Vohann. It wasn't much, admittedly, but it was something.

One of the dreadnoughts appeared at the edge of the viewscreens, a horned crustacean-like shape that glided effortlessly through the vacuum of space, seeking its prey. A cloud of fighter craft appeared around the dreadnought, launched from the docking bays to seek out the intruders. Kee could almost see the dreadnought's cannons tracking the rock ship, aiming planet smashing guns at a very tiny and vulnerable target. Flying Fangs flashed towards the rock ship at top speed, already firing their cannons. Laser light filled the viewscreens.

Kee's life passed before his eyes. He saw every vanity, every mistake, every missed opportunity, every wasted moment and submission. He had wasted his life, he realized, and now he was going to die.

Orak's ship shuddered and shook as the attacks slammed into the shields, nearly overloading the precious energy screen. They shields held. Barely, but they held. The Fangs circled around them and prepared for another pass. The second dreadnought appeared on the screen. Orak's sensors recognized that the dreadnought's huge horn guns were powering up, preparing to fire.

Orak chuckled, a strange sound given the situation. It was a strange sound regardless, given the filter in his helm that made his voice sound so harsh. "You're not giving up already, are you Vodal?"

Kee uttered a sharp bark, almost but not quite a laugh. "We're doomed!"

"Tsk, ts. Did you really think I'd try something as crazy as infiltrating Thelag Vohann without having a plan to get out of here? I 'borrowed' this ship from the K!ozn Continuum. Watch this."

Something happened. Afterward, Kee was never quite sure what Orak did exactly, but one moment they were in the midst of a squadron of Flying Fangs, about to be annihilated by a Kreeghor dreadnought, still trapped within Thelag Vohann's gravity well, and the next moment the ship was *elsewhere*. If the ship's sensors were to be believed, they were suddenly thousands of kilometers away from their starting point. Just like that, in the blink of an eye.

For the first time, Kee began to wonder just who or what he had hired.

"Get ready," Orak said, breaking into Kee's thoughts. "I'm plotting a course out of TGE space right now. We'll be long gone before they even know where to look." The bounty hunter chuckled. "This time next week you'll be sipping tea with CCW high command."

Kee stared at the bounty hunter for a long moment. Then the full weight of Orak's words hit him, just as the adrenaline in his system finally began to flag. Kee fell backwards onto the ship's deck with a thump, instantly unconscious.

# Lord of the Deep

## A Short Story Based on Rifts®

By Chris Fox

The sharp glare of sunlight reflecting off the waves cut visibility to about fifteen kilometers past the shore. Even with his Predator's glare dampeners it took Dietrich a few moments to notice the convoy's approach from his perch atop a huge tree. He twitched his right thumb to activate the power armor's optical magnification, and zoomed in on the largest of the approaching vessels. Hours of briefing and combat footage failed to prepare him for the sheer size of the Death's Head transport. Its black and white visage was a grim specter of death, and he could imagine the fear it would strike in any who opposed it.

Flanking the warship were more than a dozen smaller shapes flying in precise formation just above the choppy water. Good. Keeping low would make them invisible to most forms of radar. He panned back to take them all in, and gave a slight gasp. There. Zooming in again he focused on one of the SAMAS flying escort. It was considerably larger and a lot more intimidating than the few SAMAS that he had seen before. This must be one of the new types of power armor that the Coalition States had recently unveiled.

If the approaching envoy were following orders, they would be maintaining radio silence. Of course he had no idea if they *were* following orders. The NGR's military was a masterful example of efficiency, and he knew that his troops would follow any commands given, to the letter. Their new Coalition allies, on the other hand, were an unknown quantity. The technology that they had deployed over the last few years was impressive, but meant little if the troops using it would break at the first sign of a threat.

He watched the convoy for a few more moments, and then activated his external speakers, "Our allies approach. Hans. Einjar. Power up and get ready to follow me. The rest of you fan out and widen the perimeter. No doubt our friends will want to rest before we bring them home, *ja?*"

Dietrich keyed a switch in his right gauntlet and the massive engine of his X-10A Predator rumbled to life. The power armor was a personal favorite, and an excellent killing machine. It was slower and more bulky than the Coalition SAMAS, but more than made up for it with heavier armor and advanced weaponry. In the back of his mind he wondered briefly how he would fare in a fight against one of the new SAMAS, but then dismissed the thought. The Coalition States were one of the few bastions of humanity remaining, and they were allies.

