

Palladium Books® Presents:

THE

RIFTS®

Your Guide to the Megaverse®

Inside...

Rifts® Japan's Underworld
Palladium Fantasy®: War Magic
After the Bomb®: New Mutants
Heroes Unlimited™ Short Story
The Hammer of the Forge™
Conventions, News & More

Brandon C. Chalk

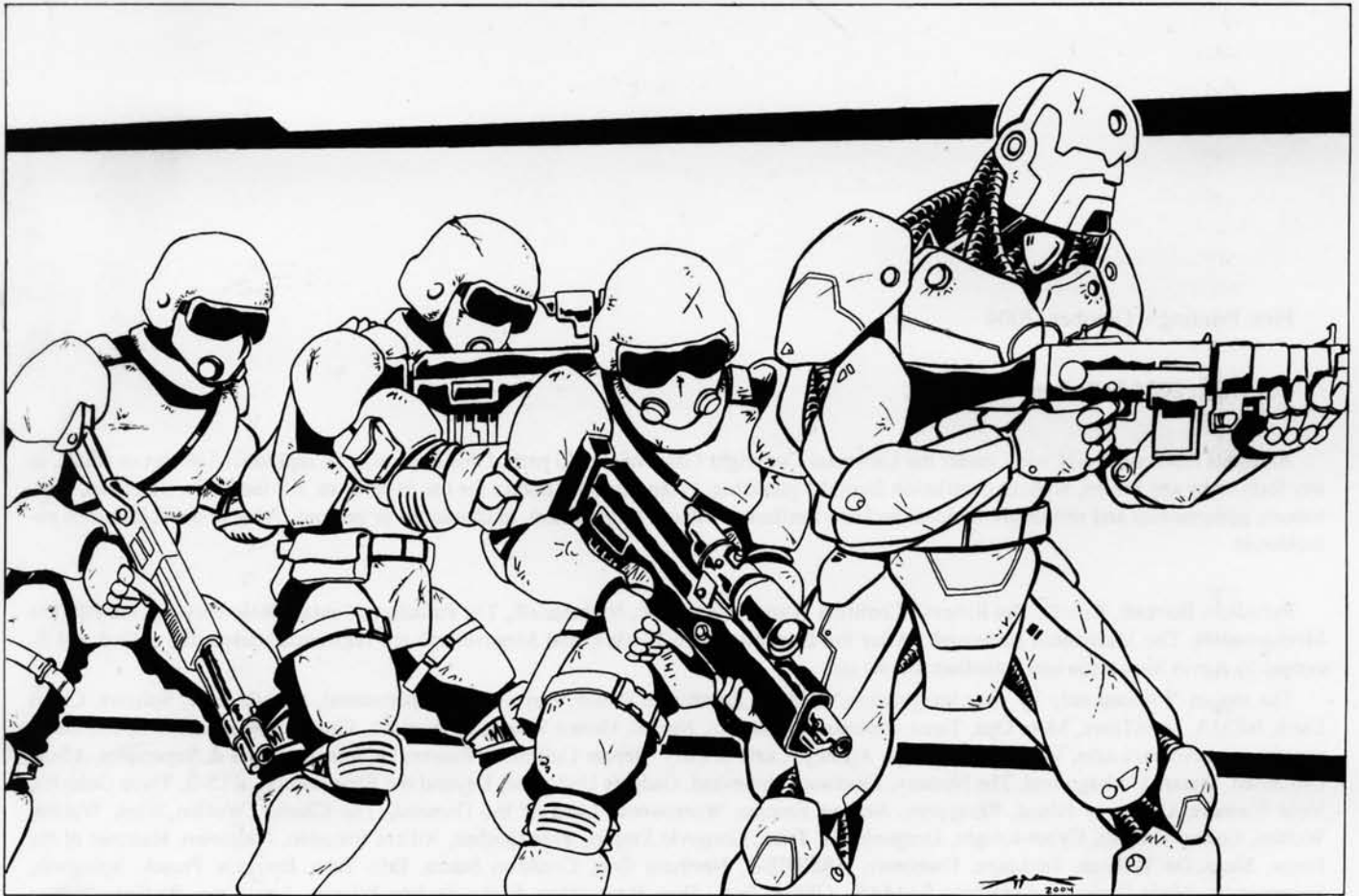
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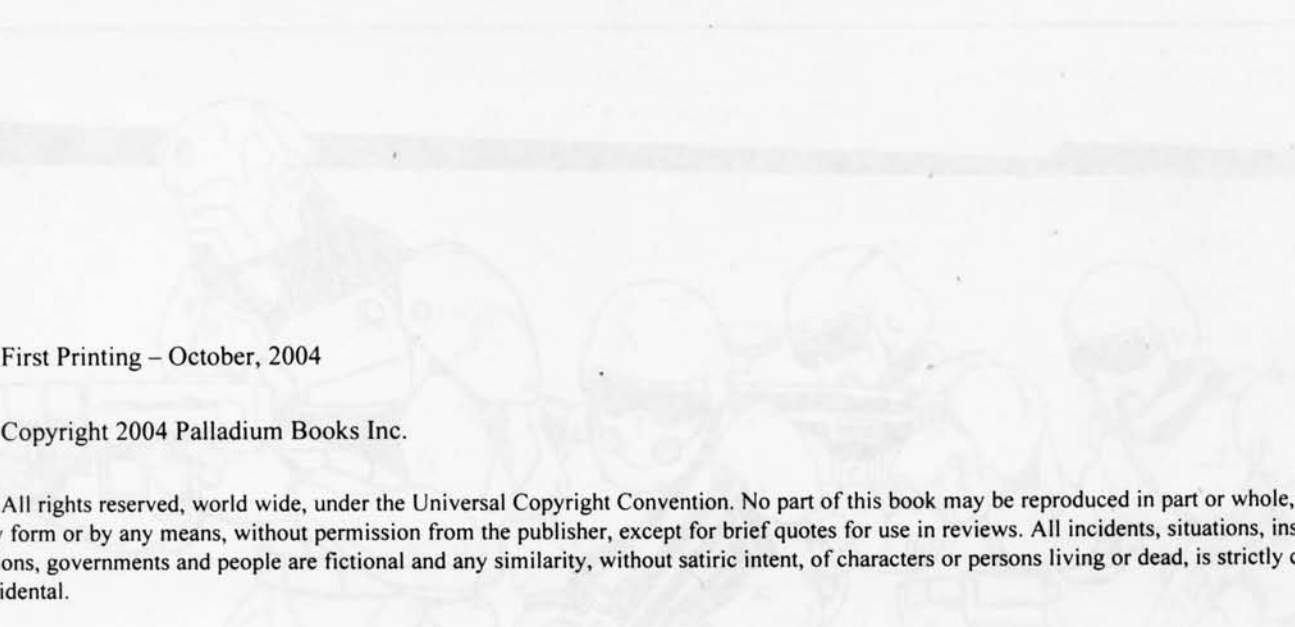
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The Rifter® Number 29

Your guide to the Palladium Megaverse®!



First Printing – October, 2004

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Palladium Books® Presents:

THE RIFTER

#29

Sourcebook and guide to the Palladium Megaverse®

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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® #29 – January, 2005

Page 6 – From the Desk of Kevin Siembieda

It is the beginning of a new year. **The Rifter®** turns eight this year, **Rifts®** is 15 and **Palladium Books** (the company) celebrates its 25th anniversary!

Palladium has been around a long time and plans to be around for years to come. Kevin Siembieda, Palladium's President and Game Designer, talks about **Beyond the Supernatural™**, **Splicers™**, **Rifts®** and other products he's excited about in the coming months, and offers a few hints about things to come. All of us at Palladium think 2005 is going to be something special, with new hit games, exciting new turns for old favorite games and entire new avenues of adventure for our fans. This issue of **The Rifter®** is just the tip of the iceberg. Stay with us for the ride of Palladium's life starting . . . um, now.

Page 7 – Palladium News

Splicers™ has been nominated for Best New RPG of 2004 by Inquest Gamer magazine, **Rifts®: Promise of Power™** (the strategy RPG videogame for Nokia's *N-Gage game deck*), and a few surprises to come are all covered in this month's news.

Page 7-8 – Palladium's Convention Schedule

It looks like Kevin and the Palladium crew *may* be making more than their usual number of convention appearances in 2005. The **GAMA Trade Show** will be Palladium's first game industry appearance of the year, followed by **Penguicon 3** in April, **E3** in May, **Gen Con Indy** in August, probably **Dragon*Con** in September, and **Trinity Con** in October, plus we suspect a couple more *may* be added to this schedule.

Convention organizers interested in bringing in Kevin Siembieda, Palladium Books or other Palladium creators as guests for their show should contact Steve as soon as possible, because we are determining our convention schedule *now*.

Page 8 – Coming Attractions

Beyond the Supernatural™, Second Edition is at the printers and ships to stores the same day as this issue of *The Rifter®*, but you'd better snatch your copy up fast, because we have a sneaking suspicion **BTS-2** is going to be Palladium's newest, smash hit, and the first print run may be gone quickly. The limited edition **BTS-2 Hardcover** will be available in February. **BTS-2 Tome Grotesque, Arcanum** and other sourcebooks should follow quickly. Read all about it on pages 8 & 9.

Villains Unlimited for HU2 is getting a face-lift and 16 pages of new material.

What's next for **Rifts®** is on page 10.

Palladium's 2005 Release Schedule for the first quarter of 2005 and Recent Releases are found on page 11, along with a concept sketch for Scott Johnson's cover to **Adventures in Dinosaur Swamp**, coming this Spring from Todd Yoho and Kevin Siembieda.

Page 12 – The Rifter® Super-Subscription Offer

If you have trouble finding *The Rifter®* in the stores or just want the convenience of getting it delivered to your doorstep, check out this great subscription offer. It ends in March, so don't delay.

Page 13 – The Palladium Fantasy RPG®

The Magic of War

Kevin Christensen offers up a fascinating and comprehensive article on magic designed specifically with *war* in mind. Optional.

Page 15 – Arken Warrior Orders begin.

Page 19 – Arken Warriors & Armor.

Page 19 – Arken Warrior O.C.C. Abilities & Bonuses.

Page 23 – War Magic begins.

Page 25 – War Magic Spell List followed by spell descriptions.

Page 38 – Armor Golem (Level 11 spell).

Page 42 – Spells of Legend.

Although created with *The Palladium Fantasy RPG®* in mind, War Magic is easily adapted to *Heroes Unlimited™* or even *Rifts®* and *Rifts® Chaos Earth™*. Any adaptations, however, are left completely to the discretion of the Game Master, as War Magic is an *optional* type of magic provided for your consideration.

We hope this nice big Palladium Fantasy article helps make up for the shortage of new releases for that line the last year.

Artwork is by the incomparable Kent Burles.

Page 43 – After the Bomb® & Heroes Unlimited™

New Types of Mutants

Caleb Goodson presents a variety of strange and twisted mutants for use in **After the Bomb®** or **Heroes Unlimited™** that should be fun to play in any super-hero or mutant animal based setting.

Arachnids (spiders and scorpions), Annelid Mutants (worms and leeches), Gastropods (slugs and snails) and ocean critters from the octopus and crab to sharks, dolphins and ordinary fish. Plus a few new Genetic Chimeras, Throwbacks and Purebreds (starting on page 55).

A fun change from the usual, run of the mill animal mutants and other strangeness.

Artwork by Apollo Okamura.

Page 60 – Heroes Unlimited™ Short Story

Fractures; A sequel to "Fallen Angels"

K.G. Carlson returns with a follow up story to his popular tale entitled *Fallen Angels*. It starts with the funeral of a friend and spirals into trouble, turmoil, and emotional discord.

Artwork by Brian and Allen Manning.

Page 74 – Rifts®: Japan

Crime and Punishment in Rifts® Japan

Dan Felkins takes us into the seedy underworld of the Yakuza and Rifts Japan's criminal organizations. It is another fun and imaginative article full of *optional* source material suitable for use in the **Rifts® Japan** and **Rifts® China** settings. It includes background info (did you know Ya ku za reflects a losing hand of a game similar to Blackjack?), Splugorth involvement, the use of Juicer and M.O.M./Crazies technology, current clans and operations, notable street gangs, magical Dragon Tattoos and more.

Page 80 – The Yakuza Clansman O.C.C.

Page 83 – Cyber-Ninja O.C.C.

Page 85 – Ninja Juicer Variants.

Page 85 – New Equipment common to Tech-Ninja starts.

Page 86 – Kittani Technology.

And what would an article about the gangs of Japan be without some data on Law Enforcement, including the Police Officer O.C.C., police squad car and equipment, and Robot Police Drones?

Artwork by Brian and Allen Manning.

Page 93 – Rifts® Phase World®

The Hammer of the Forge

Chapter 29 of James M.G. Cannon's popular ongoing saga. A quiet moment before . . . hey, we're not going to blow any plot twist. Read and enjoy.

Artwork by Apollo Okamura.

The Theme for Issue 29

This issue's theme is conflict, magic and the unusual. Editor Wayne Smith has chosen three, large, juicy hunks of optional role-playing source material for your enjoyment, plus a couple of short stories that will hopefully help to bring those RPG settings to life and provide inspiration for your own games. Enjoy.

The Cover

Brandon C. Clark, one of the artistic mainstays at Drunken Style Studio, hand delivered this cover to us. Brandon has been playing around with computer painting and techniques, and wanted to know what we thought of his latest endeavor. Well, we liked it so much we bought it on the spot for the cover of this issue of **The Rifter®**, and commissioned Brandon to whip up a new cover for the re-release of **Villains Unlimited** (probably back in print in February or March). You can see a lot more of Brandon's artwork in **Beyond the Supernatural™**, **Second Edition** and **Tome Grotesque™** (the first BTS-2 sourcebook), as well as the two **Rifts® China** books and various other Palladium titles.

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 – Palladium Online

Coming Next Issue

The Rifter® #30

We haven't plotted out everything that's going into this Spring issue, but you can count on it including some fun and interesting things, including:

- **A surprise announcement.**
- **A sneak peek of a new Rifts® O.C.C.**
- **More material for Rifts®.**
- **Material for *Palladium Fantasy®* and/or *Heroes Unlimited™*.**
- **The inside scoop on the *Lazlo Society* (for those of you who haven't figured it out by next issue).**
- **Material for *Beyond the Supernatural™* or *Nightbane®*.**
- **The next chapter of *The Hammer of the Forge™*.**
- **Source material for the entire *Palladium Megaverse®*.**
- **Palladium's new Spring catalog.**
- **New contributors and fun. So please join us.**

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

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

From the Desk of Kevin Siembieda

The New Year is before us, and it is full of promise.

Beyond the Supernatural™ RPG, Second Edition is done, and should ship the same day as this issue of **The Rifter®**, so if you're reading this, **BTS-2** is also in the stores. You have to check it out. **Beyond the Supernatural™** is something special. Some books take on a life of their own and become bigger and better than we ever imagined. **Rifts®** was such a game, and we think **BTS-2** may be joining its ranks. This baby sings. It was a labor of love and is filled with ideas, approaches and presentation that I had been kicking around and developing for the last couple of years. There's a full description of it elsewhere, so I won't go on and on about it here, but if you're into role-playing games, you have to take a look at **Beyond**. I hope you'll agree that it is the smoothest blend of high concepts, story, characters and rules Palladium (and maybe anyone) has ever done. And a compelling story filled with characters you'll love to play. And after reading **Beyond the Supernatural™, 2nd Edition**, you'll feel like diving into a game. I think editor Alex Marciniszyn summed this title up when he said,

"What I like about **BTS-2** is that it's not **Rifts**-like or like anything else I can think of. It's something entirely new that stands on its own. I love it . . . the fans will love it."

Ultimately you, the gamers, will be the judge. Let us know if you think we hit the mark on this one or not.

The Rifts® video game for the Nokia N-Gage game deck will be released in summer of 2005 and though I'm not at liberty to share any secrets at this time, I can say that everything we have seen at Palladium has put a smile on our faces. **Rifts®: Promise of Power** for the N-Gage will rock!

The Rifts® Movie. With any luck, we'll finally have some definitive movie news we can share sometime this year.

Fun new products

Fans can expect more supplements for **Rifts®** and all our lines.

Sourcebooks for Beyond the Supernatural™ should be fast in coming, with **Tome Grotesque™** first and **Arcanum™** following after.

Rifts®. The first three or four **Rifts®** titles of 2005 will center around *mercenaries* of North America with **Rifts® MercTown™** (an entire town set near the Federation of Magic, operated by mercenaries, for mercenaries, mapped, described and filled with cool characters, places and adventure ideas), **Rifts® Merc Ops™** (weapons, equipment and some wanted desperados to spin adventures from), and **Rifts® Arzno™** (mercenaries and vampires set in Arizona). Other **Rifts®** titles in the works are **Adventures in Dinosaur Swamp™** (more dinosaurs, mysteries and adventures in this unique and fun setting), **Rifts® China 3: Masters of Magic™**, **The City of Lazlo™** and one or two new **Rifts® Adventure-Sourcebooks**.

Rifts® Chaos Earth™ is slowly boiling into a fan favorite and I have two sourcebooks planned: **NEMA Mission Book One** (involving the first Juicer Uprising™) and **Psychic Storm™**. Probably releases later in the year, Summer at the soonest.

A Megaversal™ Adventure series. We don't want to reveal too much until the first 2-3 books in this 4-5 book series are completely done, but Carl "Crazy Man" Gleba is working on a unique series of books that will work as both *standalone* sourcebooks and *parts* in a series that will cross the Megaverse®, and it all starts with the **Dimension Book: Hades**. 'Nuff said. And don't try to pry more outta Carl, we have him enchanted to keep silent.

Splicers™ Sourcebook. The first **Splicers™** sourcebook should be out by Spring or Summer 2005.

With a little luck we should see some releases for **Palladium Fantasy RPG®** and **Heroes Unlimited™** as well.

Personally, I'd love to start work on **The Mechanoids®** role-playing game (*Mechanoids Space™*), but trying to be realistic, I doubt it will see a 2005 release even if I do manage to start work on it. The excitement over the **Beyond the Supernatural™, Second Edition RPG** has gotten a number of people to beg me to do *Mechanoid Space™* next, but the books noted above and a couple of secret projects will probably prevent that.

Convention appearances. I and other Palladium creators expect to be making an appearance at 4-6 conventions this year, as well as 2-4 trade shows, so drop by and to say hello, chat, get autographs and have some fun.

Exciting announcements. I suspect there will be a handful of announcements throughout 2005 that will surprise, excite and please Palladium fans. Our creative juices are flowing like crazy and we're working on some fun and exciting projects. Stay tuned.

Happy New Year from the Palladium Staff to all of you. I'm writing this New Year's Eve and feeling a little nostalgic and very positive about our future. The year 2005 marks the **Palladium Books, Inc.** 25 year anniversary and **Rifts®** is 15 years old this August. Thank you for joining us on our grand adventure these past two and half decades, we hope you enjoyed the ride. Now prepare yourself for 2005 being the launching point for the next 25 years that promise to be bigger, better and more fun and exciting than ever before.

— Kevin Siembieda, 2005

Palladium News

By Kevin Siembieda (the guy who should know)

Splicers™ RPG

Nominated for “Best New RPG” of 2004

Splicers™ has been nominated for **Inquest Gamer** magazine’s *Fan Awards* as best new role-playing game of the 2004.

Needless to say it got our vote! Hey, win or lose, it was fun to see **Splicers™** among the nominated titles.

Voting ended **January 15, 2005**, and the winners will be announced at the GAMA Trade Show in March, and probably in the issue of **Inquest Gamer** on sale the following month. Wish us luck.

What is Splicers™?

For those of you who haven’t seen it yet, **Splicers™** is a gritty, new science fiction role-playing where the heroes have to mutate themselves and/or don living suits of organic power armor to fight an insane artificial intelligence known as the Machine, and her robot legions. It’s a strange, wild, and fun setting.

- Humans wield living weapons and armor to battle robot annihilators in a futuristic world gone mad.
- Player characters sacrifice their humanity to face the murderous robot legions.
- Genetically *grown* power armor and weaponry that changes and improves as it grows.
- History, world background and epic adventures that are gritty and action-packed.
- A new, stand-alone, sci-fi role-playing game.
- Mega-Damage system – compatible with **Rifts®**, **Chaos Earth™**, and **Phase World®**.
- Written by Carmen Bellaire with additional text and rules by Kevin Siembieda.
- \$23.95 – 224 pages, Cat. No. 200. Available now.