Around him his squad moved with practiced ease. Within moments each of them had entered their respective armor or robot, and quickly powered up the idling machines. Hans and Einjar took their Predators to an altitude of about six meters, and he drifted up between them. Beneath he could see the trees shake with each footstep as Espen and Finn maneuvered their Ulti-Maxes into position on opposite sides of the clearing. The

sixteen foot tall machines were widely feared, and for good reason. Ulti-Maxes boasted a wide array of weapons, and some of the densest armor found on any robot.

Of course as impressive as they were, the X-5000 Devastator towered over them. At fifteen meters tall it was easily the largest, and most powerful, robot that the NGR could field. It contained enough firepower to cut a swath through hundreds of enemies, and required a crew of 3 just to run it. In a pinch it could hold up to four suits of power armor just like Dietrich's, as well as extra crew. It was truly a mobile fortress. Because there were so few of them it was unusual to see one this far from the strongholds of the NGR, but his superiors had thought it worthwhile to impress their new allies.

"Coalition forces," he announced over a broad channel, "In the name of the New German Republic, I welcome you to Europe."

A long moment of silence passed, and he was about to repeat his greeting when a thickly accented voice cut in, "NGR forces, this is the Coalition transport *Grim Reaper* requesting permission to approach and land."

"Affirmative, *Grim Reaper*. My men and I will lead you in."

Dietrich kicked in his thrusters and his Predator rocketed out over the water. Hans and Einjar kept a tight formation just a couple meters to either side of him as he closed the distance towards the *Grim Reaper*. The Coalition forces grew nearer and he was able to make out more details. Most of the suits were pitted and scarred with obvious signs of prolonged combat. Not surprising. Crossing the Atlantic was neither quick nor easy, and very few survived the trip.

As if summoned by his thoughts, a huge shadow began growing under the surface of the water. At first he thought that it must be a trick of the light, but as the shadow grew larger, he knew that something huge and terrible was about to emerge.

"Coalition forces, be advised. Something is surfacing underneath you. Gain altitude. I repeat, gain..."

A huge tentacle, at least a couple hundred meters long, shot out of the water. Writhing from the main trunk were hundreds of lesser tentacles, and even the smallest was thicker than his leg. The creature, whatever it was, moved deceptively fast despite its incredible size. Several of the tentacles wrapped around members of the SAMAS escort, and he saw one of the armored suits literally crushed. One of the largest looped around the *Grim Reaper*, but a withering barrage of fire slowed it enough for the transport to evade it.

The Coalition response was both precise and professional. The remaining SAMAS nimbly dodged the mass of tentacles, and fired bursts from rail guns and missiles at those that got too close. Greenish blood spurted where they hit, and more than one of the smaller tentacles was severed. Still, the massive barrage didn't seem to phase the beast, and it lashed back at the SAMAS.

"Alpha squad, move in and assist the Coalition forces. Bravo team, we need as much fire support as you can muster," Dietrich commanded.

"Acknowledged, Captain."

His two subordinates sped off to aid their coalition counterparts. Perhaps their Predators would have more success than the SAMAS had, but he doubted it. This thing had a speed and ferocity that he had rarely encountered even among the forces of the Gargoyle Empire.

Suddenly, tentacles were writhing all around him, and he fought to gain altitude. One of them grabbed his right leg and jerked down so hard that he bit his tongue. Before he could react, another wrapped around one of his wings, and with a tortured screech of metal he felt it rip free. He snapped off two quick blasts with his ion cannon, but the tentacle holding his leg held on stubbornly. These things were tough. He let loose both of his plasma missiles at the writhing mass below him. The moment stretched on forever as they corkscrewed towards their target. They sank into the creature, and it seemed to bulge outward before exploding into a spray of brackish blood and rubbery flesh.

Both of the tentacles imprisoning him fell away, but the damage had been done. His Predator was plummeting towards the hungry waters. Most of the SAMAS were down, and several of the tentacles had a firm grip on the *Grim Reaper*. The Death's Head transport was dishing an impressive amount of damage into the creature, but for every tentacle that it managed to sever, another two coiled around it. He continued to feather his thrusters, but he was losing altitude fast. Things were getting desperate.

"Dietrich to *Devastator One*. Slave your firing controls to my guidance system."

"Yes sir. Synching in three... two... one," a voice echoed back. He aimed the right arm of his Predator about a thirty meters below the transport, and sent a command back to the *Devastator*. Moments later a virtual fleet of missiles emerged from the tree line and shot towards the densest part of the creature. One after another they ripped into it, and through the cloud of greenish blood and chunks of still writhing tentacles, he saw the *Grim Reaper* break free and accelerate toward safety.