Rifts®: Promise of Power™

That’s the official name for the **Rifts® Strategy RPG videogame** for Nokia’s **N-Gage game deck**. The game is still on target for a Summer 2005 release, and boys and girls, is this game looking amazing! Of course, I’m no videogame expert by any stretch of the imagination, but I have been very impressed by everything I’ve seen. And as a **Rifts®** fan - wow!

More information will hit online and videogame magazines after a major press conference that will take place in Spring 2005. I’ll be there to enjoy the presentation and chat with the media. Meanwhile, Palladium may even have some exclusive game info to share with our fans as well. So keep your eyes peeled. Oh, and you’d better start saving up for your **N-Gage** and a copy of **Rifts®: Promise of Power™**, because I can promise you that once you see this bad boy, you are going to want one.

Rifts® Movie

Sorry, nothing to tell at this point. But stay tuned.

A virtual tour of the Palladium offices is coming

A virtual tour of the Palladium offices should appear on our website (www.palladiumbooks.com) sometime in February 2005. It will include photographs and descriptive text showing the offices, staff members and their toys. Just a little something for those of you who keep asking what’s Palladium Books like, who are the key personnel, and so on.

We’ll also be updating and doing a little revamping of the website that we think you’ll enjoy.

A few surprises to come

Okay, I’ve mentioned this online and in my editorial page, but we have some cool stuff in the works and some announcements and things that I think are sure to please and surprise our fans (and competitors). The first one involves **BTS-2**. The second and third should come in April, and others should be sprinkled in throughout the year. That’s enough torture for now.

Palladium’s Convention Schedule

GAMA Trade Show 2005 Palladium Books – Booth #212 Las Vegas, Nevada – March 14-17, 2005

Retailers, store managers and fans of Palladium Books, swing by Palladium Books booth, #212 (near White Wolf), to chat and scoop up free promotional product.

We’ll be giving away an issue of **The Rifter®**, catalogs, and select products throughout the show, while supplies last.

As usual, Publisher and Game Designer, *Kevin Siembieda*, and Sales Manager, *Steve Sheiring*, will be on hand throughout the show to chat about games, talk about Palladium’s upcoming releases and new products, and sign autographs (so bring your favorite Palladium games to be signed or scoop up something at the show).

We anticipate having one major announcement at the show, plus the latest on the **Rifts® videogame** for the **N-Gage** and the latest on the **Rifts® Movie**.

Penguicon 3 – April 22-24, 2005

Novi, Michigan at the Sheraton Novi Hotel

Penguicon is one of the fastest growing gaming and science fiction conventions in the Midwest. Palladium Books is pleased to join the more than 1200 people expected to attend this year's event (I believe they had about 1000 in 2004) with yours truly, *Kevin Siembieda*, the gaming guest of honor. But that's only the beginning.

Penguicon features:

- Celebrity guests, authors, and artists. Confirmed guests include: Cory Doctorow (SF author), Wil Wheaton (actor & author; Wesley Crusher of ST:TNG), Nathan Torkington (editor/author), and Kevin Siembieda (Palladium Books), with more anticipated.
- 24 hour gaming and special gaming events.
- Live Role-Playing.
- Masquerade and a rocking dance.
- Anime room.
- Panel discussions and talks.
- Autograph signing sessions.
- The fabulous Celebrity Frag Fest.
- A writing workshop, homemade robots and more!

Palladium's contributions to these festivities include:

Kevin Siembieda to participate in several panel talks and run at least two gaming events.

Additional Guests of Palladium Books: *Carmen Bellaire*, *Wayne Smith* (editor and editor-in-chief of *The Rifter*®), *Steve Sheiring* (the man who created and ran *Lord Coake*, and who is Palladium's Sales Manager), *Julius Rosenstein* (contributing writer and proofreader), *Alex Marciszyn* (editor), *Randi & Roger Cartier* (freelance authors and long-time friends and play-testers), and artists *Brandon C. Clark*, *Mark Dudley* and *Ka Xiong* of *Drunken Style Studio*.

Tentative Palladium Guests: *Apollo Okamura* and *Ramon Perez*.

Games Run by Palladium Creators: *Kevin Siembieda*, writer, *Carmen Bellaire*, Palladium author and proofreader, *Julius Rosenstein*, and long-time play-tester and player in Kevin's games, *Roger Cartier*, will all be running outstanding gaming events.

BTS-2 Hardcover and select other product (new and back stock items) available in the dealers room.

How to attend Penguicon

General Information: info@penguicon.org
and <http://www.penguicon.org>

Registration Contact: registration-admin@penguicon.org

U.S. Mail:

Penguicon
PO Box 401302
Redford, MI 48240-9302

This convention is fun and well organized. We hope to see a lot of Palladium fans joining us for the weekend. Let's make it a Spring-Fest of fun and gaming.

Gen Con Indy – August 18-21, 2005

We don't have a lot of details yet, but we plan to make Gen Con a bash that fans of *Rifts*® and *Palladium Books*® won't forget.

Tentative guest line up already includes writers *Carmen Bellaire*, *Carl Gleba*, and *Todd Yoho*. Artists *Apollo Okamura*, *Brandon C. Clark*, and *Mark Dudley*. Plus *Kevin Siembieda*, *Wayne Smith*, *Steve "Lord Coake" Sheiring*, *Randi & Roger Cartier*, and we hope to add other freelancers, friends and guests like *Jason Richards*, *Freddie E. Williams*, *Ramon Perez*, and others for the *biggest* line-up of Palladium creators EVER!

Gaming events run by *Kevin Siembieda*, *Carmen Bellaire*, *Carl Gleba*, *Todd Yoho*, *Roger Cartier* and a host of other Palladium personalities and long-time Palladium G.M.s will also be available. We're anticipating 20-40 gaming events! Don't miss it.

Other Conventions in 2005

Kevin Siembieda will also be appearing at the **Nokia N-Gage booth** at **E3** this May in Los Angeles, where *Rifts*®: **Promise of Power**™, for the N-Gage game deck, will be prominently featured. *Rifts*®: **Promise of Power**™ is still on track for a Summer, 2005 release.

We're considering attending **Dragon*Con**, September, in Atlanta, Georgia, and will definitely be at **Trinity Con**, Southfield, Michigan, in October. More on those shows later.

Sorry, Palladium Books does not expect to attend **Origins** 2005.

Coming Attractions

Beyond the Supernatural™ RPG Epic scope. In stores now!

Game Designer and President, *Kevin Siembieda*, has spent months rewriting virtually every word of the original game and delayed the game's release for more than a year to guarantee that it is truly something special.

According to *Kevin Siembieda*, "I feel this is the best writing I have ever done. I think *BTS* is a game that's going to knock people's socks off!"

Palladium Editor of twenty years, *Alex Marciszyn*, adds, "*BTS-2* is not *Rifts*-like or like anything I've seen from *Palladium Books* or anyone else I can think of. It's something entirely new that stands on its own. I love it, and I think the fans will love it."

That's not just hype. *BTS-2* has "it" – that *magical something* that should make it one of the hit games of 2005. We always try to produce great games, but **Beyond the Supernatural**™, **Second Edition** has that same intangible excitement that we've seen in the past with *Rifts*®, *Robotech*® and *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*® – don't be surprised if the initial printing sells out fast. (We actually have our printer on standby to do a quick second printing should we need one in a hurry!)

Hey, we know it's kind of odd to talk about our *own* game like this, but that's how excited we are about it, and that's how overwhelmingly positive the response has been from insiders who have seen all or part of the game. "Wow," "impressive," "nothing like what I expected, it's better," "it gave me nightmares," and "I'm sleeping with the lights on tonight," have all been honest to god responses we've gotten for **Beyond the Supernatural™!**

We can hardly wait to have the game hit store shelves and see how the gamers react.

- Extensive background and lush setting.
- 14 Psychic Character Classes (P.C.C.s), such as the Diviner, Fire Walker, Genius, Ghost Hunter, Latent Psychic, Nega-Psychic, Physical Psychic, Psi-Mechanic, Psychic Medium, Psychic Sensitive and Parapsychologist.
- More than 100 psychic abilities, plus special P.C.C. powers:
- Ordinary People are a unique character class all by itself and just as fun to play as characters with psychic powers.
- 42 occupations, including the Professional Psychic and Psychic Investigator.
- The Lazlo Society and Lazlo Agency.
- Skeptics/debunkers, omens, and signs.
- Creatures of darkness, Entities and other fiends.
- Easy to learn rules get you started with a bang.
- Expanded Sanity rules and tables.
- Fast, easy to play modern combat rules.
- Perception Rolls, character sheet, designer notes and more.
- A role-playing game of horror and suspense. Realistic setting.

- Sewn and perfect bound so pages will *NOT* fall out.
- Cover by John Zeleznik. Interior art by Perez, Clark, Dudley, Okamura and Dubisch.
- 256 pages written by Kevin Siembieda.
- \$24.95 retail – Cat. No. 700 – ISBN 157457-083-8
- In stores everywhere by the end of January, 2005.

Hardcover

Beyond the Supernatural™

"Gold" limited edition, signed and numbered. Because our fans seem to love 'em so much, we have produced a BTS-2 limited edition hardcover. The hardcover is fundamentally identical to the soft-cover edition, except as follows:

- Limited to 500 signed and numbered copies. (The first 100 copies reserved for Palladium staff, freelancers and promotion.) Available while supplies last.
- Signed and numbered by author, Kevin Siembieda, and artist, Mike Dubisch, and possibly other artists.
- Special, horror-filled, end sheets by Michael Dubisch.
- Bound in a handsome, blood-red leatherette with gold embossing.
- 256 pages written by Kevin Siembieda.
- \$50 retail plus \$12.00 for shipping and handling – Cat. No. 7000.
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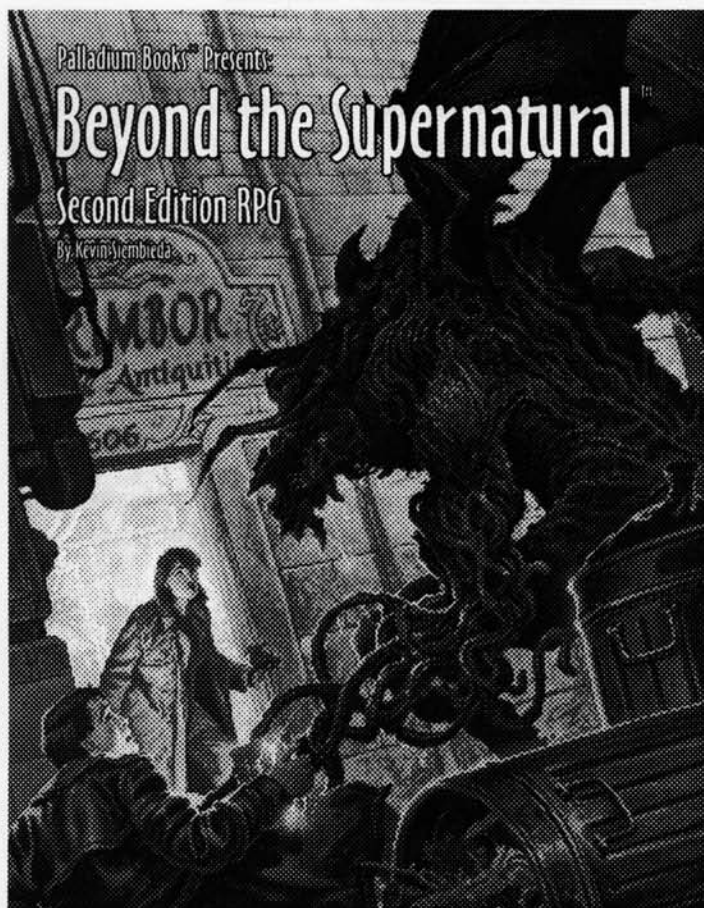
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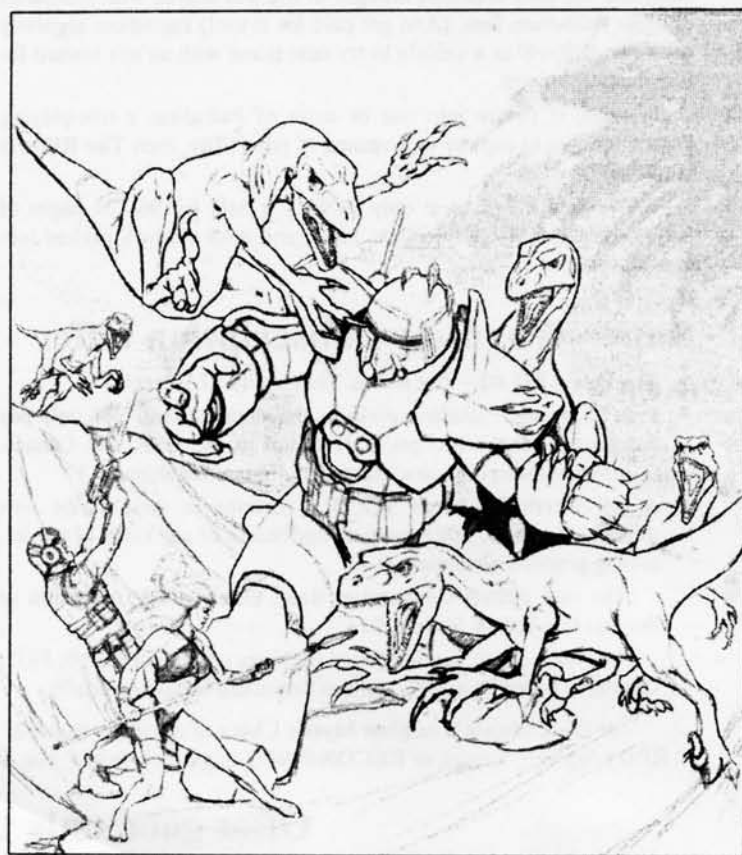
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The Magic of War

Optional Rules and Source Material for the Palladium Fantasy RPG®

By Kevin Christensen

War has had a long and well-known history upon the face of Palladium, going all the way back to the War of Light when the Old Ones were finally imprisoned, to the present day struggles of the humans and Wolfen. Throughout all of these struggles Palladium has remained a place of magic and fantasy where wizards and dragons roam the countryside, a place where the elements can be bent to the will and demonic forces bend the weak and righteous to evil. With the long history of both war and magic, it makes a good deal of sense that since magic is such an omnipresent force that it is also present upon the battlefield. Although magic drastically changes the battlefield, it would take far too long and become far too complicated to delve into all of the aspects necessary to describe magical warfare. The scope of this article is to present a view of magic as it has caused specialization in the use of war, how it has evolved so there are those soldiers known as Arken Warriors, who, for a price, command some of the most devastating magic known to the Palladium World in the practice of war.

The following ideas can be used in any campaign with an attention to balance. Unless your campaign world takes on a heavier amount of magic, this material can seem out of place. This is especially true if such ideas are plopped down in the middle of a campaign, which could be extremely disruptive if used too fast too soon. However, used properly, as old secrets coming to the surface or in a more magic heavy campaign, the Arken Warriors and War Magic can present an interesting new twist and challenge to any campaign world. They could easily spice up a to which campaign you wish to add more large-scale conflict, or as a gradual escalation of war in general everywhere. They would even work well on smaller scale conflicts. For example, while questing for an ancient site the adventurers come across a Grim Fire Arken Warrior who guards the site from any incursion, and only by defeating him can the players pass. Of course if you don't like the Arken Warrior class, the War Magic spells can be learned or given to the standard classes already present in your game such as the Wizard or Psi-Mystic which can make them into effective battle mages as well, without seriously affecting continuity. Of course their loss of mind and body caused by the destructive energies they channel can also make for interesting plot devices as an Arken Warrior N.P.C. or Player Character ages. Ultimately it is all left up to the players and G.M. to find their tastes and enjoy.

Arken Warrior Proliferation

Arken Warriors are meant to be a powerful force and therefore, can upset the balance of games if used in the wrong manner. One of the things to remember about Arken Warriors is that they have very limited numbers. Encounters with lone Arken

Warriors should be typical and more than one Arken Warrior sporadic unless involved in a large-scale conflict. The reason these Arken Warriors are so few in number are several. One of the greatest is that their profession combined with their destructive use of magic promises a shorter average life span than would be normal for a soldier. The power of their magic is so strong that their bodies can barely contain it, and after a small time of wielding such power it begins to seriously degrade the wielder physically and emotionally. Many Arken Warriors die on the battlefield, but those who don't can look forward to the possibility of death by magic overload, unless restraint is used.

Their chosen path also affects them in such a way that they are often magnets for trouble; there are many situations an Arken Warrior can find himself in by reputation alone. Perhaps while travelling through the city he is offered a position in a noble house for a personal war against another house, only to have the same offer made by the opposing house. Then a small scale street war breaks out based solely on who will possess the Arken Warrior as part of a critical advantage he can provide to each house over the other. Perhaps a boy who saw his father killed by an Arken Warrior in combat now seeks revenge against all Arken Warriors and targets a player's character. A past challenger once defeated returns for a rematch as a test of arms, or a new fighter seeking to make a name for himself challenges the player character. There are a myriad of possibilities and the old sayings provide a rule of thumb with the Arken and their breed, "Violence begets violence," and "Live by the sword, die by the sword." Those few who are cautious enough may live a full, normal life span, but they are the minority.

You could also create social pressures where to die old and in bed is seen as a great shame, passing that shame onto any apprentices the Arken Warrior trained as well as his family. Perhaps the only true death is death by combat, so all Arken Warriors die at a younger age as they seek to mark the passing of their life as the life of a true warrior.

With all of this in mind it is best that Arken Warriors be used sparingly with greater effect rather than making them a dime a dozen, which devalues their sense of power and uniqueness.

Arken Warrior O.C.C.

"If I had one foot already in Paradise, I would withdraw it to go and fight."

- Gain li Laherains, 15th century Chanson de Geste



Arken Warrior Orders

The different Orders detailed below are special groups of Arken Warriors that form a type of hierarchy in the social system they've created. An Order represents a group of these mages bound together for mutual purpose, which may also be referred to as a clan or sect. Each Order usually maintains some sort of power center, often referred to as a Krieg Hall. More often than not, the Orders prefer discretion in their place of residence, choosing to maintain as low a profile as is possible to keep attention away from their power center, acting more as a secret organization when it comes to recruitment and politics. Once outside the sphere of influence of the clan halls, the members are also removed from this cloak of mystery, and act as their nature dictates.

Usually an Arken Warrior who is already a member of an Order chooses a candidate. However, as often as not the teacher may be Suum'jin (see below) and therefore teaches his student as a normal Wizard may train his student. Those candidates selected by a member of an Order are also taught as a normal apprentice. However, once the apprentice has proven himself he is asked to join the sponsoring clan. The pupil may decide to accept the offer, joining the clan he was taught by. When this happens the student is sworn in to the Order on a binding oath of brotherhood. This oath means that the apprentice will dedicate his life wholly to the Order. Once this has been done the apprentice is assimilated into the real workings of the sponsoring clan, receiving further training, knowledge, and philosophy, unique to each Order.

The apprentice may also decide to join another sect. At this point the mage leaves the Krieg Hall he was trained at to seek a Krieg Hall of the Order he wishes to join. The apprentice must then wait before joining, spending extra time as an apprentice under an instructor from his chosen Order. Once the candidate is accepted and deemed ready to join, he may take the Order's oath of brotherhood.

Finally, a third option for the apprentice is to not join an Order, thereby becoming Suum'jin, finishing what training remains and taking to the world on his own. Similarly, those apprentices who are trained under a Suum'jin instructor may decide to seek out an Order they wish to join or continue as Suum'jin.

The oath of brotherhood is entirely binding, meaning that its first facet is that once the oath is taken the apprentice becomes a member for life. The only way to leave the fold of the Order is by death, either voluntary or carried out by another member of the Order. Though ritual suicides are fairly uncommon, it is the usually chosen method of regaining standing with the Order after a serious betrayal. They prefer to keep their strength in the Clans, though Suum'jin are not included in this view of loyalty and the actions of Suum'jin are solely at their own discretion. The second point besides being a member for life in a clan is unconditional loyalty to the clan. Though a member may question orders and complain to anyone within the Order, the commands of higher ranked members are always carried out; to do otherwise is to die for the charge of treason. This loyalty also extends to regular payment to the clan from a percentage of each member's income that is determined individually by each Order's own customs.

The only clan deviating from some of these rules is the Shadow Hand, which although it adheres to the loyalty or death ideal, has its own structure and hierarchy. It is also not part of the general Arken Warrior society; it is included in the clan descriptions solely because of its inclusion of Arken Warriors with unique racial heritage. Every other clan will destroy a Shadow Hand member upon sight if encountered, temporarily ignoring any other situation in favor of concentrating all of its resources upon the inhuman blight.

A council of three to twelve Arken Warriors, depending on the size of the Order, elects a Warmaster who is the de facto ruler that leads the Order. A Warmaster serves a life term in office and can only be displaced by death or treason, which in the end may be the same thing. A Grandwarmaster is a Warmaster who has reached a certain level of power and has resided in the position of leader of the Order for at least ten years. Although the Warmaster is the unquestioned leader of the house, he must pay attention to the council, much as a king must mind his barons.

The council is composed of Arken Warriors who are elected by their fellow members once every eight years, running repeatedly for office indefinitely if they so wish. The members of this council are not under any strict limitations to achieve the office, but generally only those Arken Warriors with age and experience receive the station. The council acts as the hand and mouth of the Warmaster. They are responsible for the bureaucratic regulation and day-to-day business of the Order while the Warmaster involves himself in more significant and sweeping problems of the clan. They are also the liaisons between the decrees of the Warmaster and the rest of the Order, carrying out and enforcing his will.

For the purposes of character creation, players may choose an Order to join, gaining all of the benefits and responsibilities at the cost of two O.C.C. Related skills. Those who become Suum'jin neither gain any special abilities nor lose any skills.

Order of the Bleeding Jaw

Although some might call the Shattered Fist clan a bit fanatical to their cause, their fanaticism doesn't hold a candle to the sheer mania possessed by the Bleeding Jaw clan for their love of chaos. The members of this clan are the worst type of uncontrolled raving madmen. Of course, few have actually engaged a Bleeding Jaw member in conversation outside of combat. Whatever they may be in the outside world, in combat they are fierce berserker-like warriors who ravage about the field of battle reveling in the glory of the kill. Although chaotic and hard to control, there was an instance where the entire clan was hired by a kingdom. It was said that the battle was won in minutes when the opposing army surrendered at the site of the battle trained, magic hurling, screaming pack of already blood soaked maniacs coming at them.

Leader: Lopenold Quixada, 12th level Human Warmaster.

Standard: As the name suggests, the symbol of the clan is a bleeding skeletal jaw. Most members have the symbol of a bleeding jaw tattooed somewhere on their body. Their greatest artifact and symbol upon the battlefield is the standard carried by Quixada. It is a long-bladed spear with a skull skewered upon it. The skull's lower jaw constantly drips a steady stream

of blood. The spear and skull are actually all one piece, held together magically, and the entire item is considered a greater rune weapon. It is a symbol of the leadership of the clan and whenever the Warmaster enters battle, he always wields the standard as a symbol and weapon.

Members: 25 total members.

Special Training: The members of the Bleeding Jaw clan may cast the spell Blood Frenzy at half the P.P.E. and twice the usual duration. They can also cast the spell Battle Harmony at half the usual cost.



Order of the Shattered Fist

This clan has only two racial members, the Titans and Gnomes. This clan's lineage reaches back into history at the very beginnings of the upsurge in the use of War Magic during the construction of the Elven and Dwarven Empires. Since then both races have banded together to form this clan for the purposes of preserving their respective people after the genocidal atrocities they suffered in the subsequent fighting between Elf and Dwarf. They are incredibly loyal to the preservation of their two races, even fanatical.

Leader: Lolinth Silnatrum, a 14th level Titan Warmaster.

Standard: A cracked, clenched fist of stone.

Members: 20 members.

Special Training: Gnomes who select this clan gain the benefit of being able to cast the spell Titan's Fortitude once per day as a single melee attack without spending any P.P.E., as an in-

nate ability. This does not count as an actual spell and therefore a Gnome must actually learn the spell to cast Titan's Fortitude at the usual P.P.E. cost and amount of time.

The Shadow Hand

The vilest of all the clans and a cancer upon the face of Palladium, as far as the other clans are concerned. No one knows exactly how this clan came to be, since it is an unspoken edict that no Orc, Ogre, Troll, Giant or other monster race may ever be taught the secrets of War Magic. It is only known that they formed around the time of the beginning of the other clans. Most believe that a group of these monster races waylaid one of the weaker groups of mages during the Reformation and somehow managed to learn their secrets. However they came to be, the existence of this clan of Arken Warriors is a dagger in the back of everyone they encounter. The Dark Master and his cabal of twelve warriors are the ones that comprise the Arken Warrior contingent and it is they who lead the clan with an iron fist, almost quite literally. Their greatest area of activity is along the borders of the Western Empire just at the edge of the infested Old Kingdom. They would have overrun the Empire's defenses and penetrated deep into the human lands long ago if the Dark Master had more Arken Warriors in the clan. As it stands now, there are never more or less than twelve members of the cabal, and the Dark Master keeps it that way for fear of being overthrown or losing power to the humans. There is conjecture that the Shadow Hand resides within an ancient Dwarven complex somewhere between the borders of the Western Empire and the heart of the Old Kingdom. No one to date has ever found this supposed fortress to verify its existence. It is assumed, however, that it is from this fortress that they strike out into the human controlled lands of the Empire. The Empire is actually unaware of the presence of the magic users, who stay behind the scenes, controlling their hordes through manipulation. It is only common knowledge among the various Orders that the masterminds behind the Empire's inhuman enemies are actually Arken Warriors.

Leader: Unknown. There is evidence and speculation that the leader, the mastermind known as the Dark Master, is not one of the monster races and may not be, in fact, an Arken Warrior. There is evidence that the Dark Master is either some form of undead monster, directing things behind a puppet, or a powerful Necromancer. It is also speculated by some that he is a mage practicing some form of previously unknown type of Shadow Magic.

Standard: A jet black flag with a grey skeletal or claw-like hand spread palm out.

Members: 12. There are an estimated two to three thousand conventional warriors of various monster races. Although twelve Arken Warriors might seem insignificant compared to the thousands of non-magic users, they are incredibly powerful mages. Not one of the members is below 6th level in experience and they are master manipulators and utterly devastating when they are physically present in a conflict.

Special Training: All members are taught two spells known only within the Shadow Hand clan. These spells are Iron Fist and Shadow Hand, which are described in the section of War Magic spells.

Order of the Sheltering Leaf

This group of pseudo-Rangers is likely the widest spread clan, gathering only once every ten years. The members can be found anywhere there is wilderness. They are especially fond of the Vequerral Woodlands, Eastern Territory and the Northern Wilderness. They can also be found in small units traversing the Old Kingdom forests on "cleansing" quests. These mages are especially adept at forest skirmishing and small guerilla tactics while applying their spells to the greatest effect in these types of endeavors. The group is too scattered to have a permanent place of leadership or power. However, during their gathering once every ten years they meet in a sacred grove located in the Northern Wilderness. No one except the clan members knows where the grove is located, and it is also protected by strong magic from outsiders who might try to find it or stumble across it.

Leader: Vascaulus Doebringer, 11th level Gnome Warmaster.

Standard: The clan symbol is a white oak tree with a sword buried through its trunk on a field of green.

Members: Anywhere in the range of 20 to 40. The clan likes to keep its numbers and strength hidden from outsiders, and definite numbers are hard to obtain because of their widespread agents. They are almost never found in groups any greater than 4 or 5.

Special Training: Members gain +10% to any Wilderness skill they learn, as well as an extra +10% to both Tracking skills.

Order of the Wailing Dunes

A splintered clan group that was once a part of the Order of the Sheltering Leaf, which they separated from shortly after the Elf-Dwarf War. The territory they now frequent was once the home of the great Baalgor rain forest, now since transformed into the harsh climate of the Wastelands. Since the forest was destroyed, the small contingent that remained became adept at surviving in the harsh climate of the Wastelands. They are very similar to the Sheltering Leaf clan and relations between these two are still strong, often referring to members of one or the other as "brothers" or "cousins" at the rare times members meet each other. The entire clan is constantly on the move, never staying in one particular region of the blasted lands of the desert for longer than a month.

Leader: Corzosas Valatrium, 11th level Elven Warmaster.

Standard: An intricate design that upon first glance more resembles a chaotic swirl than anything else. It is actually an ancient Elven standard from the Elf-Dwarf War, its true meaning lost to time, that is laden with patterns not seen without careful inspection. It is not freely displayed as a banner or flag, but is instead used by the clan members as a symbol between themselves, often drawn on rocks to designate a shelter, food source, source of water, etc. It is also displayed when encountering other clans for official purposes.

Members: The clan consists of 100 members who operate more as a tribe. Of those 100 members, only 15 are actual Arken Warriors, the rest are wives, sons or daughters, relatives and a few adopted outsiders.

Special Training: Members gain +10% to any Wilderness skill, which is focused specifically on the desert conditions of

the Baalgor Wastelands. When outside of the Baalgor Wastelands they are at -5% to all Wilderness skills. In addition, they gain +5% to all Navigation skill rolls when traveling through the Wastelands.

Order of the Bright Blades

These Arken Warriors are considered the holy fighters of mage-kind. They are the stalwart opponents of evil in all forms. They hold the highest codes of conduct and honor, and require that only the most elite among potentials be allowed into the clan.

Although the Bright Blades mages are examples of excellence and righteousness, the clan is aloof and uninvolved in the general struggles of the mortal world. Instead they hold themselves ready, entering combat from their shining fortress only when some dark host threatens the land. Though currently not involved in many of the major struggles or events taking place, they are keeping a keen eye on the growing threat of the Western Empire, remembering in days long past the evil it turned to in order to do battle. It was in these time-shrouded days that the Bright Blades played key, but hidden, roles in the opposition of the demon armies, vampire scares, and death cults that arose as the Empire crumbled. They are currently involved in gathering information on the Shadow Hand, and once they understand the nature of this particular foe they plan to throw their might into a bid for its extermination.

The clan hall was originally located in the Western Empire, but to avoid any kind of corruption or decay, the entire fortress, brick by brick, was moved to the Eastern Territory during one of the periods of great migration that marked the decline of the Western Empire. Now the seat of power for the Bright Blades clan resides in the great Fortress of the Shining Walls, so named because of an enchantment upon the walls that at night reflects the moonlight like glittering mirrors, casting a great illumination on the surrounding countryside for miles.

Leader: Iona Mentros, 14th level Elven Grandwarmaster.

Standard: A silver great sword in a field of white stars on blue surrounded by a symbol of the sun in gold.

Members: 36 members.

Special Training: They do not suffer from the effects of their lifestyles so badly as others. Members of the Bright Blades do not roll for a psychosis at 6th level, nor do they suffer from an addiction to magic.

Order of the Grim Fire

The least known clan next to the Shadow Hand is the Grim Fire. What their agenda actually is, nobody is certain. Only the members know why they do things, and they are extremely closed-lipped even in the most open of times. What is generally known is that members of the Grim Fire clan are protectors, responsible for the safeguarding of sacred sites. Exactly what they are protecting, or what they are protecting their charges from, is also unknown, but they seem to have some kind of strange ability to draw power from the dead, perhaps because of their long occupation of sacred sites known to also be burial sites. They are also known as questors; one can occasionally find a Grim Fire member among a group of adventurers seeking to plumb

the depths of a tomb or infiltrate the great boughs of a forbidden forest. In the Arken Warrior circle it is hinted at by scholars of clan history that the Grim Fire are perhaps part of a group once known to eradicate magic weapons from the face of Palladium, but this is often dismissed out of hand as most Arken Warriors view such speculation as absurd, since most Arken Warriors favor and highly treasure magic weapons. The Grim Fire clan is also maligned at times by younger Arken Warriors, especially of the Bright Blades clan, who point to their power over the energies of the dead as a form of Necromancy.

Leader: Morteth Wirewight, 10th level Human Warmaster.

Standard: A skull atop a shield, both wreathed in a white flame upon a crimson field.

Members: 25 members.

Special Training: **Channel the P.P.E. of the dead:** Most spell casters have the ability to channel the P.P.E. that is released when the creature dies. However, in order to harness this extra P.P.E. the Wizard or mage must be prepared for it. Grim Fire members have been specially trained to immediately siphon the P.P.E. released from a creature's death at the moment it occurs without the usual preparation. This P.P.E., as soon as it is grabbed, must be channeled in some way or used for a spell with the character's next available melee attack or it will be lost. To try to hold on to the energy longer is futile, and no matter what the mage does the P.P.E. is released back into the environment and becomes unavailable for use by any mage.

Order of the Hog's Breath

This clan is mostly composed of humans and is renowned as one of the greatest groups of horsemen on Palladium next to some of the Knightly Orders. Unfortunately they are fiercely mercenary and extremely rough around the edges. Their riding leathers, love of tattoos and decorated saddles easily identify them. When not riding across the lands of Palladium they can more often than not be found in the Land of the South Winds.

Leader: Ahzamon Thunderstriker, 9th level Human Warmaster.

Standard: Unlike a standard design, the symbol is that of a lycanthropic creature that blends man and boar. Sometimes the clan will carry a boar's head on a shaft into battle as a standard, other times they will leave a scarecrow that is a representation of this wereboar creature to mark their presence or passing.

Members: 25 members.

Special Training: All clan members gain Horsemanship: Knight as a bonus skill.

Order of the Dark Steel

A group of crack soldiers dedicated to monastic-like perfection of skill and valor in combat. They are the warrior monks of the Arken Warriors, training incessantly with their skills to reach a metaphysical level of perfection. Unlike normal monks or Warrior Monks, they embrace war and weapons as a gateway to the path of their goal, true enlightenment. Like the Bright Blades, they are generally neutral regarding the affairs of the world. The only involvement Dark Steel members take in the world is in adventuring for the sake of furthering their skills. All

of these warrior monks leave their monasteries at some point in their lives to go on an adventure; some adventure all of their lives, preferring the solitude and reality of the road to that of their monasteries. They are also known as warrior poets, believing in both the pen and the sword in equal accord, meaning they are some of the best educated of the Orders. In this regard they possess a library that competes with those that are famous in the more civilized areas of humanity, such as the Western Empire or Eastern Territory. Very few from the outside are allowed to see this library. It usually takes a hefty amount of money and a reputation to get in and even then the visitor is not shown anything outside the scope of their visit. Those few visitors to the library are guarded closely at all times with an Arken Warrior monk assigned to them who acts as the guest's shadow.

Their monastery is a gothic cathedral construct that looks ludicrously like a cross between a stone bunker and a porcupine. This construct is incredibly difficult to assault not only because of its stout construction, but also because of its improbable location nestled in the peaks of a mountain range with nothing but vertical drops on each side. Only the stairway, or phenomenal climbing ability, grants access to the monastery and only those granted the knowledge of its location can ever find it, so cunningly was it laid into the surrounding rock.

Originally the Order was a collection of covert assassin cells. This all changed when the Order took a contract for a noble family. They succeeded in fulfilling the contract without realizing that this noble family was also the family of a young Arken Warrior who was away travelling the world, seeking enlighten-



ment through combat. When he returned for a visit he learned of the slaughter of his beloved family, and he vowed vengeance upon the perpetrators. He spent years searching for the source of his family's destruction and finally learned of the covert assassins' organization. His skill allowed him to destroy the first cell of Dark Steel members that had personally assassinated his kin. Then he moved on to the next and the next one after that and so on. Through his wit he kept himself hidden from the Dark Steel, managing to destroy half of their strongholds before they knew what had hit them. Then one after another, he defeated those sent to kill him until he came to the last and greatest group of assassins in their guildhall. In a great battle he defeated them all, laying waste to their hideout. The surviving Dark Steel assassins saw their destruction looming before them as they lay broken on the ground and begged mercy from the stranger. They would learn as he had learned, they promised to change their lives and set themselves on a path of redemption. Something turned in the warrior and he saw mercy and a chance at something greater, so he killed those he thought past redemption and took the ones who had hope and trained them. Generations later, after the warrior had achieved an enlightened soul and left the mortal plane, the Order of the Dark Steel had finally shaken off the last vestiges of their dark path to follow that which their benefactor had taught them.

Leader: Mironith Lassiva, 13th level Changeling Grandwarmaster.

Standard: A white crescent moon on a field of black.

Members: 23 members.

Special Training: +2 to save vs disease. Gains two O.C.C. Related Skill selections that can be chosen only from the Communications, Domestic, Science, Scholar/Technical, Weapon Proficiency, or Wilderness skill categories with the usual restrictions. In addition, members may take Gymnastics as an O.C.C. Related or Secondary Skill selection.

Stone Bones

When a castle needs to be removed, an outpost destroyed, a wall collapsed, or a city smashed, there will be the Stone Bones. This clan's specialty is siege warfare, and they excel at it. They choose no side but the one that pays the best and respect no power that resides behind stone. Stone Bones have no place of residence, preferring instead to function more as a roving mercenary group that travels to where the action is the most intense. Both members and initiates gain their training from firsthand experience, starting at the bottom and working their way towards the top.

The Stone Bones sect possesses the greatest number of magical siege engines and devices of any one single Order or Palladium kingdom or empire. All manner of devices of war were saved or kept secret by the Stone Bones and passed down from generation to generation; which allowed very unique weapons, that will probably never be seen again from the ancient wars of old, to survive through the ages intact. The Order is extremely paranoid about these ancient devices falling into the hands of anyone outside the clan and jealously guard the whereabouts and presence of their unique treasures.

Leader: Belgur Gwarnain, 13th level Human Grandwarmaster.

Standard: A femur bone cracked by a magic-sheathed arrow.

Members: 32 members.

Special Training: Stone Bones members can cast the spell Doombolt at twice the usual range, and the spell Word of Ruin will inflict 10 points of S.D.C. damage for every one P.P.E. point spent. Note that they do not automatically gain these spells; they only receive these bonuses if they learn them.

Suum'jin

The title of Suum'jin, or disavowed, does not designate the title of an Order, but it is instead the title given to those Arken Warriors who choose not to join an Order. That is, they decide not to ally themselves with any of the clans, instead wandering freely throughout the world to follow their own aims and goals. Suum'jin are the equivalent of the wandering Mercenary, or the Ronin Samurai. They have no one to call master except those they decide are worthy of the title, and come and go at their own discretion, adhering to whatever code they see fit. They are loners who have no ties to the greater clans' politics and machinations. They are not viewed with any special distaste, considered less or otherwise mistreated or looked down upon by the various Arken Warrior sects. They are the Suum'jin and they are free.

Arken Warriors & Armor

Despite their combat training, Arken Warriors still experience the same problems as other magic users when trying to cast spells while wearing metal armor. Since metal armors interfere with casting, the Arken Warrior is not highly trained in its use, preferring the ability to rapidly cast spells in favor of armor.

That having been said, there is a much larger proportion of Arken Warriors who don some form of metal armor at times than any other magic class. Sometimes in their hazardous lives there is no substitute for a good piece of steel between the flesh and an ambusher's spear point. It is not completely out of character for one of this class to don a suit of heavy armor, such as a full suit of chain, though full plate armor is still too stifling. They still suffer the usual casting penalties and encumbrance penalties that every other non-man of arms possesses. Also, it's not uncommon to catch an Arken wearing a metal breastplate or half suit of armor that just barely qualifies for not interfering with their spell casting (if such a suit of half armor is worn, reduce the A.R. by one and the S.D.C. by ten).

Arken Warrior O.C.C. Abilities and Bonuses

1. Magic Powers: Arken Warriors have spent years learning to master their own inner energies through physical challenge and meditation. After that training they must test themselves to find out whether the sacrifice and sweat has been worth it. The manner of the test is up to each individual, but has to be approved by an elder-in-arms and is usually in the form of some quest to retrieve an item, gain information from a hostile region, defeat a superior foe in combat, or participate in a large battle. After the test is completed, the student will spend 2 days in meditation and combat practice without food

or water, while he reflects on the completion of the test. At the end of this period, the student intuitively understands how to cast the following spells: Sense Magic, Protection from Blades, See the Invisible, Blinding Flash, Song of Valor and War Cry.

2. Additional Spells: The warrior will intuitively know whenever he or she has reached a new advancement in learning (new level of experience). At each new level of experience, the character will find the time to reflect on the challenges he has faced and consider the role of his magic in those challenges. As a result, the caster can select two new magic spells from both the normal list of magic and from the War Magic list (2 from each, for a total of 4) at any level up to his current level of experience (i.e.: a fourth level Arken Warrior can select his spells from levels 1-4). In addition the Arken Warrior is allowed to learn one spell per level of experience using the same methods that a Wizard can to learn new spells, meaning he can purchase or learn one spell per level of experience at any time that is not restricted by the warrior's level of experience.