The water rushed up at him, and with a huge splash he went under. For one panicked moment he couldn't tell which direction was up in the murky water, but then his armor's gyroscope righted itself and he felt himself sinking feet first. He double-checked the environmental seals, and was relieved to find them intact. The battle had taken place near the coast, and if he was lucky he might be able to walk his Predator to shore before his air supply ran out.

Dietrich tried to remain calm as the minutes passed and he continued to sink. The water *couldn't* be that deep here, could it? Not knowing what sort of creatures lurked in the inky depths made him nervous. He flipped on his external floodlights, but even the powerful bulbs failed to penetrate more than a few meters. Finally his feet found solid footing. He sank up to his knees in the fine silt of the ocean floor, but he was able to pull himself free with a little effort. He began half jumping; half lurching in the direction his sensors maintained would lead back to shore. Minutes passed and he felt like he was making progress. Maybe he would survive this after all.

His brief surge of hope was smothered as something cold settled over his heart. A nameless dread more urgent than anything he had ever felt filled his mind. Some *thing* was out there. Something evil. Something more powerful and more complex than his mind could ever understand. And it was coming for him. Cold sweat covered his body, and though every muscle in his body screamed at him to keep moving, he froze in place.

*I come.*

The voice, whatever it was, echoed through his head. Horrible, horrible things raced by faster than he could comprehend. He felt himself recoil into a tiny part of himself, and could only watch as the abominations marched through his mind.

*Power. I offer POWER.*

"What are you?" He wasn't sure if he screamed the words or whispered them. There was no response, but the images changed a little. Monstrosities that he could barely describe swarmed over coastal villages, ships, and some sort of underwater civilization. Everywhere, he saw death. Then he was one of them. His mind was filled with a terrible rage and a dizzying feeling of power. He felt his claws rending the flesh of innocents. He roared, and at the sound both man and beast cowered. He raised his claw once again, and looked for another victim. Before him lay a human woman. She was covered with blood, and he knew instinctively that she would die of her wounds. Yet despite the pain she still managed to shield an infant with her body.

Revulsion filled him. This was wrong. All of this was *wrong*.

"No!" this time he was sure that he screamed, "I *reject* you."

*Anger. RAGE!*

What he felt was more emotion than thought. He had never felt, had never even conceived, that such fury was possible. Fully prepared for death, he braced himself for whatever retribution or punishment this evil would mete out. To his surprise, the presence receded, and then was gone. His own ragged breathing echoed impossibly loud within the confines of the Predator. Numbness seemed to have stolen over his mind, and he lingered for several long moments before the rational part of his mind took over. One plodding step after another, he trudged along the ocean floor.

How much time passed, he wasn't sure, but eventually he emerged into the fading sunlight. Waves crashed around him as he pushed onward towards the shore. When he was positive that the ebb and flow of the water was far enough behind him, he turned to look at the sea. The setting sun filled the water with a bloody red hue.

He sagged weakly to his knees, and sank mercifully down into oblivion.

\* \* \*

Dietrich jerked awake with a gasp. He tried desperately to move, and when he couldn't, he felt panic overtaking him. Was he paralyzed? The feeling receded, if only slightly, when he realized where he was. His armor was laying face down in the sand. The power had shut down due to inactivity, and that was why he couldn't move. He keyed a short sequence, and with a sharp hiss the seals to his suit popped open. He pulled himself out of the small opening in the back of his armor, and tumbled to the wet sand a couple meters below.

He lay there for several seconds, gulping in huge breaths of the early morning air. The breeze coming off the ocean felt good, but his body armor was still confining. Cocking his head to the right, he caught a glimpse of his reflection in the still glossy armor of the Predator. Dark circles were etched under his normally clear blue eyes, and his close-cropped blond hair was matted with sand from where he had landed.

Yesterday he would have called the waves crashing behind him beautiful, but now they inspired terror somewhere deep within him. He dimly recalled nightmare after horrible nightmare filling the previous night, but it was a jumbled series of disjointed images. All of them were terrible and all had to do with some nameless thing.

A shiver that couldn't be explained by the early predawn chill traveled up his spine. He didn't want to think about the dreams anymore. Dietrich turned his attention to his armor, and a frown creased his face. He knew from his fall the day before that it would no longer fly, but from what he could see the Predator wasn't going to do much walking either. The actuators in the right ankle had been crushed, and he had neither the tools nor the time to fix them. The radio might work, but since it used the wings as an antenna its range would be limited.

He could probably make the armor move, but it would be at a slow walk. Given the size of the armor, it would make a lot of noise, and that would attract attention that he could definitely do without. With a regretful sigh, he opened a small compartment on the armor and took out his survival kit. Inside the backpack he found three days worth of food and water along with a first aid kit. He strapped his Vibro-Knife to the leg of his body armor, and checked to make sure that his sidearm was loaded. For all the good it would do him. He could probably use it to annoy an attacker before it either crushed or ate him.

His squad's campsite from the previous day was probably close, but even if he could find it, he doubted that his men would have left anything that he could use. Trying to raise them on his armor's radio wasn't going to work, either. He was on the northern shore of what had once been called France, and that meant about eight or nine hundred kilometers of hostile territory to cover before he was close enough to seek help. The trip here had been faster because of his squad's armor, and a lot safer due to their firepower. Now he had neither.

Dietrich buckled on the backpack, and took a bearing from the compass in the hilt of his Vibro-Knife. At first walking was painful, but after a few hundred yards he managed to work the kinks out of his muscles. It was an odd feeling being on his own like this. He had grown up in the NGR, and on the few trips outside of its borders he had always been surrounded by friendly troops. Despite being alone, he felt a sense of purpose and more confidence than he would have expected given the situation.

Before long he reached the tree line, and after taking shelter beneath their massive branches he felt a little better. He was a decent woodsman and found the going easy enough. Twice on the first day he heard the roar of some creature he couldn't identify, but both times it was distant. Near twilight he found a huge oak that had split down the middle. He took shelter in the bole of its massive trunk, and lay awake for hours before dozing into a fitful slumber.

The brightness of the morning sun pulled him up from the depths of the nightmares. Trying to forget them, he opened a

small plastic container that claimed to hold steak and mashed potatoes. Dietrich squeezed the tasteless orange paste into his mouth, and felt a bit better with something in his stomach. When he was finished he put the empty container back in his pack, and looked about carefully to make sure that he had left no traces of his presence. He doubted that he was being followed, but you could never be sure.

When Dietrich was ready he took a bearing with his compass and began moving east again. The land was fairly flat, and though the forest was thick he made his way without too much problem. Around noon he wandered across a road that roughly paralleled his course.

He made much better time on the beaten track, and guessed that he covered just over thirty-five kilometers by the time dusk fell. At this rate it would take him just under a month to get home. He was going to look for a place to camp when he heard a scream not far ahead. Drawing his sidearm, he sprinted up the road in the direction the cry had come from. Ahead of him on the road he saw a humanoid figure standing over a prone woman. She was holding an arm aloft as if to ward off another blow.

Dietrich redoubled his speed then skidded to a halt about ten meters away. With practiced ease he sighted down the length of his pistol until he drew a bead on the back of the attacker's head.

"One more move and you'll have an extra hole in your head." His voice was calm even if his heart was racing. He could have just fired, but depending on what his target was, that might do nothing more than make him angry. He thought that he was prepared for just about any response, but what happened made his jaw go slack.

The woman on the ground started laughing, and the "menacing figure" helped her to her feet. At the same time, four other people came out of hiding from all around him. He had just walked into an ambush. Lovely. They had probably been following him for hours.

"I think that *you* had better put down the pistol before I put an extra hole in *your* head," came an amused voice from behind him. A feminine voice. Laughter rang out all around him, but despite the embarrassment he let his pistol fall to the ground next to him.

"Now put your hands over your head, and turn around slowly."

He did as he was ordered. As he turned he took a closer look at his captors. One of them had mottled green skin, and a thick gut bulging out of its shirt. The rest appeared to be human. Each wore a dark cloak, but under that their clothing was a riot of colors. Garish reds, blues and yellows contrasted in odd patterns. Gypsies. Better and better.

"You're kind of cute for a thug. It's too bad, really," the voice he had heard before belonged to a chestnut haired woman in the same dress as the others. In other circumstances he may have called her crooked smile alluring, but now knocking a few teeth loose sounded better.

"If you harm me you have to know that the NGR will bring swift retribution on your whole tribe."

"First of all, *human*, we are a family, not a tribe. Second, you are in no position to make threats. We are hundreds of kilome-

ters from anywhere that your people hold sway. That means they either left you for dead or that you are a deserter.”