3. Spirit of War: Arken Warriors have spent years learning a new method of casting that overcomes the usually large amount of time it takes for spell casting. The Spirit of War allows the Arken Warrior to cast spells at a rate that is equal to the number of the character's Hand to Hand melee attacks, or in other words, cast a spell as a single melee attack. The trade-off for the extra speed in casting is threefold. First, there is a limit on the maximum level of the accelerated spell. This level restriction is based upon the warrior's level of experience (listed as part of the Hand to Hand: Arkenas) and is part of their ongoing learning process of mixing magic and combat. Any spell above this level restriction that is cast will take the usual amount of time. Also, this ability does not include spells of level nine and above. It takes one full melee round to cast for levels 9-11 and two melee rounds for levels 12 and up. Secondly, when a spell is accelerated it will cost the mage an extra 50% of the spell's P.P.E., making sure to round up. So an accelerated Armor of Ithan spell would cost 15 P.P.E. instead of the usual 10 P.P.E. Finally, because the mage is in such a rush to cast the spell, there is a chance for spell casting failure. Every time a spell is accelerated, the mage must roll below 80% on percentiles. Failure on the roll means that the spell fizzles out. The P.P.E. is expended, including the extra 50% charge, but nothing happens. Increase the chance of success by 1% for every level of experience beyond the first.

4. Fist of War: The Fist of War is a ritual ability that allows a warrior to bind a weapon so that the weapon will act as a magic focus, strengthening a single spell cast through it while requiring less energy. First the mage must find a weapon that he wishes to cast the ritual upon. This weapon is usually one of the Mage's favored weapons of choice, which in most cases will be his personal side arm. It can be any type of weapon such as a dagger or sword, staff or club. It cannot be a ranged weapon such as an arrow, though a bow can be enchanted. Spears can be used, but a spell that has a range of touch or personal cannot be used in conjunction with throwing the weapon. The Arken Warrior can only possess one weapon at a time with the Fist of War enchantment and can only have the ritual placed on it once if successful.



Success Ratio: 20% +5% per each additional level of experience.

The Ingredients: One pint of the mage's own blood (must be fresh), a Hydra's tooth, and an anvil inscribed with the symbols of magic and directed power. The mage must also spend 100 P.P.E. in addition to the P.P.E. required to cast the desired spell. The mage builds a small fire, placing the Hydra's tooth within while it burns and then heating the weapon to a glowing red. After the weapon is heated the mage places it on the anvil and, while holding it, begins to recite the ritual incantations. At the end of the ritual incantations the mage casts the spell he desires to focus with the weapon and expends the additional 100 P.P.E., and immediately pours the blood over it to quench the weapon.

If unsuccessful, the preparations and ingredients will have all been wasted and the weapon and anvil will crack when quenched, making them completely useless. In addition, 1D4 skeletal undead, per level of experience of the mage performing the ritual (as per the spell *Animate & Control Dead*), will rise from the fire and attack the mage. The skeletons last for 5 minutes per level of the mage and will continue to hunt down the mage for the duration of the magic or until destroyed. Although the *Fist of War* may be used on magic weapons, it may not be used on rune weapons. Any attempt to use the *Fist of War* on a rune weapon results in automatic failure; although the rune weapon will not break, the anvil will, and three times the usual number of skeletal undead at twice the duration rise from the fire.

If successful, the mage has managed to enchant the weapon so that the spell he cast can be focused through it, doubling range and duration while reducing the P.P.E. cost by half. The weapon will also absorb all of the blood that was poured on it, turning the metal an unnatural, deep red color, similar to the magic color enchantment that can be placed on weapons by an Alchemist. Only the spell cast at the time of the ritual may be focused through the weapon, and it cannot be changed at a later date, nor can any other spell be cast through the weapon. In order to use the ability granted by this ritual the mage must have the weapon in hand and unsheathed. Then it is a simple matter of casting the spell while concentrating on the weapon. Usually during the ritual the mage gives the weapon a name, which afterwards is then uttered, sometimes in a phrase and often as part of the spell incantation, to activate the power while casting the spell. Though this is not a requirement of the ritual itself or to focus the spell, it is a matter of tradition that the warrior names a weapon so forged. The *Fist of War* enchantment is permanent until the mage is killed or dies, at which time the enchantment is permanently broken; the color fades and the weapon cannot be used to focus the spell again unless enchanted to do so again by another. Only the Arken Warrior who enchanted the weapon may draw upon this ability.

5. Vengeance of War: The nature of the energies that Arken Warriors channel are so devastating to the body that after prolonged use of War Magic and using their spirit of war the strain starts to take a tremendous toll on the mage both physically and mentally. No amount of curative magic, psionic powers, *Spells of Legend* or the wishes of gods can ever remove the penalties gained from following the path of the Arken Warrior.

Level 3: Scar of Strife: Upon attaining 3rd level the Arken Warrior's body spontaneously generates an open bleeding wound that inflicts 10 S.D.C. points of damage and bleeds for three rounds, causing the additional loss of one Hit Point per round from blood loss; the Hit Points lost from bleeding heal naturally. After the bleeding finally stops the wound magically, but weakly, stitches together to form a hideous scar. The scar becomes a permanent fixture that can never fully heal and always splits open to bleed again whenever the Arken Warrior is under dire stress or casting War Magic spells. This eternal bleeding scar means that the Arken Warrior *permanently loses 5 Hit Points*.

Level 6: The mental strain of intense combat and wielding their magical energies begins to fracture the mind. Roll once on the *Psychosis Table*.

Level 10: Magic Wed: The Arken Warrior suffers from addiction to War Magic just as if one were addicted to drugs. Follow the normal rules for drug addiction (**Palladium Fantasy RPG®**, pages 29-30), except apply it to the casting of War Magic. The slave of this addiction can go through the usual process of detoxification from their addiction, which means the likely loss of using War Magic altogether, or risk addiction to it once again. This addiction does not apply to the casting of normal spells.

Level 12: Sacrifice of War: All wars exact a demanding toll on those who wage them, victor or defeated. Every time a spell is cast the character takes 2 points of S.D.C./Hit Point damage as the magic exacts its toll, causing spontaneous bruising, bleeding from the head, internal injury, strain, or severe fatigue.

6. Hand to Hand: Arkenas: This is a cross between *Hand to Hand: Expert* and *Wizard* training with emphasis on magical combat. **Training Bonuses:** These bonuses are received due to the rigorous physical and mental trials involved with learning this martial art. **Bonuses:** +10 S.D.C., +1 on initiative, +1 to disarm, +4 to save vs Horror Factor.

Hand to Hand Bonuses by Level

1 Starts with two attacks per melee round, +2 to roll with punch/fall/impact. Spirit of War: Cast level 1 spells in one melee action.

2 +2 to parry and dodge, +1 to initiative when beginning the round with casting a spell.

3 +1 to strike. Spirit of War: Cast level 1-2 spells in one melee action.

4 +1 attack per melee round.

5 Kick Attacks: Karate and one of choice. Spirit of War: Cast level 1-3 spells in one melee action.

6 Critical Strike on an unmodified 18, 19, or 20. Knockout/stun with any spell that causes physical damage to a target. The Arken Warrior must make an attack roll for the spell, even if the spell doesn't require one, and the target must beat the attack roll, adding in any bonuses to save vs magic. The attack roll only determines the likelihood of the knockout/stun attack; the spell still functions as normal in regards to resolving how it hits, damages and affects the target as detailed in its description.

7 Cannot be interrupted when casting a spell by attacks or when dodging or parrying.

8 **Slash the Weave.** The Arken Warrior is capable of ignoring any defense bonuses granted by magic that would hamper his ability to hit a target with a weapon. This means that any A.R. ratings granted by magical means such as a ring, Armor of Ithan spell or enhancements to armor are ignored. Items such as a Cloak of Armor, Cloak of Protection, or Leather of Iron act as they would with no magic, meaning they are respectively ordinary mundane cloaks and leather armor. Spells such as Energy Barrier that create a physical space of protection still keep the warrior from physically bypassing them, but every hit with a weapon wielded by an Arken Warrior against such a barrier deals twice its usual damage, and the barrier's A.R. is ignored.

9 **Spirit of War:** Cast level 1-5 spells in one melee action. +2 to strike with spells.

10 **Steel & Spell attack.** The Arken Warrior may simultaneously strike with a weapon and cast a spell as if he had the ability to use paired weapons and the spell was just another weapon. Only accelerated spells may be used for this attack. The paired attack may be used as a double strike where weapon and spell hit the same target or the attack can be divided between two separate targets, the weapon striking one and the spell the other. This does not confer any proficiency with two weapons at once, only the ability to use a weapon in conjunction with a spell in the same attack. It can only be used once per melee round.

11 **Critical Strike** with a spell on an unmodified 18, 19 or 20. Automatic Knockout/stun on an unmodified roll of 18, 19 or 20 with a spell, applying the same rules as before when attempting a knockout/stun with a spell.

12 +2 to parry and dodge.

13 +1 attack per melee.

14 **Spirit of War:** Cast level 1-7 spells in one melee action.

15 **Death Blow** with a spell on an unmodified roll of 20 to strike.

7. Special Arken Warrior O.C.C. Skills and Abilities:

Recognize Magic Weapons: A combination of magic intuition and Magic Lore skill that is focused upon the knowledge of magic weapons. Arken Warriors have been involved in almost every known war in some form or another or possess collected lore since the Time of a Thousand Magicks. Throughout this history they have encountered and possessed some of the greatest items of war ever created and wielded countless magic items themselves. All this familiarity allows them to identify and handle them. This includes known rune weapons, history, magic properties, dangers or known curses, activation of powers, etc. It does not allow an Arken Warrior to instantly bond with rune weapons or permanently bypass alignment restrictions, but racial or alignment restrictions can be temporarily bypassed for 1D10 minutes on a successful roll. The first percentile represents the mage's ability to correctly identify the weapon and gain insight into its history. The second number indicates the ability of the mage to activate any of its powers or to temporarily bypass restrictions. Separate rolls at the second percentage must be made for each individual power of the item in order to activate it. Only one power may be activated in this way in one week. Bypassing a weapon's restrictions can only ever be done once per weapon per Arken Warrior. **Base Skill:** 30%/20% +5% per level of experience.

Recognize Clan: Any Arken Warrior may recognize fellow Arken Warriors by their clan affiliations or lack thereof. This also includes a general knowledge of clan histories, current Warmasters, and approximate number of current members belonging to the clan. **Base Skill:** 40% +5% per level of experience.

8. **Magic Bonuses:** +1 to save vs magic at level three, six, nine, twelve and fifteen. Spell Strength: Starts at 12, +1 at levels two, six, twelve and fifteen.

9. **P.P.E.:** Like any practitioner of magic, the Arken Warrior is a powerful, living battery of mystic energy. The character draws upon this reserve of energy to perform his feats of magic and cast spells. **Permanent Base P.P.E.:** 2D4x10+20, in addition to the P.E. attribute number. Add 3D6 per each level of experience, starting at level two.

Arken Warrior O.C.C.

Alignments: Any.

Attribute Requirements: I.Q. 11, P.S. 9, P.P. 10, and P.E. 12 or higher are required with absolutely no exceptions made. Multiple O.C.C.s are not possible.

O.C.C. Skills:

Athletics (General)

Languages: Native tongue at 98% plus two of choice (+15% each).

Lore: Two of choice (+10%).

Mathematics: Basic (+20%)

W.P. Sword

W.P.: One of Choice.

Hand to Hand: Arkenas

Hand to Hand: Arkenas cannot be exchanged for another Hand to Hand combat skill for any reason.

O.C.C. Related Skills: Select four 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.

Domestic: Any.

Espionage: Any except Disguise, Imitate Voices & Impersonation, Pick Pockets, Pick Locks and Sniper (+5%).

Horsemanship: General or Exotic only.

Medical: First Aid only.

Military: Any (+5%).

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

Rogue: Any.

Science: Any (+5%).

Scholar/Technical: Any (+10%).

Weapon Proficiencies: Any except for Lance and Long Bow.

Wilderness: Dowsing, Identify Plants & Fruits, Preserve Food, Land Navigation and Wilderness Survival only.

Secondary Skills: The character also gets to select two Secondary Skills from the previous list at level one, and one additional skill at levels two, four, seven, ten and thirteen. These are additional areas of knowledge and do not get the advantage of the bonus listed in the parentheses. All Secondary

Skills start at the base skill level. Also, skills are limited (any, only, none) as previously indicated in the list.

Starting Equipment: Two sets of clothing, a nice cloak or cape (with or without hood), leather boots, belt, blanket, backpack, two medium-sized sacks, two small sacks, a water skin, food rations for 1D4 weeks, bedroll, a pocket mirror, tinder box, 50 feet (15.2 m) of rope, small hammer and 1D4+1 wood or iron stakes.

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

Weapons: Starts with a sword of choice and one other weapon of choice; all are basic S.D.C. weapons of good quality. Magic weapons and items must be acquired later.

Money: The character starts with 100 in gold, which can be saved or used immediately to purchase more equipment. Additional money will come from payment for jobs and/or booty.

Experience: Use the same experience table as the Palladin.

War Magic

War Magic is a branch of magic with roots that trace back to the beginning of the Elf-Dwarf War and the trials of the mages who mastered such magic in that terrible period of conflict. War Magic isn't much different from normal spell magic in most of its aspects. The spells still require verbal actualization as a focal point, they all require a level of self-mastery beyond the normal, and they all draw their power from the same source, P.P.E., and so on. What makes War Magic so different from other spell types is its birth in chaotic violence; the primal emotions it is learned through and channeled with. All War Magic by its very nature has a grittier, dangerous and violent edge to it. When War Magic spells are cast they not only draw on the reserve of the mage or other magic source, but they also draw on the raw power of violence and destruction. This taint of carnage cuts deep, as it grants War Magic spells a greater power to them that manifests itself in different ways, but the magic also slowly tears at the caster's essence with each use, taking a mighty toll. Only Arken Warriors who are the masters of such magic can channel the energies of War Magic without totally obliterating themselves, but even they suffer drawbacks from its use over time as the body cannot withstand the destructive power it channels.

Normal spell casters are not as well conditioned against the effects of such magic, and while they can still learn and use War Magic as they would their normal spells, they do so at a hazard to themselves and others.

Effects of War Magic

Whenever a War Magic spell is cast it is always associated with some additional consequence or benefit that occurs as a side effect of the raging spell energy. Below is a table of options for players and G.M.s to roll on whenever anyone casts a War Magic spell. Arken Warriors, for an additional 10% P.P.E. charge, can eliminate these side effects. If using the Spirit of War ability, the 10% charge is applied after applying that ability's 50% extra P.P.E. charge. Most of the descriptions of these extra effects are left purposefully vague as far as determining



who or what is affected besides the target of the spell. Depending on the type of game your group or G.M. wants to play, these effects can occur as drawbacks or advantages. The powers given below are just suggestions, players and G.M.s are encouraged to come up with other effects they feel appropriate or fun.

There are several different suggestions for applying these effects that can drastically change how they affect the way War Magic interacts with the rest of your gaming world. One suggestion is a random roll on percentile dice, usually a fifty-fifty chance of whether or not the additional effect targets the caster or the target of the spell, friendly or hostile, or whether or not an area effect harms only enemies or friends as well. As will be noticed later in the descriptions, some of the War Magic side effects inflict damage or other nasty occurrences. Most players would find it annoying to cast a beneficial spell on a friend only to have an acidic cloud spring forth or a lightning bolt come screaming down from the sky when the spell is cast, especially when subterfuge is necessary. Some people may like to play that way, enforcing the chaotic nature of War Magic. It may be decided that spell side effects only affect non-living matter, meaning a Doom Bolt spell can cause a burst of metal shards that shreds the trees and land around it, but leaves the combatants unharmed. Perhaps the caster is always the target of additional side effects. This allows those involved a free hand to play as they wish and allows a variety of different results out of a single side effect.

It is recommended, however, that whenever a non-Arken Warrior casts a War Magic spell that they can suffer the side effects as drawbacks as mentioned earlier, given as a percentage determined by the G.M.; meaning they may inadvertently cause a lightning bolt, or cause blood to erupt from their friend, or have fire burst from their skin when casting these spells due to the lack of control and skill necessary when wielding the unfamiliar and powerful energy.

The duration for those additional effects that are not instantaneous are variable and is determined by rolling on the Effect Duration table, unless noted otherwise in the description.

01-03%: A burst of fire erupts from the skin, dealing 1D6 points of fire damage to the initial target and 3D6 points of fire damage to anyone or anything within 10 feet (3 m).

04-07%: The eyes suddenly gush forth a burst of blood that doesn't actually inflict any damage, but anyone witnessing the sight must make a roll to save vs Horror Factor at a 14 or better.

08-11%: All light within a 5 foot (1.5 m) area is temporarily absorbed, including any natural or magical light, creating a blot of pure darkness. All vision, including magical, is temporarily rendered blind in the area.

12-15%: A cacophonous blast is emitted, deafening everyone in the immediate vicinity, 2 foot (0.6 m) radius.

16-19%: Motes of metal fall from the sky in the area. The metal is irritating to skin and eyes, any such unprotected will suffer -5 to strike, parry, dodge and -10% to skill performance if exposed.

20-23%: Blood wells from the ground or falls from the sky, coating things in a layer of it. The blood is slick, especially when partially congealed, providing a 10% chance of slipping and falling while moving through it. The blood is permanent and does not magically dissipate.

24-27%: Lightning lances from the sky, dealing 3D6 points of damage to anything it strikes.

28-31%: A brilliant light springs forth. All those in the immediate vicinity suffer a -2 penalty to strike from the blinding light.

32-35%: The spell's damage, range or duration is increased 50% and appears to be bigger, brighter, nastier, etc.

36-39%: The spell's damage, range or duration is decreased 50%, but the caster instantly heals 3D6 Hit Points or S.D.C. and is temporarily enveloped with a red, glowing haze.

40-43%: A cyclone arises around the caster, granting a Natural A.R. of 14 or a +2 bonus to A.R. if the caster already has an A.R. value, against light projectile attacks such as arrows or sling bullets. Vision is temporarily obscured, however, and the caster is -2 to strike.

44-47%: Screams of the tormented dead fill the air, chilling everyone to their marrow; everyone loses one melee action for the round.

48-51%: A thick, caustic black fog bursts from the spell or source of the spell, blinding and causing 2D6 points of damage to everyone caught in it. Metal items suffer an additional 2D6 points of corrosion damage.

52-55%: A shock wave blasts anyone in the area, knocking them off their feet and causing a loss of initiative.

56-59%: Everything within 50 feet (15 m) collects a layer of rust on it. Remove 1D4 points of S.D.C from any metal object within the area due to the rusting effect.

60-63%: The spell inflicts 1D4 points of damage straight to Hit Points. This is in addition to any damage the spell itself might inflict.

64-67%: 2D6 skeletal undead, as per the spell Animate & Control Dead, rise from the ground and attack anything within line of sight.

68-71%: Metal shards erupt in a spherical blast shredding anything in a 10 foot (3 m) radius per level of the spell, inflicting 1D4+1 points of damage unless a successful roll to dodge of 17 or better is made.

72-75%: 1D4 Tectonic Entities are instantly summoned and on the following melee attack after the spell has taken effect, animate any nearby debris, attacking anything within line of sight.

76-79%: The ground shakes violently, and anyone within 10 feet (3 m) must either roll a 14 or better to dodge or make a maintain balance roll, or immediately lose their balance and fall prone to the ground, losing one melee attack.

80-83%: All vegetation within the immediate vicinity turns a horrid black color and gives off an acrid, tangy scent. The plants live for 1D4 days before they die and turn to ash. Anyone eating fruit from a plant so affected must immediately make a roll to save vs non-lethal poison or suffer from nightmares the following night and suffer a -1 penalty to attack rolls the next day from fatigue.

84-87%: The eyes are instantaneously afflicted with a coating of rust, causing blindness. The character is at -9 to strike, parry, or dodge.

88-91%: When the spell ends the character is drained of strength, suffering from a fatigue that induces a -4 penalty to strike, parry and dodge.

92-95%: Anyone within 20 feet (6.1 m) must make a roll vs insanity or suffer from a stress disorder that mimics one of the insanities listed on the Psychosis (1-50% chance) or Phobia Table (51-00%). The character rolls randomly to determine which insanity as per the table. This stress disorder is temporary and is a less severe version of the insanities on either table. G.M.s should give their players more leeway in how the insanities affect the characters, and players should tone down how they would play such an insanity to a more subtle level.

96-00%: Roll twice on the table. Ignore any further repeat of this roll.

Effect Duration

01-07%: 1 melee action per level of the spell.

08-15%: 1D4 melee actions.

16-23%: 1D4+2 melee actions.

24-31%: 1D6 melee actions.

32-39%: 2D4 melee actions.

40-47%: 1 melee round per level of the spell.

48-55%: 1D4 melee rounds.

56-63%: 1D6 melee rounds.

64-71%: 1D6+2 melee rounds.

72-79%: 1D4 minutes.

80-87%: 1D4+1 minutes.

88-95%: 1 minute per level of the spell.

96-00%: The effect lasts for as long as the spell it occurred with endures.

Learning War Magic

War Magic can be learned by anyone who displays the curiosity and drive to learn such arcane knowledge, but unlike normal spells, any non-Arken Warrior casting such spells faces severe drawbacks.

First of all, when casting a War Magic spell there is a 10% chance that the spell will fail automatically; the P.P.E. will be spent but no spell will occur. Secondly, including any additional inherent effects normally associated with casting a War Magic spell, the caster will instantly suffer 1D4 points of damage for every ten points of P.P.E. spent casting the spell, even if the spell fails. Prolonged usage of War Magic is also extremely hazardous to a caster's health. For every 100 P.P.E. the caster has spent casting War Magic spells, he permanently and instantaneously ages by 5 years. Eventually, after prolonged use of such spells, the caster will begin suffering from the penalties associated with old age as listed in the **Palladium Fantasy RPG®** (page 34); the user eventually burning out his body into an old dead husk as the magic consumes the life within.

War Magic Spells

Level 1

Eyes of the Hawk (5)

War Cry (4)

Level 2

Protection from Blades (10)

Song of Valor (10)

Specter of War (8)

Level 3

Guiding Hand (5)

Shard Wind (10)

Shifting Shield (10)

Toss of Might (8)

Level 4

Battle Harmony (23)

Vanguard's Skin (12)

Level 5

Attract Blade (25)

Degrade (15)

Minotaur's Fury (15)

Ormax's Barrier (55)

Shadow Hand (20)

Shield of Repulsion (25)

Swaggering Sword (35)

Vanguard's Barrier (55)

Level 6

Blade Stop (20)

Doom Lightning (25)

Titan's Fortitude (18)

Warrior of the Wind (24)

Level 7

Create Blade (Simple) (28)

Death March (20+)

Dragon Snot (27)

Fortify (15 or 150)

Iron Fist (30)

Level 8

Animate and Control Armor (40)

Ballistic Bolt (45)

Blade of the Abyss (40)

Shield of Magic Deflection (30)

Spectral Scout (40)

True Enemy (25)

Word of Ruin (Varies)

Level 9

Blood Frenzy (60)

Captain's Sight (20)

Raise Tower (70 or 500)

Seeking Sword (50)

Level 10

Battle Rager Escort (65)

Create Blade (Superior) (120 or 200)

Mend Metal (60)

Shield of Destiny (80)

Steel Earth (100)

Stonebiter (80)

Tide of Battle (75)

Level 11

Armor Golem (300)

Dragon Ward (150)

Sheath of the Void (300)

Soldier's Home (150)

Troop Supply (100)

Level 12

Blade of Disruption (200)

Rust Blade (200)

Level 13

Raise Fortress (375 or 2000)

War's Eye (260)

Level 14

Summon the Archon (600)

Spells of Legend

Jihad (2,000)

Obliterate (3,000)

Level One

Eyes of the Hawk

Range: Self or one other by touch.

Duration: One minute per level of experience.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 5

Casting this spell grants the caster the famed eyesight of a hawk. This means the character can see objects in spectacular clarity up to two miles (3.2 km) away. Although the spell is extremely simple, it is also extremely useful to those resourceful enough to apply it to full advantage.

War Cry

Range: The cry can be heard up to 2 miles (3.2 km) away.

Duration: Instant.

Saving Throw: Standard.

P.P.E.: 4

A War Cry can be unleashed by the mage, a common practice used by warriors to startle or shock an enemy. This type, however, carries with it a bit of magic and can serve two purposes. The first purpose is to startle and distract nearby opponents. Any enemy within 100 feet (30.5 m) of the casting mage must save vs magic or lose the initiative and one attack for that round. The second purpose of the spell is to alert any friends that are up to two miles (3.2 km) away that the mage is in danger and might require assistance.

Level Two

Protection from Blades

Range: Self only.

Duration: Five minutes per level of experience.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 10

By casting this spell the Arken Warrior gains a resistance to any sort of cutting or stabbing weapon. When striking the mage with a bladed weapon, the opponent must overcome a Natural A.R. of 14. If the roll to strike does not beat this Armor Rating then the mage suffers no damage. If the A.R. is penetrated, the mage will only take half damage from the attack. This spell is completely ineffective when facing an opponent who wields a blunt weapon such as a club or warhammer. Blunt weapons with spikes or sharp edges (e.g.: a morning star or flanged mace) still need to penetrate the A.R., but at a value of 7 instead of 14, and full damage is inflicted if bypassed.

Song of Valor

Range: 10 foot (3 m) radius around the caster per level of experience.

Duration: Special.

Saving Throw: Standard if one wishes to resist the effects.

P.P.E.: 10

Many are the tales of valiant warriors striding into battle with a hymn of courage and valor upon their lips. This spell is the source of those tales, and those valiant warriors are Arken Warriors who sing this song before or when first joining combat to lift the spirits of compatriots. The song is always one about victory and great deeds done by heroes in famous battles. For those who hear it, it is truly inspiring; anyone in the actual radius of effect will receive +2 to strike, parry and dodge, +10% to skill rolls and +4 to save vs Horror Factor. These effects last as long as the spell caster sings, and once the spell caster stops singing the effects will last for one melee round per level of experience. To maintain the singing takes one attack per melee round.

Specter of War

Range: Self or one other by touch.

Duration: One melee round.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 8

When this spell is cast, a shadowy, ghostly figure rises from the caster's body and hovers around him. The specter is extremely unsettling to any who see it and provides the caster with a Horror Factor of 18. In addition, the specter bobs and weaves and darts at any who engage the caster in hand to hand combat. The specter may make one melee attack per round, at +5 to strike. Upon a successful strike the victim is instantly chilled to the marrow of his bones with fear, suffering 1D6 points of damage, the loss of one melee action, and the victim is at -2 to strike the mage. The specter is impervious to any damage, all weapons and spells harmlessly passing through its insubstantial body, and dissipates with a shriek when the spell's duration lapses.

Level Three

Guiding Hand

Range: Self or two others by touch.

Duration: Two melee rounds; +1 melee round per level of experience.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 5

Another basic spell that can help gain an edge in combat. When this spell is cast, the hand that wields the shield is enchanted to enhance and magically guide the user's ability to block an incoming strike. It adds an additional +3 to parry with a shield on top of the caster's normal attribute and training bonuses.

Shard Wind

Range: Affects a column 30 feet (9.1 m) wide and 120 feet (36.5 m) long.

Damage: 1D6 per round.

Duration: One melee round per level of experience.

Saving Throw: A roll of 18 or higher allows one to dodge the spell's effect.

P.P.E.: Ten.

This spell creates a fierce, cutting wind that affects anyone caught within its range. Anyone caught in the wind takes 1D6 points of damage per round from tiny metallic shards that fly through the air by the thousands. The spell can be directed by the mage as a melee action once created and affects a column 30 feet (9.1 m) wide and 120 feet (36.5 m) long.

Shifting Shield

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

Duration: One melee round per level of experience.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 10

This is a fairly simple, yet useful spell. The mage simply casts the spell on a shield and for the duration of the magic he may change the size of the shield, enlarging or reducing it. Any enlargement or reduction in the size of the shield only requires a melee action, and it will retain that size until the caster changes it again, or the magic's duration elapses, in which case the shield will return to its normal size. The shield may be increased or decreased in size by 2 feet (0.6 m) in any dimension, adding an additional 2 feet (0.6 m) to this range of change per every level of experience beyond first of the caster. The mage may cast this spell and change a shield's shape up to 30 feet (9.1 m) away. Which means the spell can be cast, the shield's size changed and then left to perhaps block a path or add protection against missile weapons. Since this is a magic spell the weight of the shield will always remain what it was during its original size. So a large shield like a kite shield will still weigh 15 lbs (6.75 kg) when it has been reduced down to 1 foot by 1 foot (0.3 x 0.3 m). The same applies for S.D.C.; the value will remain the same despite any changes in shield size.

Toss of Might

Range: Self or one other by touch.

Duration: One minute.

Saving Throw: None

P.P.E.: Eight

When this spell is cast it temporarily grants the caster the ability to either throw objects very far or to throw very large objects, like small boulders, over short distances. The spell grants the caster an additional 200 feet (61 m) to the range of any thrown weapon intended as a ranged weapon, or 100 feet (30 m) to any item that weighs less than one quarter of the character's maximum carry weight. Objects that are heavier than one quarter the character's maximum carry weight, regardless of whether or not they are intended as ranged or thrown items, may be thrown at a range of 60 feet (18 m). A character cannot throw any object heavier than his maximum lift weight.

Level Four

Battle Harmony

Range: Self or one other by touch.

Duration: The trance lasts for one melee round, the spell lasts for 10 minutes.

Saving Throw: None unless the person wishes to resist.

P.P.E.: 23

An Arken Warrior with this spell cast is a sight to behold, and can only be described as a mix between violence personified and professional dancing. The caster must meditate for a melee round before activating this spell, which is one of the spell's main drawbacks, however once the meditative period ends the mage becomes an extremely dangerous foe. The recipient of the spell gains the following bonuses: +4 to strike, parry and dodge, +6 to damage, and grants two extra attacks per melee. In the case of casting this on another person, the mage must simply focus and meditate on the recipient and then touch them to cast the spell.

Vanguard's Skin

Range: Self or one other by touch.

Duration: One minute per level of experience.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 12

This spell is a modified version of the Armor of Ithan spell. Much like that spell, casting this will create a noiseless, weightless suit of armor around the casting mage that has an A.R. of 16 and 80 S.D.C., plus 10 S.D.C. per level of experience. Unlike its cousin, this spell creates a visible effect. The suit is a manifestation of the caster's will, and therefore, a reflection of the caster's tastes, making each suit unique to the mage. The appearance is always something very heavy, usually a very stylish and intimidating suit of plate. In addition to its looks, the armor exudes a feeling of strength and power to all those around the mage, inflicting a feeling of awe and terror. Once cast the recipient gains a Horror Factor of 15 while the magic's duration lasts. Anyone the mage encounters must roll to save vs Horror Factor or suffer the usual penalties for Awe/Horror Factor.

Level Five

Attract Blade

Range: Any shield held by the caster, or another by touch.

Duration: One melee round per level of experience or until the shield is dropped.

Saving Throw: See below.

P.P.E.: 25

This is basically the companion and reverse spell to Shield of Repulsion. Unlike the other spell, once cast upon a shield, any weapon swung at the wielder will be attracted to the face of the shield. This means that if an opponent is not strong enough to counteract the deviation in cutting path, the weapon will always

hit the shield face, automatically parrying any and all strikes. The shield user can control the attraction effect of the magic at will. It can be turned on instantly to parry a strike and then turned off, or it can be turned on, automatically parrying, and then left on in order to hold the opponent's blade against the face, like a piece of steel against a magnet. If a weapon is caught in this manner it is similar to an entangling attack, however the shield user may still attack with his free arm. Every action after being entangled, the weapon user must make a roll to save vs magic. A successful roll means he has freed his weapon and can take further action. Failing the roll means his weapon is still caught and the shield user may take his action as usual.

Any character with a P.S. of 18 or higher can defeat this spell and can move his weapon about freely, suffering only -2 to strike the mage.

Degrade

Range: 10 feet (3 m), +5 feet (1.5 m) per level of experience.

Duration: Instant and permanent.

Saving Throw: Standard.

P.P.E.: 15

Elementally based, this magic attack causes the buckles and rivets, the items that hold a suit of armor together, to instantly rust or decay. These support pieces are decayed to the point that they can no longer support the weight of the armor, causing it to break apart and fall right off of the wearer.

When cast successfully, take off $\frac{1}{4}$ of the armor's total S.D.C., and it cannot be worn again until fixed by someone who can forge new pins, rivets and buckles. Since the armor is worn so close to the body and the magic is offensive in nature, the spell is considered a magic attack, allowing the victim a chance to resist the spell. Note that this will work on all armors, including horse barding and chain mail. In the case of chain mail, enough of the small links are degraded at critical points in order for the armor to fall off. Even leather armors are affected, causing the leather to age and crack and finally fall apart.

Ormax's Barrier

Range: Self or other by touch. Four foot (1.2 m) radius of effect.

Duration: Three melee rounds per level of experience.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 55

This spell is basically Vanguard's Barrier converted to the use of shields instead of swords. This does provide a much better barrier against attacks, but it also means that the barrier cannot itself make any offensive moves. When cast, the spell will animate a group of shields exactly like the spell "Vanguard's Barrier." The shields hover four feet (1.2 m) away, forming a circle and moving with the caster to serve as a protective barrier against all attacks. Beginning at first level, the mage is able to animate up to three shields, plus one shield per every three levels of experience beyond the first. This wall is protective enough that an opponent must penetrate an A.R. of 14 in order to strike the mage behind the shield barrier, with three active shields. For every shield beyond three the Armor Rating is in-

creased by one, so 6 shields total means an A.R. of 17. The Armor Rating represents the ability of the shields to not only passively block an area from attacks, but also their active role in parrying attacks that try to pass through an opening. In the case of additional armor, physical or magical, strikes against the Mage must roll twice. The first roll is to penetrate the shield wall, and the second roll is to see if it bypasses the personal armor.



Minotaur's Fury

Range: Self or one other by touch.

Damage: 5D6 points of damage plus P.S. bonus.

Duration: One melee action.

Saving Throw: Dodge, but the victim must know the attack is coming and suffers -4 to the dodge roll.

P.P.E.: 15

By calling upon the awesome fury of the Minotaur the subject gains the power to make a single charge attack on his next available melee action. The subject of the spell is surrounded in a ghostly nimbus of light shaped like a Minotaur, complete with horns, for the brief duration of the spell. The subject may make a charge attack against a single opponent, that inflicts 5D6 points of damage plus P.S. bonus and has a 60% chance of knocking the victim down, causing him to lose one melee attack and initiative. The charge is blindingly fast and the charging character can cross distances of 10 feet (3 m), per level of experience of the caster, in the span of the attack to strike the victim, barring all but total obstruction that would prevent such an attack.

Shadow Hand

Range: Self only.

Damage: 1D4 points of damage direct to Hit Points per touch/strike.

Duration: The spell lasts for one melee round per level of experience.

Saving Throw: A save vs magic will negate the blindness and reduce damage by half.

P.P.E.: 20

Used by the Order of the Shadow Hand, the spell shrouds the caster's hand in a dark, murky shadow. When the mage uses it to touch or strike an opponent, it inflicts 2D4 points of damage straight to Hit Points. In addition, the target must make a roll to save vs magic or suffer from magical blindness, which lasts for 1D4 melee rounds.

Shield of Repulsion

Range: Any shield held by the caster, or another by touch.

Duration: One minute per level of experience or until the shield is dropped.

Saving Throw: Special; see below.

P.P.E.: 25

Once this spell is cast, the shield the mage is holding becomes very "slippery," surrounded by a magic field. A weapon that is aimed at the shield will be repulsed, slipping off inches before impacting. The field not only causes the weapon to slip off, but once the weapon has deviated it also adds momentum to the direction the weapon slipped off in, sort of throwing the weapon away from it. This throwing action causes the opponent's weapon to strike out in a very wide and uncontrolled arc. This uncontrolled action pulls the weapon's wielder off balance, ruining his stance, which, in turn, ruins his overall ability to defend or take an offensive action while he tries to recover his weapon and balance. This gives the shield user a very open target without fear of reprisal. The shield user gets a +2 bonus to strike and +2 to damage after every time he parries an opponent's strike with his shield. A roll on a twenty-sided die under the P.P. of the weapon's wielder means that he was able to recover his balance before the Arken Warrior has a chance to strike into the opening and therefore, the Arken Warrior does not get any bonuses to strike or damage.

Swaggering Sword

Range: 3 feet (0.9 m) or by touch. The blade must remain in a 50 foot (15.2 m) radius area, centered on the mage.

Duration: One melee round per level of experience.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 35

Casting this spell on a blade, i.e. sword, knife, axe, polearm, etc., will cause the blade to become animated. This animated blade is autonomous, bobbing, darting and weaving its way about the battlefield to find an opponent. The blade's instructions are designated by the mage and specified when first casting, which can be any command, such as sending the blade to attack a specific person, telling it to attack the closest enemy, or

even setting it to randomly attack any enemy it sees. The blade attacks in the same manner as if someone were wielding it, hacking or stabbing at its target. The sword has three attacks per melee, is +2 to strike or dodge, and inflicts whatever the base damage for that weapon is. The weapon the spell is cast on must be within the reach of the mage, but once cast can travel out to a maximum of 50 feet (15 m) from the mage. Being pulled or knocked outside of this area will cause the spell to end and send the blade clattering to the ground. Note that the sword has a P.S. of 16 for figuring out whether or not it can be pulled or held out of the maximum range. Magic powers that require some kind of activation, such as Spits Fireballs, Turns Holder Invisible, or Blinding Flash, may not be activated when this spell is active. In addition, this spell cannot be cast upon any type of rune weapon.

Vanguard's Barrier

Range: Self or others by touch. Four foot (1.2 m) radius of effect.

Duration: Three melee rounds per level of experience.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 55

This spell is designed to serve both a defensive and offensive capability. When cast, the spell will animate a group of weapons much like the Swaggering Sword spell. However, the weapons that the mage has chosen will hover 4 feet (1.2 m) away from him, forming a circle. The blades will move with the caster and serve two functions. The first is that the blades will parry incoming attacks for the mage. Second, if an opponent comes within the range of the barrier the blades will attack that opponent. Beginning at first level, a mage can animate two bladed weapons in this manner and will be able to animate one more weapon per level of experience. Each blade can attempt to parry one attack made at the mage per round and is +4 to do so. Each blade may also make one attack per melee against anyone who has come into the range of the barrier, and is +1 to strike. The same restrictions for weapons with magic powers and rune weapons apply as with the Swaggering Sword spell. The blades are under the subconscious control of the mage. This means that though the mage is not required to concentrate in order to keep up the spell, knocking out or stunning the caster will prematurely cancel the spell.

Level Six

Blade Stop

Range: 5 foot (1.5 m) diameter that is centered on the caster, +5 feet (1.5 m) to the diameter per level of experience.

Duration: One melee round per level of experience.

Saving Throw: If a person is wielding a weapon that is affected by the spell, they may make a standard roll to save vs magic to resist the effects.

P.P.E.: 20

Having a link to bladed weapons through their magic allows the Arken Warrior to perform some strange feats. This is one such spell, and casting it will instantly freeze the motion of any

metallic blade weapon within its radius of effect. It will affect any blade, meaning it stops the movement of the weapon regardless of whether or not it is being used or just resting on a table. So a soldier in mid-swing will find his sword instantly held fast. The blade is completely exempt from movement in any direction; it is completely frozen in space. Note that if a weapon is being carried on a person's body, like in a sheath, the blade will be held there and the person must unbelt, remove, or release the blade, otherwise they will not be able to move, held in place by their weapon. The blade cannot be moved physically in any manner; no amount of strength will budge the blade loose from the magic. The only way to free a weapon from this spell is to cast a *Negate Magic* spell, which will free the blade and allow it to be used normally.

Doom Lightning

Range: 400 feet (122 m) +20 feet (6.1 m) per level of experience.

Damage: 2D6 S.D.C. damage.

Duration: Instant. The feelings of doom and despair last for 3D6 minutes.

Saving Throw: A roll to dodge at an 18 or higher. Once hit the target must also make a standard roll to save vs magic or experience the secondary effects of the spell.

P.P.E.: 25

When cast, a purplish-white, multi-tendrilled bolt of lightning courses from the caster's hand. The bolt will completely bypass all body armor or natural armor to inflict damage straight to the target. The mage can regulate the damage in increments of 1D6. The bolt is extremely fast and hard to dodge, only those who know the attack is coming may make a roll to dodge at an 18 or higher.

When a living target is hit, they are struck numb with an overwhelming sense of doom that rules out all thought of hope. This feeling is especially debilitating and will cause the character to drop any equipment and curl up on the ground to wait for their death. No action may be taken by the victim for the duration of the spell. Only a save vs magic will prevent this secondary effect.

Titan's Fortitude

Range: Self or one other by touch.