Her comment surprised him, and he took a better look at her. The tips of her ears curved upwards and her eyes had a slight almond shape. She was an Elf.

“So what is it you want with me?” he demanded.

“Your weapons, your money and anything else that catches my eye,” she ticked off a finger with each demand.

“I don’t have any money. My weapons are practically worthless to you. So now what?”

“That’s most unfortunate,” she sighed, “Brin, bind his hands behind him. Maybe he’s worth something to the NGR.”

“Are you sure, Tira?” the green-skinned D-Bee asked. Her lips tightened in anger. After a moment a well-built Elf stepped forward and picked up his weapon. He wrapped some sort of root around Dietrich’s wrists, and whispered something that the soldier couldn’t make out. Suddenly the roots constricted painfully and his wrists were mashed together.

“Get moving,” she shoved him roughly.

By the time they walked back to the Gypsies’ encampment, full night had fallen. He heard the place long before he saw it. Several types of loud music seemed to be playing at once, and the discordant mingling of songs made it difficult to pick out any specific one. When they were close enough he counted eight vehicles arranged in a rough half circle around a huge bonfire. Some of them were modified military, but most looked like civilian transports. It amazed him that these seemingly careless people could survive out here.

The D-Bees accompanying him were greeted warmly as the revelers around the camp became aware of them. They had differing reactions to his presence. Some catcalled or yelled insults, while others fell quiet or whispered in small groups. The stories that he had always heard said that they didn’t like outsiders. Of course, none of those stories mentioned kidnaping either.

Tira led the group to one of the oldest vehicles. It had been some type of APC at one time, but decades of modifications and the motley of armor patches had transformed it into a sort of Frankenstein machine. When they reached the vehicle she stopped and waited patiently. Her companions, evidently convinced that he was harmless, took the opportunity to drift away and join friends around the fire. She rapped gently on the door, and then settled back to wait.

Eventually it opened and a matronly Elf emerged. Her garb was similar to the other Gypsies, but around her brow sat a delicate circlet adorned with an eye. It was so realistically carved that it gave Dietrich the odd feeling that she had a third eye. When her gaze fell on him he felt as if something cold were passing over him. She cocked an eyebrow in what he took for curiosity.

“Who is this that you bring before me, Tira?”

“We... I mean I... felt that he was important, Seer,” she explained nervously. Her whole demeanor changed drastically, and if anything he would call it submissive.

“Perhaps he is, at that. Bring him inside.” Tira looked startled at the Seer’s words, but had enough presence of mind to shove him forward. He could tell that she was angry with him, and that annoyed him. He was the one who had been kidnaped.

The inside of the APC seemed somehow larger than the outside. It was a spacious room with a number of cushions spread about the floor. Where the décor had been garish outside, it seemed somehow tasteful in this room. A gauzy curtain sectioned off one part of the room, which he took for the Seer’s sleeping quarters. The only other piece of furniture in the room was a small table near the center of the floor.

Tira hustled him toward the table, and pushed him into a kneeling position next to it. The Seer waited for her to sit, and then descended gracefully next to them. She chanted in some alien tongue while lighting several candles arranged in a strange pattern on the table. The hairs on the back of his neck stood on end as she neared the crescendo, and he wondered if she was casting some sort of spell. When she was finished, she turned to Dietrich and delivered a piercing gaze.

“You are much more than you appear to be. What are you?” her tone brimmed with authority, and for a moment he felt a strong desire to please her. Then his usual stubbornness reasserted itself.

“What am I? I’m pissed off, that’s what I am. First I’m ambushed on the road, and then robbed. As if that wasn’t bad enough, *she* drags me here for some reason that I can’t figure out...” he trailed off. Something in her gaze smothered his anger.

“You foolishly allowed yourself to be captured by a simple ruse, and for that you can blame no one but yourself. Still, you have been invited into my home as a guest. I give you my word that we will not harm you. Now, what are you?”

“I don’t understand. I am an NGR soldier. Surely you can see that,” he explained warily. Perhaps this was a test, but if so it was lost on him.

“True. You wear the garb of a soldier. Yet you thrust aside my magics as if they were nothing.”

“Magics?”

“Earlier I tried to probe your mind, but you resisted. Once you entered my wagon I cast a spell to make you more pliable, and I felt it unravel as I cast it. Your mind is closed to me. I have never seen the like.”

“I have no idea what you are talking about,” he explained, and meant it. Tira looked just as confused as he felt. Suddenly an idea occurred to him.

“Besides, if I can ‘thrust aside your magics,’ how did you bind my hands?”

“The Ycari root is a living thing. It understands its own speech, and will obey commands if given. But it is not magical. However, I do believe you. You honestly don’t seem aware of what you are doing.”

“Seer, if he can prevent your magics then he is dangerous. We should kill him before...”

“Tira,” the older woman’s voice cracked like a whip, “This man has been in my home. He is a guest now and you *will* remember our ways. No go and fetch us some tea.”

Tira flinched as if she had been struck and then scurried behind the curtain. When she was gone the Seer looked deep into his eyes.

“I do not have the right to return your weapons, and I wouldn’t even if I could. Those rightfully belong to Tira and the others who captured you. But I will at least free you,” she whispered

something and reached behind his back to touch his bonds. Suddenly the root went limp and he felt a million needles as the blood rushed back into his hands.

"Thank you," he replied after a moment. He did not share the rabid hatred of D-Bees that many of his comrades did, but he still didn't entirely trust them. Yet other than humiliation and the loss of his pistol, he hadn't really been harmed.

"We are traveling in the direction of your NGR. If you wish it you may remain with us. Tira will gladly share her wagon with you."

The sound of shattering crockery followed by something that could only be a curse in some strange language came from beyond the curtain. Despite himself Dietrich felt a grin stretch across his face. He got the feeling that she wasn't put in her place very often, and after the way that she had treated him, he was glad that he had been there to see it.

\* \* \*

Over the next two weeks, Dietrich gradually lowered his guard around his strange new companions. With the Seer's blessing, the rest of the Gypsies accepted his presence without comment. The caravan moved slower than he would have liked, but they still made better time than he was likely to on his own. As far as he could tell, they traveled with no discernible goal. One day they would press on sixty kilometers only to stop at some insignificant clearing. Afterwards, they might stop for three days to rest and enjoy the scenery.

He felt a little naked without his weapons, but despite his misgivings the caravan didn't meet a single threat. Tira, who had finally begun talking to him after the third day, claimed it was because the Seer guided them around such dangers. At one time he may have scoffed at such a notion, but after seeing her cure the sick and foretell several people's future, he was not as sure. The NGR taught that magic and other similar practices were wrong, but as of yet he had seen her do nothing but good for her people.

"Look at you, just lounging there. If you are going to travel with us the least you could do is work," Tira snapped at him. He couldn't help but smile. She knew just as well as he did that there was no work to do.

"Get me a rifle and I can help with the hunting," he quipped. There was no way she was going to give him a weapon. It wasn't that they feared him; rifles were expensive, and he had nothing to pay with.

The Elf turned away with a snort and stalked away from the transport. They had been camped here for a full three days, and the inactivity was beginning to wear on her. He had asked the Seer (who had no name as far as he could tell) why, and she had told him to be patient. She seemed to be expecting something, and since her word was law, no one questioned her decision.

It was nearing midday when he felt the first stirring of something within him. He didn't know what it meant, but something tugged at him. He knew exactly what direction it was coming from, and knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that if he followed his instincts he would find whatever it was. This wasn't the first time he had felt it.

The dreams had receded over his first few days with the Gypsies, and when they finally stopped, he was left with a new understanding. He had a name to go with the terror that he had faced. *The Lord of the Deep*. It was a terrible creature that nested somewhere in the depths, and where it passed, evil followed. He knew that the twisted beast needed to be stopped, and felt a firm resolve to fight it wherever and however he could.

His musings were interrupted by a sudden sense of urgency. Whatever it was out there was getting closer. He could feel it. Dietrich looked around for Tira, but she was nowhere to be found. He sprinted to the Seer's wagon and banged on the door as hard as he could.

"Seer! Open the door."

The door slid open after a moment and the motherly Elf stepped into the mid-afternoon sunlight. Her hair was disheveled as if she had been sleeping, but her eyes remained alert.

"What is it, Dietrich?" she asked warmly. The pair had spent many afternoons in long conversation, and he thought that he might actually consider the strange D-Bee a friend.

"Something is coming. A threat."

"Yes, I know. Observe," she gestured. The very old and the very young were already disappearing into their vehicles, and everyone who could fight already had a weapon in hand.

"What about me?" Dietrich demanded.

"What about you?"

"Give me a rifle. Hell, give me a sharp stick. I can fight!"

"I have no weapon to give you. I don't own any," she smirked at him. This was so infuriating. These people could die and he was powerless to help them.