Duration: Two melee rounds per level of experience.

Saving Throw: None, unless the recipient wishes to resist.

P.P.E.: 18

This incantation bestows the character with some of the traits of the famous and noble Giants, the Titans. The following bonuses are granted to the character for the duration of the magic: +80 S.D.C., +5 to damage, and add 10 to the P.E. attribute (taking note of the increased resistances to magic, poison, and death). All movements performed during this time are done without fatigue.

Warrior of the Wind

Range: Self or one other up to 10 feet (3 m) away.

Duration: One melee round per level of experience.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 24

This spell transforms the target's body into wind, similar to an Air Elemental. The wind is free to move, unhindered by obstacles or weight; able to move where it will on a whim. The subject under the influence of this magic appears to be ghostly or made of mist, only partially substantial. There is also a constant breeze that blows about the subject. Targets of the spell, including any worn equipment, only take half damage from physical attacks and have the power to move with incredible fluidity and freedom. Exercising mental control over this semi-substantial form, the subject may completely ignore any obstructions, obstacles or otherwise, shifting to pass through them or around, even splitting apart to reform again. The subject moves at increased speeds, gaining a +5 bonus to the speed attribute for every level of experience of the caster, and the subject may walk through the air at his movement speed up to a height of 40 feet (12.2 m). The subject may still interact normally with the environment and his equipment still functions as normal. The character may not pass through obstructions that are airtight, and smaller spaces such as keyholes or solid but not airtight structures take a melee round for every five feet (1.5 m) of distance traveled to pass through. If the spell's duration elapses while trying to pass through such objects it results in instant death. In addition, the character's total weight, equipment and all, when affected by the spell is reduced by $\frac{1}{4}$ and the character cannot move in winds of 60 mph (96 km) or greater.

Level Seven

Create Blade (Simple)

Range: Self or up to 10 feet (3 m) away.

Duration: 30 minutes per level of the spell caster.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 28; +200 to make the weapon permanent.

By casting this spell, the mage brings into existence a common weapon of his choosing. The weapon can be any type of cutting weapon such as a sword or knife. Even spears can be created, however the weapon is made completely out of metal, no leather grip covering, wood shaft, or fancy fringes. The mage can choose to add such things to a weapon after it is created, so a mage could cast this spell and make a spearhead which he could then attach to a wood shaft. The conjured weapon only lasts for 30 minutes per level of experience, but can be made permanent by expending an extra 200 P.P.E. So to make a long sword permanent requires a total of 228 P.P.E. The weapon is always of excellent craftsmanship, +1 to strike and parry, and does the base damage for that weapon even if the mage decides to create a blade with extra hooks or nasty serrations. This weapon is considered a magical weapon, which means that it will affect creatures that are susceptible or vulnerable to magic weapons.

Death March

Range: Self, touch, or up to 10 feet (3 m) away.

Duration: One day (24 hours) per level of experience.

Saving Throw: None, unless the recipient wishes to resist, which requires a standard roll to save vs magic.

P.P.E.: 20; +1 P.P.E. per person beyond ten.

There is nothing worse to a soldier than a long march followed by fighting, followed by more marching and fighting. The marching alone is tiring enough as it is and is a major factor when moving troops and determining the difference between success and failure. This spell grants those it is cast upon the ability to march at a tremendous rate with next to no fatigue. It is a devastating spell to use, allowing troops to strike from long distances and conduct guerilla-like raiding actions with larger groups and relative impunity to fatigue. When cast, the spell confers a running speed of 35, approx. 22 mph (35 km), and the recipient fatigues at 1/10 the normal rate. It does not replace or increase running speed if the recipient already has a speed of 35 or higher. The spell may be cast upon 10 people at one time, requiring 20 P.P.E. The mage may cast it upon more than ten people at once, but for every person beyond ten it requires one extra P.P.E. point. The stories of armies under this spell running at distances and speeds that would easily kill the hardiest and hardest of campaigners are enough to strike fear into those who try to oppose such a force.

Dragon Snot

Range: 30 feet (9.1 m) long by 10 foot (3 m) wide area of effect; +5 (1.5 m) feet to the length of the blast for every level of experience.

Duration: The initial blast lasts for one melee round, the lingering fire damage lasts for 2D4 melee actions unless a save vs spell is made to reduce that duration by half.

Saving Throw: Save vs spell for half duration.

P.P.E.: 27 (Fire Warlocks can cast this spell at half the listed P.P.E.).

A somewhat whimsical name for such a dangerous spell, it creates a long stream of fiery orange slime out of the caster's hand. The mage may wave his hand around, wildly spraying the stuff over a larger area, or may keep the hand trained upon one target. Anyone trying to avoid this spell must dodge out of the way or be hit by the goop, and the mage is at +4 to strike targets with the stream. If hosing an area, everything will take 4D6 S.D.C. damage from the initial blast and will suffer from an additional 1D6 damage due to the burning substance sticking. If the stream is trained on one target, it will take 3D6 S.D.C. damage for every melee attack the mage has for the duration of the spell. After the stream stops, the target will take 2D6 damage each melee attack from being coated in the flaming goo. This orange substance ignites shortly after contacting air and will stick to anything it is sprayed on. The initial blast from the superheated substance is the worst, inflicting the most damage. However the slime will continue to burn after it has been cast, burning anything it has come into contact with and stuck to. The slime will burn for 2D4 melee actions, unless it contacts a living object, which gets a saving throw vs magic to resist the magic



damage. There is no way to remove or wash off the sticky substance, it must simply be allowed to burn out and cannot be put out by normal means, though an Extinguish Fire spell will reduce the burning time by half. Also, there is a chance of igniting any other combustible materials on fire. 01-80% chance of setting flammable items on fire such as wood, cloth, rope, paper, old rags, or dry grass; 01-98% chance of setting combustible items like oils and explosives on fire.

Fortify

Range: 20 foot (6.1 m) radius per level of experience.

Duration: One hour per level of experience.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 15 or 150

This is another semi-elemental based spell, which creates an instant mound of earth and spikes. Although a very basic and simple form of fortification, it allows a small group to take a defensive posture very quickly. It is actually an interesting sight to behold since the earth seems to come alive, scraping itself together into a large, circular mound, forming a depression in the middle with a slightly flattened rim around the top of the circular mound, similar to a large donut. After the mound finishes forming, long, wooden punji sticks grow out of the earthen structure, like some twisted version of a hedgehog. The fortification may be cast to completely encircle a group or it may be created with a small opening at one end. From a strict gaming standpoint, creating the fortification does not confer any real bo-

nuses to the people inside it. However, from a role-playing perspective, the advantage is immense, allowing a group of characters to fight from an enclosure which cannot be easily penetrated by horse or foot.

The range of the spell is the outer radius of the circular mound, meaning that the mound will start out at 20 feet (6.1 m) per level of experience while the wall is generally 12 feet (3.6 m) thick and 6 feet (1.8 m) high, leaving an eight foot (2.4 m) radius circle in the center. Which means a 3rd level casting of Fortify will leave a 48 foot (15 m) circular depression to fit people in, while the wall itself on the outer slope reaches out to 60 feet (18.3 m). The inside slope is much more gradual, allowing those inside to easily climb up to the top of the wall, unlike the steep sides of the outside slope.

Once the spell's duration elapses the earth melts back to its original shape and the punji sticks disappear into the ground. By spending 150 P.P.E. the spell can be made permanent.

Iron Fist

Range: Self or other by touch.

Damage: From Supernatural P.S.

Duration: One melee round per level of experience.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 30

The caster's arms are transformed into solid steel, granting the character +5 to P.S. and Supernatural Strength. In addition, the affected character may parry swords, axes and even arrows with his hands without receiving any damage. The mage fights at a level of proficiency two levels higher than his actual level of experience. This means that a caster that has Hand: Expert at 5th level will fight as if he had Hand: Expert at 7th level.

Level Eight

Animate and Control Armor

Range: 400 feet (122 m); line of vision.

Duration: 5 minutes per level of experience.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 40

This spell is the Arken Warrior's equivalent of the Necromancer's or Wizard's Animate and Control Dead spell. However, instead of affecting the bones of the dead, the spell animates empty suits of armor. The spell functions almost exactly the same as the normal Wizard spell with a few minor changes. The type of armor that can be animated can be any metal armor such as plate, splint, chain, and scale. Leather armors cannot be animated. Secondly, the suit of armor must be a full suit; half suits of armor may not be animated. It is also interesting to note that armor that is worn by a corpse can be animated, and although it may look as though the mage has animated the dead, it is really the surrounding suit of armor, carrying the body with it, that is moving around to the mage's desires. Armor worn by a living being cannot be animated.

Restrictions and Notes:

1. The mage can animate and control two suits of armor, plus one per level of experience.

2. The animated armor must remain in the caster's line of sight. If the suit cannot be seen, it cannot be animated or controlled.

3. Each of the animated suits of armor has two attacks per melee round, a speed of 7, and inflicts 1D6+2 damage from a punch or bashing attack. They are robot-like S.D.C. structures and inflict S.D.C. damage. They can pick up any normal weapon and use it normally.

4. Only total destruction of the suit of armor or knocking out the controlling mage will stop the animated armor. All attacks must penetrate the A.R. value of the particular suit that is being animated. Failure to roll above the A.R. means the suit of armor takes no damage. Only magic weapons and spells such as Fireball, Call Lightning, Firebolt, etc. inflict full damage without requiring a roll above the A.R. The animated armor is not affected by stunning blows, death blows, critical strikes, nor by psionic mind control, charms, illusions, poison or disease.

Ballistic Bolt

Range: 600 feet (18.3 m), +50 feet (15.2 m) per level of experience.

Damage: 1D4x10 S.D.C. damage to every target it strikes within its target path.

Duration: Instant.

Saving Throw: None, other than to dodge; but such an action suffers a -4 penalty to do so.

P.P.E.: 45

This is the companion spell to Word of Ruin, allowing an Arken Warrior to further serve in the role of living siege weapon. This spell summons forth a purplish-white bolt of energy, about half as long as a man is tall, that goes streaking off like a ballista-launched arrow. The bolt will strike and pass through any target within its path out to its maximum range. Unlike a ballista bolt that may travel in an arc, the spell version is a direct line of fire weapon, which means it cannot be arced over interposing objects like a catapult might do. The one restriction placed on the bolt is that if it hits any target with more than 100 S.D.C. in a ten foot (3 m) area, the bolt will inflict full damage to that target but it will also dissipate and will not travel any further. When passing through a target, the bolt doesn't actually blast through, creating large holes. Instead it imperceptibly weakens the material of the object, so a person will be weakened from internal injuries, while a stone wall will become much more brittle and ready to crack.

Blade of the Abyss

Range: Self.

Damage: 4D6 per stab/strike.

Duration: 5 minutes per level of experience.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 40

This spell calls upon a mysterious and deadly plane to shape a blade from a fragment of the plane's very elemental substance, that can be wielded by the caster. The dimension is known as the Abyss and is composed of everything the Palladium World is not. When the black, strange planar blade strikes a target, there is a large flash of energy and an audible crack or boom. In addition the person struck feels as though he has been hit with a Giant's maul and is flung 3D6+10 feet from his position, losing initiative for the current and next round and one attack. Additional hits with the blade within the same round see the continual loss of attacks from being sent flying through the air.

Shield of Magic Deflection

Range: Any shield held by the caster, or another by touch.

Duration: Two melee rounds per level of experience or until the shield is dropped.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 30

This spell has one singular and simple purpose, to temporarily enchant a shield so that it may be used to block and deflect physical spells. Normally, most spells like Fireball and Call Lightning travel too fast to take any action against them. Not only that, but their nature is such that they're impossible to deflect or parry without taking damage to the parrying object. This spell overcomes this inability by magically moving the shield for the mage, into the path of the oncoming spell, as well as placing a mystic field on the face of the shield so that it has the ability to take the spell and absorb its damage, making it completely harmless. This spell now allows a mage to parry Call Lightning, Fireball, Energy Bolt, Doom Bolt and other such damaging physical spells. When a spell is cast against a mage with this enchanted shield, the mage casting the offensive spell must now always make a roll to strike, ignoring any bonuses to strike provided by the nature of the spell. In return the mage with the shield must also make a roll to parry the spell, making sure it is a straight roll of the die (no physical, magical, or training bonuses). If the spell is parried it is harmlessly absorbed into the face of the shield by the magic, so an area effect spell like Fireball will not explode. If the spell is not parried, it strikes with all of the usual damage and effects.

Spectral Scout

Range: Immediate area.

Duration: 30 minutes per level of experience.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 40

The mage may summon up a spectral warrior. The warrior usually appears as a normal, light foot soldier, only ghostly in appearance. The summoned apparition has a telepathic link to the summoning mage that allows the caster to see, hear, feel and experience what the scout experiences. This link is used to allow the scout to be sent forth and do what its name suggests, relay information back to the mage like any normal scout would. Unlike a being of mortal flesh, the specter has a few unique abilities. First the ghost is semi-ethereal, which means it can pass through walls, trees and other objects like a ghost. This also

means that though the scout is weak, it is also hard to inflict harm upon it. Secondly, the Spectral Scout does not fatigue and can travel at very fast speeds. Finally, unlike a normal scout, the information the mage receives through the link from his servant is exactly what the scout experiences and is instantaneous. The scout, if left to its own devices, is extremely mindless, which means the mage must constantly direct most of its actions, though this does not take serious concentration on the part of the mage and therefore, no penalties are conferred. Actions it can perform on its own are things like being ordered to go to a certain spot and wait, follow the mage, pick up small to medium-sized objects and carry them around, etc. There is no restriction as to how far it can be sent away from the mage, or any limit on the range of the link once created.

Spectral Scout

- Natural A.R.: 10
- Hit Points: 30
- Attributes: I.Q. 3 (unless mentally directed by the mage), M.A. 3, M.E. 10, P.S. 10, P.P. 20, and running speed is 80 mph (128 km).
- Natural Abilities: Impervious to normal weapons like spears, axes, fists and swords. Only magic weapons, spells and psionics can hurt it. Impervious to normal cold, fire, poison and disease, doesn't fatigue and may carry up to 100 pounds (45 kg) and still move at its maximum speed.
- Bonuses: +3 on initiative, +5 to parry, +10 to dodge. Two attacks per melee round and inflicts 1D6+3 from a strike.

True Enemy

Range: Self or other up to 10 feet (3 m) away.

Duration: Eight minutes per level of experience.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 25

Often in a fight a warrior can be deceived through any manner of mundane or magical tricks. A person can change their appearance to appear larger or smaller, older or younger, stronger or weaker. This ends up throwing off the fighter's ability to deal with the hazard significantly. Knowing this can occur in many fights, against such creatures as members of Hades or Dyval, Changelings, Dragons, and other magic users, the Arken Warriors developed this spell to cut through any known illusion and reveal the true appearance of the foe. This spell will not actually cancel out any magical illusion spells or abilities, meaning it won't allow anyone other than the casting mage to see the true creature. To the caster however, the creature will appear as its true self, with a ghostly image of its current pseudo-shape appearing around it. Spells that create nothing but an illusion such as the spell Horrific Illusion or Apparition will be seen as nothing but a ghostly image with no true solid shape. This spell will also allow the mage to see anyone he is facing that has been made invisible. It will not allow the mage to see the true shapes or forms of people he is not in physical combat with, and it will not cut through such illusions as Fool's Gold or Circle of Concealment. Basically, it will not penetrate an illusion unless the illusion is meant to fool somebody inside of combat or invoke combat in any way, or those that may prevent the character from fighting. This spell will also reveal psionic-based illusions in the same manner and under the same restrictions.

Word of Ruin

Range: 100 feet (30.5 m), +10 feet (3 m) per level of experience.

Damage: For every one P.P.E. point put into casting, the spell will inflict 8 S.D.C. points worth of damage on the structure.

Duration: Instant.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: Varies.

Many Arken Warriors are a truly fearsome sight to behold when in the throes of combat and spell casting. Their magic is potent and will quickly end an encounter in the mage's favor. However, even the greatest warrior will be dashed to his ruin when trying to confront a guarded stone fortress. Unless, of course, that warrior holds Castlerake. However, perhaps the greatest ability of an Arken Warrior is to act as a living siege weapon. This is the spell for this, giving those who live in stone walls something to truly fear. For though Castlerake may be stolen and dismantled to disappear for decades or centuries, Arken Warriors are a constant source of danger. If it weren't for this spell, an Arken Warrior wouldn't be quite as desired by army recruiters when compared to a normal Wizard as one might expect. Sure, they are much more effective in combat than a normal Wizard, but despite their effectiveness, most mercenaries would prefer an armored, skilled Knight over an Arken Warrior for melee combat. This is due to the natural distrust most warriors have against men of magic, seeing their powers as something to be questioned and feared. After all, there is nothing keeping the mage that is right next to you from tearing through his own ranks like he does against the enemy if something were to happen. This spell, however, is why most Arken Warriors are highly sought after; it turns the mage into a living siege engine.

To cast this spell, the mage begins a meditation at the beginning of the melee round. During the middle of the melee round the mage is concentrating inward, building up magic energy into a volatile spell. Then at the end of the round, the mage yells the power word, releasing into it all of the stored up energy. The power word, serving as a focus, sends the volatile energy into the object of the mage's casting, causing immense amounts of damage. The spell is designed to blow through doors, walls, portcullises, or closed drawbridges made of any material, from stone and steel, to earth and wood. The spell may only be cast on inanimate objects, and the only damage it will do to a living target is to deafen anyone in a 5 foot (1.5 m) radius for one melee round since the power word contains so much raw might.

For every one P.P.E. point put into casting, the spell will inflict 8 S.D.C. points worth of damage on the structure. So a mage must guess how strong a structure is and how much P.P.E. is required to destroy it. If the damage caused by the spell is under the total S.D.C. of the structure then, depending on the G.M., the structure/object may be weakened but still standing or the G.M. may decide that the damage was enough and the object simply crumbles. If the damage inflicted is equal to or greater than the object's total S.D.C. then the object is obliterated. Anyone that is on the opposite side of the object from where the mage is casting, and within a 15 foot (4.5 m) radius, will be subject to 2D6 damage due to flying shards or debris when the object is obliterated. Although the spell's main purpose is to take out larger walls, doors and other such things one might want to

penetrate in a castle or fortress, it can be cast on almost any inanimate object, like a tree, rock, ale mug, etc. It will not work on such things as weapons, armor, or items that a person might be wearing or carrying. The disadvantage to this spell is that the mage must be close (speaking in bow range terms) to the structure, which means he must be protected while casting, and the loss of life while raiding a castle at close range can be high. Despite this, it is still an effective tactic to launch a rush at a wall with a contingent of soldiers containing an Arken Warrior, and burst through, paving the way for the rest of the army. This spell is also extremely draining on an Arken Warrior when trying to assault well fortified structures.

Level Nine

Blood Frenzy

Range: Self only.

Damage: 2D6 points of damage.

Duration: One melee action per level of experience.

Saving Throw: Standard. A successful saving throw reduces damage inflicted by the magical blasts in half.

P.P.E.: 60

When coated with the blood of his enemies through the course of a battle or fight, or even by painting it on and casting this spell, the mage undergoes a blood-charged sorcerous frenzy. Whenever the mage strikes a living creature for physical damage, S.D.C. or Hit Points, he draws blood up through the weapon and onto himself. This blood begins to change into a red, glowing magic energy. Once ten points of blood damage have been inflicted and drawn to the mage, the energy begins to writhe and pulse about him, at which point the caster may blast a target up to 200 feet (61 m) away with the energy, inflicting 2D6 points of damage. In turn the energy blasts cause blood to flow back into the mage as well, gaining even more blood. Directing the blast takes no action on the part of the caster and he can make any number of blasts at any time as long as he has accumulated 10 blood points. These blasts can strike any target the caster wishes at a thought, out to the maximum range, including those behind the caster, using the caster's normal attack roll. For example, Bregan, with three attacks per melee, activates the spell after a spray of blood from an enemy coats him during his first attack. On his second attack he hits his opponent with a mace for 10 points of damage, the blood crawls up his body, converts to the glowing magic energy and immediately lances out to the target he is currently fighting, inflicting maximum damage of 12 points. The energy lashes out again, leaving only 2 points left, but hits another target for 6 points of damage. Bregan now has 8 blood points, not enough for the spell to blast someone, but this all occurs before his third attack.

Captain's Sight

Range: Special.

Duration: One hour.

Saving Throw: None, unless the recipient wishes to resist which requires a standard roll to save vs magic.

P.P.E.: 20 P.P.E. per person this spell is cast upon.