His head snapped around almost against his will. Whatever was coming had nearly reached them. The Gypsies who could fight were armed and waiting, and the rest scurried into the wagons. He spotted Tira running in from the forest from nearly the exact opposite direction of the approaching danger.

With a deafening crash, a huge Gargoyle leaped through the trees and landed next to one of the APCs. Though he had seen and fought such creatures before, the sight was still impressive. The beast stood over four meters tall and its dark gray skin was harder than any stone. Razor sharp claws tipped each finger, and two jagged horns well over a foot long added to its menacing height. Moving faster than its adversaries could track, the Gargoyle's long tail snapped forward and encircled one of the Gypsy's necks. There was a sickening crunch and with a booming laugh, the Gargoyle hurled the corpse into one of the APCs. A hollow thud echoed over the camp as the body impacted.

The rest of the Gypsies opened fire with all manner of weapons. Pulse rifles, lasers and slug throwers bit into the beast, but did little more than anger it. Then several more creatures emerged from the woods. Dietrich recognized them as Gurgoyles. They were shorter than the Gargoyle, and lacked their larger cousin's wings. Still, they were formidable in their own right.

His instincts finally kicked in and he ran full tilt toward the APC where the first victim's body still lay. By some miracle the man's WR-15 rifle was clutched in his lifeless hand. Dietrich skidded to a halt and ripped it from its former owner. Spinning around, he took stock of the situation. Two of the Gurgoyles

were using energy rifles, and a third was dismembering Gypsies with a Kittani plasma sword. At least a dozen of his new comrades were down, and the rest would join them without help.

As he took aim at the Gurgoyles with the plasma sword, he heard the Seer reaching the crescendo of some spell. Then he tuned everything out and became one with his weapon. When the cross-hairs settled on his target's right eye, he gently stroked the trigger of his new rifle. A beam of coherent light ripped into the Gurgoyles' face, and the beast fell back with an agonized cry. Dietrich felt a moment's surprise, but even as his mind registered it his feet were moving. It was an excellent shot, but there was no way that it should have done that sort of damage.

The Seer had managed to wrap one of the Gurgoyles in a blue, glowing net, and another had been brought down by the combined firepower of the remaining Gypsies. They were much fewer now, and unless something changed there could be only one outcome. He wove his way through the wagons until he found the corpse of the Gurgoyles that he had killed. There. He dropped his rifle and snatched up the plasma sword that the creature had wielded before dying.

Whirling around, he saw the Gurgoyles moving towards the Seer. The Gypsies were also aware of it, but despite their best efforts couldn't even slow the beast. As his legs pumped underneath him Dietrich feared that he would be too late. He hurled his body the last few meters just as the creature's tail began its descent. There was no time to block it, but at least he could trade his life for hers. The tail stabbed towards his chest like a bolt of lightning, and he braced himself for death.

A strange tingling surrounded his entire body, and the Gurgoyles' attack skittered off his chest in a shower of sparks. Both opponents stood surprised, but Dietrich recovered first. With a grunt of effort he swung the plasma sword in an overhead arc. Energy danced and flickered around the blade as it sheered through the Gurgoyles' left elbow. Steaming blood showered down on him, and his opponent staggered back.

The beast's eyes narrowed and it settled into a combat stance. It understood that this was no longer a game. He could hurt it. Maybe even kill it. Dietrich circled to his right, but kept close enough to guarantee that he would keep the Gurgoyles' attention. From the corner of his eye he saw Tira helping the Seer to her feet.

Several tense moments passed as the combatants circled each other. In the vids that Dietrich had loved as a boy, he and the Gurgoyles would have exchanged barbs and laughed as they fought. The reality was a far different thing. Both of them respected the other and their silence spoke volumes.

The muscles bunched in his opponent's mighty legs prepared him for its leap, and as it left the ground he rushed it. His sudden move caught the Gurgoyles off guard, and its tail plowed a furrow nearly a meter behind him. It lowered a massive wing to block his sword just as he had hoped. As the wing obscured its vision, he dropped to one knee, and threw his whole body into a strike at the beast's knee. The blade crackled and sputtered angrily as it bit deeply into the Gurgoyles' leg.

He finished the move by rolling a couple meters behind his opponent, and regained his footing while the Gurgoyles struggled to face him. Its tail swept along the ground in an attempt to trip him, but he danced out of range. His opponent was clearly favoring its left leg now, and a steady stream of black blood continued to pump from the severed stump where its right hand had once been. Dietrich continued to circle the beast in an effort to keep it off balance. It was limping now, and its face was locked into a mask of hatred. It had to know that it was weakening, and that meant it would want to finish the fight quickly.