This spell is another very useful reconnaissance spell that allows the caster to see through the eyes of his chosen captains. The spell does require a few physical components. First the mage must find those who he wishes to place the spell upon, usually a high ranking officer in charge of a larger group of men, but somebody who will be in the thick of fighting, or even a forward scout. As many as one person per level of experience of the caster may have this spell cast upon them. Once the person the mage wishes to cast it upon is present, he draws a singular symbol on the forehead of the individual. The mark can be either the personal mark of the mage himself or the mark of the army/unit the mage is fighting with. The symbol must be drawn in a mixture of mandrake root juice and owl's blood, and the mage's true name must be part of the symbol. The writing on the forehead is semi-permanent, meaning that it cannot be washed or rubbed off in any way until the magic's duration lapses. Once the duration of the magic ends, the components will simply disappear off of the forehead of the wearer.

Once the components have been drawn and the magic words are spoken, the spell allows the mage to see everything the person the spell was placed upon sees, as if the mage were there himself. This extra vision does require intense concentration on the part of the caster to maintain sight, but the mage may focus upon just one person with the spell, or he may focus on all of the recipients he has placed the spell upon. This means he can see and completely comprehend what is simultaneously going on through several sets of eyes. While concentrating on this extra vision, the mage may only make one hand to hand melee attack per round and he has no combat bonuses except those gained from high attributes. The mage may switch back and forth between viewing in remote through another character's eyes or his own. When not using another's vision he does not suffer from any penalties, and the spell may still be active. So an 8th level caster who enchants up to eight people will be able to use his own eyes, or can switch to seeing through two different sets of eyes or all eight, with a mere thought and concentration.

Raise Tower

Range: Up to 100 feet (30 m) away.

Duration: One day per level of experience.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 70 or 500

A greater version of the Fortify spell, this magic summons up a tower of stone from the earth. The tower's appearance and layout are up to the desires of the caster, but must not exceed the maximum dimensions. The tower must fit into a 100 square foot (9.3 sq. m) area (e.g. 10 x 10 feet/3 x 3 m) and be no taller than 40 feet (12 m). The wall sections have 20 S.D.C. per square foot (0.093 sq. m). By decreasing the size of the tower in half, no larger than 50 square feet (4.6 sq. m) and 20 feet (6.1 m) tall, the tower can be considered fortified, its walls having twice as much S.D.C. per square foot. Once the duration elapses, the tower melts back into the earth. By spending 500 P.P.E. when cast, the tower can be made permanent, and lasts until physically destroyed.

Seeking Sword

Range: Touch or 3 feet (0.9 m).

Duration: 24 hours per level of experience.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 50

This is an unusual spell, since it was not originally a spell that was directly applicable to fighting or battle. It is, in fact, a tool of revenge or assassination. In order to cast this spell, the mage must have a weapon that has the blood of the intended victim on it. This is usually from a previous encounter where the blade may have struck the person and drawn blood, but the blood can be acquired in any number of ways. Once the blade has some of the victim's blood on it, the mage simply casts the spell. Once cast, the blood will spread along the length of the cutting surface and continually ooze for the spell's duration, letting the mage know that the spell is still in effect. When the blade is used in combat against the opponent whose blood is on the blade, the weapon will automatically hit the person as long as a roll to strike is above a 4. This means that it will bypass all physical or magical barriers to strike directly at the person. Secondly, the weapon inflicts its damage direct to Hit Points, bypassing S.D.C. Against anyone else, the weapon is considered non-magical and inflicts its normal damage in the usual manner.

As stated previously, this spell was originally invented by some unknown Arken Warrior who had a grudge to settle with another party. Now, however, the spell has been adapted to a more versatile role. It is generally used in battles where a famous personality or great general needs to be eliminated in order to sow chaos and confusion among the ranks of the enemy army. Usually an encounter somewhere allows a blade to taste the blood of the target, at which point the Arken Warrior's job is to enchant the blade. Once enchanted, a blade can be passed off to another without fear of canceling the spell's magic.

Level Ten

Battle Rager Escort

Range: Immediate area.

Duration: 5 minutes per level of experience.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 65

This magic calls upon a spirit warrior to guard the casting mage. The warrior most often appears as an ancient berserker warrior in a constant state of rage. In most cases, the warrior appears as a famous Dwarven hero, giving credence to rumors that the spell calls upon the realm of the dead and summons them forthwith. In every way the spirit warrior acts as a normal fighter would, but is completely loyal to the caster and unerringly follows any orders given by him. The spirit warrior is impervious to mind control or possession in any form. The Battle Rager can travel no further than 200 feet (61 m) from the mage. If pulled outside this range, the Battle Rager resists the pulling attempt by any means and the caster must make a save vs magic at a 12 or better. If the caster succeeds then the Battle Rager continues to exist and continues to resist the pull. For every

round the Battle Rager is outside the 200 foot (61 m) range, the caster must make the save vs magic check to see whether or not the Battle Rager is destroyed or continues to fight, until either the duration elapses or the Battle Rager is back into range. The caster may, of course, end this spell at any time he wishes.

Battle Rager

- Natural A.R.: 16
- Hit Points: 60
- Horror Factor: 15
- Attributes: I.Q. 13, M.A. 14, M.E. 13, P.S. 20, P.P. 20, and running speed is 20 mph (32 km).
- Natural Abilities: Impervious to normal cold, fire, poison and disease. Can see the invisible at 100 feet (30.5 m), regenerates 1D6 Hit Points per round, doesn't fatigue, and may carry up to 100 pounds (45 kg) and still move at its maximum speed.
- Bonuses: +3 on initiative, +6 to strike, +5 to parry, +4 to dodge. Four attacks per melee round, and inflicts 2D6+5 S.D.C. damage from a strike.

Create Blade (Superior)

Range: Self or up to 10 feet (3 m) away.

Duration: 30 minutes per level of the spell caster.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E. 120, 200; +1000 to make the weapon permanent.

This is basically the same spell as Create Blade (Simple). The only difference is that the mage can increase the quality of the weapon to the point of adding any magical attribute that an Alchemist might bestow upon a weapon. By spending 120 P.P.E. the mage can bring into an existence a bladed weapon that is Dwarven quality. This weapon can achieve the maximum bonuses for a Dwarven made weapon, so creating a sword would mean +4 to damage and +2 to parry and strike (refer to the **Palladium Fantasy RPG®**, page 27, to see the bonuses conferred to Dwarven made weapons). In the alternative the mage can expend 200 P.P.E. to create a weapon that has one magic enchantment placed upon it. The magic enchantments that can be created are those that can be placed upon a weapon by an Alchemist (refer to the enchantments available in the **Palladium Fantasy RPG®** and *Western Empire™*). So a mage could create a dagger with the Fireball enchantment. The resulting blade functions just like a magic dagger, inflicting 1D6 damage and can cast a 3D6+2 damage fireball three times a day. Note that a mage cannot combine Dwarven bonuses with magic abilities. Expending an extra 1000 P.P.E. will make the weapon permanent for either of the two options. When striking with this weapon it is considered a magical weapon, which means that it will affect creatures that are only susceptible or vulnerable to magic weapons.

Limitations:

Only one enchantment can be placed upon the weapon. The weapon that is created for the enchantment is a base form, it is not of exceptional quality. This means that there are no bonuses conferred to the weapon, it is just a solid well built weapon with no extraordinary characteristics besides its magical nature.

Trying to reforge a weapon made permanent destroys the enchantment.

The same rules apply to the exceptional quality weapon; it may not be enchanted with magical properties even if made permanent and taken to an Alchemist.

Mend Metal

Range: Touch or 3 feet (0.9 m).

Duration: Instant and permanent.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 60

This spell is actually a stolen Earth Warlock spell, converted over so that a mage may learn and cast it. Exactly how this spell came to be stolen and converted has been lost in the haze of the past. What is certain is that Earth Warlocks do not know of its existence as a Wizard spell. Arken Warriors like to keep it this way, for to do otherwise would bring down the fury of the Warlocks upon them. Although a high level spell, it has a very basic and simple function, to mend damage done to any metallic object. This spell will repair 4D6 S.D.C. to any metal object made of copper, aluminum, iron, nickel, or any alloy of these metals, including steel.

Shield of Destiny

Range: Self or one other by touch.

Duration: Ten minutes per level of experience.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 80

When Ormax, the creator of this spell, was a young mage and just beginning to develop and train, he had a crisis of faith. He had a philosophical quandary over fate, destiny and free will. Ormax wasn't sure which one controlled his life; whether he was a puppet of the universe, or he was destined for something great, or if every part of his life was shaped by every decision he had ever made. Eventually he came to his belief that people are influenced not by fate, but in part by destiny and in part by their actions. Destiny is what may guide a person. They can follow a path and find their destiny at the end of it or by their own choice, wander off that path and find something they were never destined for. Playing into this idea he came up with another idea, that those who follow their destiny are in some ways shielded from events that would stop them from achieving their final goal. Destiny in some ways takes care of a person, preventing a fatal stab in battle or a wrong turn in a dark cave. There are many famous tales of heroes born to a destiny that had fame and power in store for them. Many are the amazing accounts in these ancient tales, where the hero managed by "luck" to avoid a life-threatening situation, surviving and earning what was awaiting him. It is not a hard and fast rule that all those with a destiny survive, in fact many have died; as with a normal shield, something can slip by to injure the person. Despite this, Ormax believed he had some unknown date with destiny and hence he used his magic to tap into this protective power. So in a sense, the spell strengthens the ties to a person's destiny to alter the odds and help shield them from harm.

Under the influence of this spell, the number the character needs to roll for a critical strike is reduced by two (e.g. 18-20 instead of 20), and he gains +2 to all of his saving throws, +15% to all skill rolls, and automatically saves on any rolls to save vs coma or death. Any opponent trying to attack a person with this spell active will never inflict a critical strike, and a roll of 1-10 counts as a miss while 1-4 counts as a fumble for them, if fumble rules are used.

Steel Earth

Range: Can be cast up to 20 feet (6.1 m) away. The area affected by the spell is roughly 40 feet (12 m) long, 20 feet (6.1 m) wide and 5 feet (1.5 m) tall. Add 10 feet (3 m) to the maximum length and width of the area affected per level of experience.

Duration: The actual creation of the blades is instantaneous, but once created they last for 10 minutes.

Saving Throw: None for the initial effect, and only a roll on a twenty-sided die under the target's P.P. attribute will prevent further damage.

P.P.E.: 100

This is a devastating spell against infantry, and not only will it cause damage to the targets of the spell, but it also makes the area it is cast upon difficult to travel through. Upon completion of this spell, razor sharp blades of metal pierce the earth, rising to a height of 5 feet (1.5 m). They will impale anyone caught in the area when the spell is first cast, inflicting 4D6 S.D.C. The area affected by this spell is a rectangle, 40 feet (12 m) long and 20 feet (6.1 m) wide; +10 feet (3 m) to both dimensions per level of experience. Once created, the area that is affected is extremely hazardous and difficult to traverse. For every ten feet (3 m) traveled through the sharp blades, the victim(s) of the spell must make a roll under their P.P. attribute, using a twenty-sided die. If the roll is failed, the character has been too clumsy and suffers an additional 1D6 S.D.C. damage from nicks, cuts and stabs inflicted by the blades. If the player manages to save, then he has been fortunate enough to walk ten feet through the forest of steel without being cut by the exposed edges.



inflicts triple the normal damage, half of that tripled damage going to S.D.C., the other half going into Hit Points. If armor is being worn, the Armor Rating is ignored, the armor's S.D.C. is reduced by $\frac{1}{4}$, and double damage is inflicted to the person underneath (half to S.D.C., half direct to Hit Points). If the enchanted weapon is parried with a weapon or shield, that weapon or shield either suffers triple damage, or loses half its S.D.C., whichever is greater.

Tide of Battle

Range: One mile per level of experience.

Duration: 30 minutes, +10 minutes per level of experience.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 75

A slightly lesser version of the spell War's Eye, this spell also grants the caster the ability to sense war, but on a much smaller scale. It will give the mage a sense of the flow of the tide of a battle, so the mage will know the general emotional and physical state and numbers of anyone in the range of the spell. This includes the state of friendly and enemy troops, which allows the caster to form a general idea if the battle is being won, lost, at a stalemate, whether or not tactics are working, if there are sudden reinforcements, timing advances or retreats, etc. It is an extremely useful spell to have in order to pull meaning from the din and chaos of battle.

Stonebiter

Range: By touch when casting. Once cast, the range is limited to the length of the weapon.

Damage: Special, see below.

Duration: The enchantment lasts until the next object is struck, with a maximum duration of 10 minutes per level of experience.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 80

A powerful weapon enchantment spell created by the famous Arken Warrior, Lywrath. The spell's purpose is to enchant a weapon so that the next time it strikes it will cut right through any object. When an object is struck by a weapon with this enchantment, its S.D.C. is immediately reduced by half. In the case of inanimate objects, this may or may not completely destroy it. For instance, striking a tree with a bladed weapon will see the trunk cut completely through, felling the tree and sending it crashing to the ground. In the case of a person, the strike

Level Eleven



Armor Golem (Ritual)

Range: Touch.

Duration: 24 hours per level of experience.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 300; 1000 P.P.E. to make the spell permanent, exists until destroyed.

Great tales of lore tell of armies of animated suits of armor used by the Elves to devastate the Dwarven armies during battle. These suits were not just simply animated by such methods as Tectonic Entities, but were actually a different form of Golem that the Arken Warriors could build. Many believe this spell to be a Spell of Legend, lost to the antiquities of yore. This is not quite the truth, since it is still known by a small handful of powerful mages who keep the knowledge secret. In addition to that, this spell is not quite as powerful as the other Golem creation spells, and is more like a combination of Zombie and Golem creation. Its main advantage over the latter two spells is that the creation is extremely lifelike and fairly intelligent.

In order to build an Armor Golem, the mage must first obtain a suit of armor. The armor can be of any size and must be a full suit of plate complete with a complementary weapon. Once the armor is found, he must collect two amethysts and a pint of blood. One amethyst is placed on the inside of the chest piece while the other is placed on the outside of the helmet. Then the

mage must smear the armor with the blood. The pint of blood must come from a warrior that has fallen in battle, regardless of race. After the gems and blood have been placed on the armor, the ritual is recited and the armor scrapes itself together, ready to follow the commands of the caster. The Golem is not permanent and will remain active for one day per level of experience of the caster, after which point the spell powering the creation stops, causing the Golem to fall apart into its constituent pieces. The Golem is actually quite intelligent and can follow complex commands unlike its brethren. It can be sent on its own to attack or kill, told to guard an object or place, instructed to guard the mage, etc. The Golem is eerily lifelike in the execution of any commands it is given, and has an independent I.Q. equivalent to that of the average human. However, an Armor Golem is completely loyal to the casting mage and cannot be bribed, charmed or converted in any way against the mage's instructions.

There are references in the *Tristine Chronicles* of great war machines that wreaked havoc on the battle fields during the Elf-Dwarf War. These war machines were apparently giant suits of armor created by the Dwarves and were akin to the Armor Golems created by the Elves. However, these machines were much greater in their power, described by some scholars as a cross between a suit of plate armor and a nightmarish mechanical contraption. A small handful of scholars and Arken Warriors have researched these tales, calling the machines *Havocs*, in reference to their destructive capabilities. They believe these creations might have been built using rune magic and were among the greatest of the Dwarven creations. In fact, just recently, a powerful adventuring group known as *The Trillium* has claimed the destruction of a reactivated Havoc somewhere in the Old Kingdom and come into possession of its runic heart.

Armor Golem

- Attribute Equivalents of Note: I.Q. 9, P.S. 16, P.P. 17, P.E. 25, P.B. 3, Spd. 12.
- Size: Depends on the armor used. Any Armor Golem made from a suit larger than 10 feet (3 m) receives a +5 bonus to its P.S., +100 S.D.C. and a -2 penalty to its P.P. and Spd.
- Horror Factor: 16
- Natural A.R.: 17
- Hit Points/S.D.C: 200. This Golem does not regenerate after death and it cannot wear more armor to gain additional protection.
- Attacks per Melee Round: 3 attacks per melee.
- Damage: 1D6 +P.S. bonus damage from a full strength punch, a power punch inflicts 2D6 +P.S. bonus damage, or by weapon.
- Bonuses: +2 to strike and parry (not including any adjustments from physical attributes).
- Skills of Note: Magically understands all languages 96%, knows Basic Math 80%, Land Navigation 60%, and Climb 40%/35%.
- Special Abilities: Nightvision 200 feet (61 m), supernatural P.S. and endurance (never fatigues), impervious to poisons, drugs, disease, heat, cold, Horror Factor, phobias, fear, illusions, hunger, thirst, suffocation and most psionics (including Empathy, Telepathy, and Bio-Manipulation). Fire and cold attacks inflict half damage. The Armor Golem regenerates 1D6 S.D.C. per minute (4 melee rounds).

Dragon Ward

Range: Any shield held by the caster, or another, by touch.

Duration: Five minutes per level of the spell caster, or until the shield is dropped.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 150



Most mages, at one time or another, run across the occasional dragon hatchling or fire-breathing creature. After one particularly nasty battle where an Arken Warrior came back with a little too much singed hair (bald in fact), he corrected his deficiency with this spell. When cast upon a shield, it instantly creates a protective aura against any kind of breath weapon a creature might possess. Even if the user manages to fail a parry against a breath attack, the spell reduces, by half, any damage taken upon the body from the attack, and the wielder also gains a +2 to save vs any other additional effects of the breath. The shield, however, is completely immune to the damage inflicted by breath weapons, and creates such an aura of protection against them that when a successful parry is made to block them, the breath does not pass beyond the line of the shield. Which means a buckler with this enchantment can block the full blast of an Ancient Great Horned Dragon, and the flames will be redirected outward from the shield's edges, never touching anything behind the shield, including the wielder, any compatriots standing behind the wielder, and the general area. The same is true of any breath weapon, be it ice, vapor or flame. The shield has no other attributes beyond what it has normally and those imparted by the spell, and it is not considered to be a magical item; it's just a focus for the power of the spell.

Sheath of the Void

Range: By touch only.

Duration: Permanent until destroyed.

P.P.E.: 300

This spell is one of the few permanent enchantment spells in an Arken Warrior's repertoire. When cast upon a normal sheath, the spell creates a small dimensional pocket. During the enchantment the mage must place a drop of blood on the top part of the sheath, sealing it from use by others. The sheath holds swords only, and may hold up to five of them within its casing. There is no restriction upon size, length, weight or shape, only on the number of swords. Each sword placed into the sheath must also have a small drop or smear of blood placed on it as well. This allows the mage to choose at will, through mental concentration and a simple command word, which sword is to be drawn. The sheath always appears empty until the mage utters the command word, at which point the sword's hilt appears and is ready to be drawn. The sheath appears as if it always has a sword wrapped in its folds and weighs as if there is only one sword, regardless of the number of swords stored. This spell will also work with knife or dagger sheaths, though these smaller sheaths cannot be used to store swords, and vice versa.

Soldier's Home

Range: Immediate area around the caster.

Duration: 8 hours.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 150

To an old campaigner who has been on the march for months or even years, there is nothing better than the homecoming at the end of the war. It resurrects the dead feelings of caring in them and again reminds them what all of the toil and violence was about. By casting this spell, the caster creates 10 tents, +10 per level of experience, capable of holding up to five men each. These tents appear as any normal army tents, usually made out of canvas, and are normal, standard issue fare. When soldiers sleep in one of these tents, they are imparted with very vivid dreams of their own homecoming or of warm and comforting scenes. The scenes aren't any sort of premonition or foreseeing, they can't tell a person's future or possible future. They simply draw upon the sleeper's memories and recreate them as a vivid dream of the actions taken during a homecoming. Even if in real life a homecoming might be bitter or the thoughts of returning home so, the magic is such that it will always turn these feelings into happy dreams. This serves to greatly increase the morale of the troops, and once again guards them in a blanket of warm memories against many of the violent scenes they see every time they enter combat.

For the week after sleeping in the tents, apply +1 to parry and dodge, and +1 to save vs poison/death, insanity, and psionics. The tents last for eight hours, waking the sleepers just before the magic dissipates. These tents have no other magic properties, such as resisting wind or cold, although even in harsh and uncomfortable environs the soldiers always have a very deep and peaceful sleep. The one drawback is that it is not a wise idea to use this spell when awareness is needed, in case of a surprise attack or raid. Under such circumstances it will take two full me-

lee rounds for a soldier in one of the tents to wake up and finally take action. Usually by then, under a surprise attack, the only action that can be taken is to surrender or die.