Sure enough, the creature gathered itself on its right leg and leapt. It used its wings to stabilize its flight, and came down right on top of him. Trusting that the mysterious force that had saved him before was still there, he let it grab him with both clawed hands. As it came down on him, he jabbed the plasma sword upward with all of his strength. As the tip sank into the creature's gut, he thumbed a switch that sent a massive energy discharge rippling up the blade. The force of its own body pushed the sword all the way through the Gurgoyles' back, and the plasma blast finished the grisly work.

Its hot, fetid breath crashed over him like a wave as the weight of its body bore him to the ground. Its claws raked into the shimmering shield around him and left deep furrows in the chest and legs of his armor. But after a few moments, the blows grew weaker, and he knew that the Gurgoyles' strength was ebbing. It gave one long, shuddering breath, and then lay still.

He struggled to get out from under its impossibly heavy body, but both his arms and legs remained pinned under it. Breathing was getting harder, and black spots swam across his vision. Dietrich began to feel lightheaded, and laughed to himself at the situation. He had managed to kill a Gurgoyles single-handedly, only to die under its lifeless corpse.

Suddenly the pressure was removed and he sucked in a deep breath of blessedly fresh air. He staggered to his feet ready to fight, but the Gypsies had managed to kill the last two Gurgoyles. Looking around, he saw two thick cables tied around the Gurgoyles' body, and after a moment he understood. They had tied an APC to it and used the vehicle to pull it off of him.

"Thank you," he gasped at Tira as she climbed down from the driver's side.

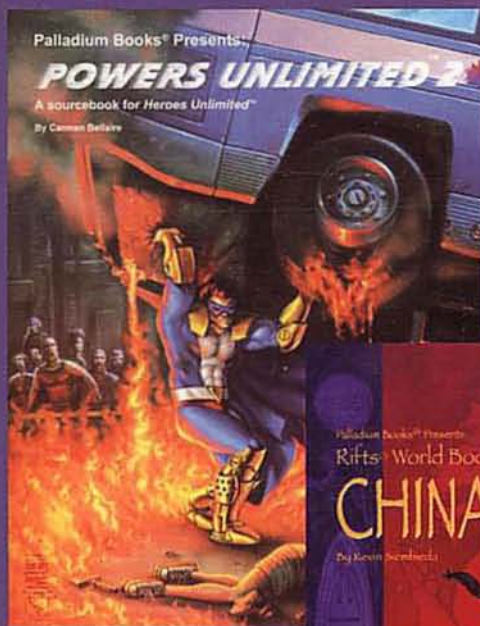
"You didn't deserve it, but I supposed it would have been a waste to let you die," she bristled. The comment was half hearted and they both knew it.

"I told you, Dietrich," the Seer said as she dusted herself off. "You are more than you appear."

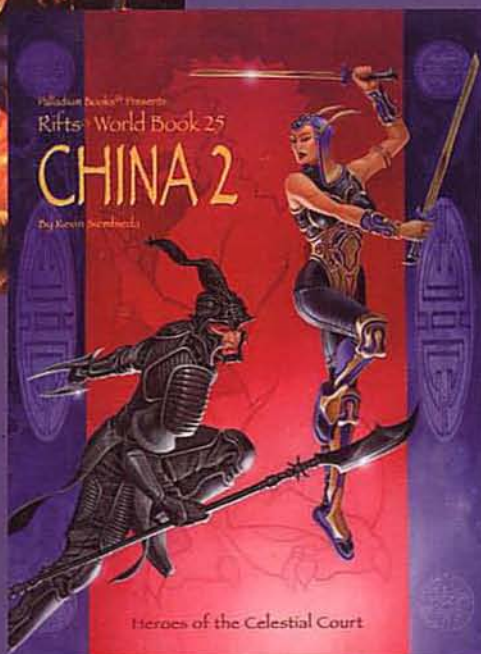
She was right. He had no idea how or why he seemed to have these new abilities, but the fact was that he did have them. Perhaps they were linked to his ordeal with the Lord of the Deep, but whatever the reason, he was going to use them to combat the threats that others couldn't.

For now, though, he was going to help these people bury their dead. They had been through a lot, and whatever the NGR said, they didn't deserve it. He didn't pretend to know what would happen after that, but he did know that he would face it unflinchingly.





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