Troop Supply (Create Bread & Milk Superior)

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

Duration: Permanent.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 100

Often it is the lowliest of things that can bring the best trained and hardest of armies to a standstill. Inclement weather, geographic obstacles and supply shortages can all bring a well-oiled war machine to a grinding halt. Of these, even great fortresses provide no protection against such a thing as starvation. It is well known that although slow and time consuming, sieges are the most effective way of prying the occupants of a fortress or castle out, because the occupants must rely on how much food is present. This spell's intent is to prevent such a problem of food shortage from affecting an army or guard force. When cast, this spell creates 2D6x10 loaves of bread, 10 gallons (38 liters) of milk, 20 lbs (9 kg) of jerked beef, and 3D6 wedges of cheese. Add 1D6 loaves of bread, two gallons (7.6 liters) of milk, 5 lbs (2.25 kg) of jerked beef and one additional wedge of cheese per level of experience of the mage. The milk is held in barrels, the beef in canisters, both of which disappear when emptied, and the cheese is encased in a thick crust of wax that also disappears when peeled away.

Level Twelve

Blade of Disruption

Range: Self.

Duration: One minute per level of experience.

Saving Throw: Standard.

P.P.E.: 200

This spell is another sword creation spell known to Arken Warriors, similar in nature to the spell Blade of the Abyss. This spell, however, creates a blade that has a disrupting effect whenever it strikes. The weapon appears as a blade-shaped flame, purple and white in color, constantly swirling and flickering with action. If the blade strikes living flesh, the person or creature needs to roll a save vs magic. If the roll is failed, the creature will take 3D6 S.D.C. damage, +2 damage per level of experience beyond first level, and will be partially blinded, deafened and numbed. These disruptive effects apply a penalty of -10 to strike, parry and dodge to all combat bonuses. These effects last for 1D4 melee actions. The duration of these penalties is cumulative with additional strikes and saving throw failures. If the saving throw is made, then the creature only takes 2D6 damage from the blade and does not suffer from any of the negative side effects.

The second disrupting effect of the blade is upon magic. If a mage is struck, then not only does the mage need to roll to save

vs magic for the above properties, but the blade will also disperse 3D6 P.P.E. from the mage's P.P.E. base. This lost P.P.E. can only be recovered by rest, meditation, or absorbing P.P.E. from another source such as a P.P.E. battery or person. If a mage or another person has a spell active upon them, being struck by the blade will instantaneously cancel that spell, and this includes spells like Armor of Ithan, Fly as an Eagle, Eyes of the Wolf, Speed of the Snail, Agony, etc. Basically any spell that has a duration and can be cast upon the mage or another person. Spells the blade cannot affect are spells that create physical effects such as Fireball or Energy Bolt. In addition, it will not cancel innate spell abilities of permanently enchanted items. It will cancel spells cast from an item onto either another person or the user. However, it will not disperse P.P.E. from a magic item, such as a P.P.E. battery or rune weapon.

Rust Blade

Range: Self only.

Damage: As per the weapon created. Inflicts an additional 1D6 points of damage to metallic objects, or Armor Rating loss against metal armors.

Duration: Three melee rounds.

Saving Throw: Save vs disease at a 14 or higher. Those who roll a successful save still take physical damage, but are not subject to the disease.

P.P.E.: 200

This spell summons up a rusted blade into the hand of the caster. The blade is incredibly flimsy and is a symbol of decay, continually rusting until it disintegrates after three melee rounds of use. When used to strike a person, the victim must make a save vs disease at a 14 or better or suffer a deadly infection. The disease causes headaches and muscular stiffness in the jaw followed by stiffness of the neck, difficulty swallowing, rigidity of abdominal muscles, spasms, sweating and fever. While these symptoms persist, the victim is -4 to all combat actions and -5% to all skill performance. Within two days of contracting the disease, the victim must make another save vs disease at a 14 or better. If the victim fails, his muscles begin to completely lock up, causing pain, suffocation and death within two hours. The only way to save a person so infected is to cure the disease through magic, or through a successful Holistic Medicine roll.

When used to strike metal objects, the weapon inflicts an additional 1D6 points of damage to the object as its touch indiscriminately rusts the metal. If the wielder so chooses, when striking metal armors he can reduce the Armor Rating by one point with each hit instead of the extra damage, up to a maximum of one point per every other level of his experience. So a sixth level caster could decrease the Armor Rating by one with each hit, up to a maximum loss of three points of Armor Rating. The armor still rusts, but it does so in a manner that spreads over large sections of the armor, creating weak points, though the armor is still essentially intact.

The blade can be any shape or size that the caster wishes, and with the exception of the special qualities of the spell, works exactly as a normal weapon of the shape the caster wrought it as, such as a short sword, dagger, bastard sword, axe, and so on. This means that a blade created as a dagger has the same damage and effective throwing range as a normal dagger.

Level Thirteen

Raise Fortress

Range: Up to 300 feet (91 m) away.

Duration: One week per level of experience.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 375 or 2,000

The supreme extension of Raise Tower and Fortify, the casting mage can create, at will, a fortress of stone that rises from the earth. Just as Raise Tower, the fortress must fit within a certain area. The fortress cannot exceed a 10,000 square foot (929 sq. m) area (e.g. 100 x 100 feet/30.5 x 30.5 m) and can be no taller than 50 feet (15 m) at any given point. The walls of the tower have 20 S.D.C./square foot (0.093 sq. m). By decreasing this area in half, the walls of the structure can be fortified, doubling the usual S.D.C. per square foot section. When the duration elapses, the fortress melts back into the earth from whence it came, unless made permanent by spending 2,000 P.P.E. instead of the three hundred and seventy-five when initially casting the spell.

War's Eye

Range: The known world.

Duration: Instant.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 260

It is often said that the Arken Warriors have an eye for war; that they come with the tide of carrion eaters to take part in the glutony of the destruction. It is often the case that this seems to be true, lone Arken Warriors or entire clans showing up just at the cusp of aggressions. Even among the clans there is a legendary tale of a link to the Eye of War, a mysterious object of legend. Although the Eye of War is lost, there still seems to be the ability to tap into it by means of this spell. By casting this spell the caster is granted an immediate view of the state of the world through the Eye of War. The mage will know, anywhere in the world, where war is likely to occur and where there is currently war. The caster will also know the general intensity of fighting, so he may be able to sense light fighting in the Northern Wilderness or heavy fighting in the Timiro Kingdom. The greatest advantage comes when the casting mage has personally visited a particular area. If war is about to occur or is occurring in a region he has visited, the Eye of War will also impart a sense of the races involved, their general numbers, strengths, weaknesses, and again, how intense the conflict is. So he can sense the difference between guerilla fighting/minor raids of the humans and Wolfen in the Northern Wilderness, and large scale fighting between the humans in the Western Empire and the monsters of the Old Kingdom. This spell has no known range limit, except that it only works on the world the caster is currently on; there is no sense of what war is doing at large in the cosmos.

Although the range is unlimited, there is the fact that sensing beyond the known Palladium continent is rare at best. It is only a strange chance when an Arken Warrior casting this will sense the impression of a war on the other side of the world. This re-

ally has more to do with the way the person defines their view of the world; whether or not they believe the known Palladium World is a world unto itself, or just a small piece in a larger puzzle.

The spell's ability to grant sight through the Eye of War is fleeting at best. So the sense may only last a couple of seconds, what remains is the memory of that sense. So the mage will not continually feel war occurring, or which direction it will take. He will know that the last time he cast the spell there was fighting, or fighting may occur. Since then things may have changed and war may have started or never occurred. The mage will have to cast this spell again to learn of these changes through the Eye of War. Again, it is not a continual sense, so the mage will remember he felt war occurring in a specific region or if the conditions are right, with some of the more detailed knowledge stemming from his own personal visitation of a region. This memory works just like normal memory, which means it does not magically fade or disappear, as long as the mage remembers, the knowledge is permanent.

Level Fourteen

Summon the Archon

Range: In the immediate vicinity.

Duration: One hour per level of experience.

Saving Throw: Special.

P.P.E.: 600

When this spell is cast, everyone within a 100 foot (30.5 m) radius of the point of summoning must make a save vs magic at the caster's spell level, or be affected as if a Blinding Flash were cast. In this blinding flash, the Archon appears. It is a gigantic, misanthropic looking angel, clad in torn, bloodstained robes and carrying a notched, rusted sword, its wings are tattered, rotted things, and it has a constant, crazed, blood-lusted look on its face. Once summoned, the Archon follows the commands of the casting mage and will perform any action asked of it. The archon has an alien mentality that for all intents and purposes, gives it a Diabolic evil alignment, with the exception that it can in no way betray, disobey or hurt the mage that summoned it unless the mage orders it to do otherwise. The Archon has no sense of self preservation, and will always fight to the death unless commanded to do otherwise. Once summoned, there is no restriction as to how far the Archon can be sent away from the mage. When the duration expires the Archon explodes in a grisly shower of blood and gore. Anyone within 50 feet (15 m) of the Archon when this happens must make a roll to dodge at a 15 or higher or they are coated in the gore, which burns like acid before disappearing, inflicting 2D6 points of damage.

Archon

- Natural A.R.: 18
- Hit Points: 500
- Horror Factor: 18
- Attributes: I.Q. 13, M.A. 16, M.E. 10, P.S. 28, P.P. 22, running speed is 60 mph (96 km) and it can fly at 120 mph (192 km). Strength and Endurance are considered supernatural.

- **Natural Abilities:** Impervious to normal cold, fire, poison and disease. Can see the invisible at 100 feet (30 m), regenerates 2D6 Hit Points per round, doesn't fatigue, and may carry up to 400 pounds (180 kg) and still move at its maximum speed.
- **P.P.E.:** 80. Knows the following spells: Call Lightning, Fire Ball, Fire Fist, Agony, Animate and Control Dead, Sickness, Havoc, Stonebiter, Blade Stop, Rust Blade, Dragon Snot and Steel Earth.
- **Bonuses:** +6 on initiative, +10 to strike, +10 to parry, +2 to dodge. Six attacks per melee round, and inflicts 3D6+13 points of damage from a strike.

Spells of Legend

Jihad

Range: Affects everyone within a 500 foot (152 m) radius, +100 feet (30 m) per level of experience.

Duration: Lasts for one day per level of experience.

Saving Throw: Those who try to resist may make a roll to save vs magic at -10.

P.P.E.: 2,000

This spell is used very sparingly, not only due to its requirements upon the caster, but also because of the untold devastation such a spell can cause. By casting this spell, any person within range is filled with a seething hatred of their enemy. This can be another religion, state, monster force, group of people, etc. The people under the influence of this spell will go to every possible length to utterly obliterate their enemies from the face of the earth, including sacrificing their lives when the need arises. It instills a complete and overriding hatred that blocks out common sense, reasoning and any other emotion that may get in the way of destroying the hated enemy. Which means that alignment no longer applies to actions involving the chosen enemy. This spell cannot just create the idea that a group is evil and needs to be destroyed; it can only work when there is already a fair amount of animosity and hard feelings between two groups. Usually anyone who tries to interfere with the people under this spell is ignored, or destroyed along with the other group if they get in the way and try to interfere too much.

The tales of people under this spell are numerous and are usually stories of hideous atrocity in battle. People will rape, pillage, and implement utter genocide, so filled with hate they are no longer recognizable as their former selves. In combat, apply +3 to strike, parry, and dodge, and to all saving throws, when encountering someone who is the enemy, due to the intense focus and sheer drive to destroy granted by this spell.

Obliterate

Range: 1,000 foot (305 m) radius centered on the mage.

Duration: The effects of the fear only last for a melee round.

Saving Throw: Save vs Horror Factor when initially cast.

P.P.E.: 3,000

Casting this powerful spell causes a pillar of purplish-white light to descend from the sky, focused on the mage, who is immune to the effects. When the pillar of light touches the ground



it instantly creates a rolling wave of devastation that travels outward in a semi-sphere. The wave of destruction can be seen as a visible distortion, like a shock wave viewed in slow motion, and indeed the wave does travel slowly, only at a Spd. of 10, which means it can be outrun. Despite the fact that the wave is traveling slowly, any movable object touched by the wave is devastated, suffering 100 S.D.C./Hit Points worth of damage, and is flung through the air, away from the wave, 2D4x1,000 feet (610-2440 m). At the end of the fall, the object will take an additional 4D6 damage from the rough landing. The wave will follow the general contour of the surrounding land, but anything that sticks up out of the ground will be struck by the wave, such as buildings, exposed boulders, or trees. Immobile structures, like those just listed, will take 1,000 points of damage per melee round as the wave repeatedly contacts them. The debris from the structures being crushed will also be flung from the wave front as a movable object would. When the spell is initially cast and the pillar of light appears, all those within the radius of effect of the spell must make a roll to save vs Horror Factor at a 17 or better. If the roll is failed, then the person is locked in place by fear, unable to take action for a full melee round. The wave is inexorable and it cannot be stopped, bogged down or destroyed in any way. It always travels out to its full range at its maximum speed, simply annihilating and pushing away everything in its path.

This spell is the stuff of legends, and many who have cast it have been taken by many to be gods descended from the heavens, such is the power of this spell. It was first created in the Elf-Dwarf War, just after the second peace had been broken and

the fighting grew the worst. It was at this point that the greatest Titan Arken Warrior of the time was trying to rescue a Gnomish city caught between two rabid packs of Elves and Dwarves. Unfortunately, the armies swept through the city before the Titan and his companions could take any action. Wholesale slaughter reigned as Elves killed Dwarves, Dwarves killed Elves, and both killed the Gnomes. The atrocities committed before the Titan's eyes were unimaginable and beyond count. His sanity was shattered, which caused him to release this spell in the thick of the throng of armies. It completely wiped out the two sides, and half of the remaining Gnomes, as well as all but one of the Titan's companions. To this day it is said that a strange pillar of light can be seen at night at the site of the battle, marking those who died there in the insanity of the war.

AFTER THE BOMB® NEW MUTANTS

By Caleb Goodson

Optional Material for **After the Bomb®** and **Heroes Unlimited™**

Arachnid Mutants

Spiders and scorpions should be treated in a similar manner as mutant insects. They are creatures driven by instinct to survive. The life of an arachnid is one of constant struggle and death. Whether it be wandering the earth in search of food, or hanging from a web, these animals are survivors. For player characters, this means that the mutant arachnid will instinctively see EVERYTHING as either a potential enemy or a food source. These tendencies can be overcome, but it will be difficult.

New Powers

Exoskeletal Body Armor: The character has an exoskeleton, or its skeleton is on the outside of its body, providing strong support and protection to the soft organs inside. In gaming terms, this means S.D.C. bonuses and Natural Armor Ratings.

Note: Characters that have extra limbs not converted into arms (spiders, scorpions, crabs, et al.) AND have an exoskeleton can attach ancient weapons to these limbs. Use normal hand to hand bonuses in conjunction with these weapon grafts. Also add 25% to the normal cost for the additional labor of attaching the weapon to the exoskeleton.

Spider: Weaver

Original Animal Characteristics:

Description: This type of spider builds webs in order to catch prey. It comes in thousands of different varieties and is necessary to control insect populations. Some examples are the

black widow, brown recluse, and common garden spider. Mutant spiders are hated and feared in the world of **After the Bomb®** due to the natural mammalian revulsion for such creatures. Most will attack a mutant spider on sight. Player characters should keep a low profile.

Size Level: 1

Length: To one inch (2.5 cm).

Weight: From less than an ounce to a few ounces.

Build: Medium.

Mutant Changes & Costs:

Total Bio-E: 85

Attribute Bonuses: +2 to P.P., +5 to P.S. (Brute), +10 to Spd.

Penalties: Reduce I.Q., M.E., and M.A. by one third (tends to rely on instinct and animal cunning more than intelligence). Also reduce P.B. by half.

Human Features:

Hands: None: Hairy, spindly limbs used for climbing.

5 Bio-E for Partial: Two fingers and a non-opposable thumb.

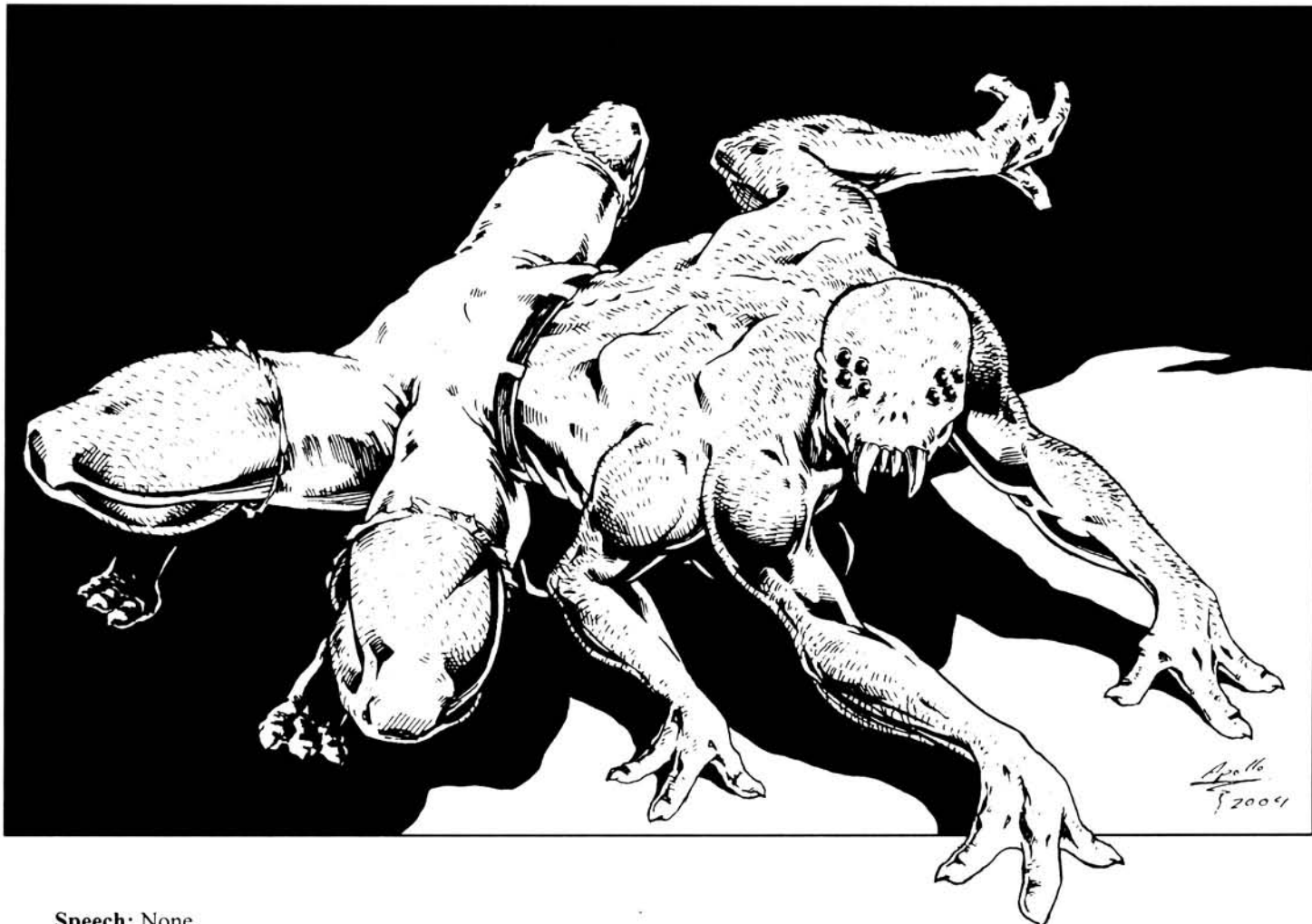
10 Bio-E for Full: Two fingers and an opposable thumb.

Note: Must be purchased separately for each pair of arms.

Biped: None: Crawls around on eight legs. +20 to Spd.

5 Bio-E for Partial: Uses the back four legs for movement, and the front four as arms. +10 to Spd.

10 Bio-E for Full: The bottom-most pair of limbs becomes a set of full human legs, while the other six limbs can be used as arms, otherwise they are stubby limbs that can be used to strike with.



Speech: None.

5 Bio-E for Partial.

10 Bio-E for Full.

Looks: None: Looks like a giant spider. Large head with two huge fangs, a small cluster of dark eyes on the head, and a spindly frame. The mutant spider's appearance will have nothing in common with any of the typical mutants in the world of **After the Bomb®**. Most characters will believe the mutant is an unintelligent monster and attack. Will not be able to disguise its appearance due to the inhuman frame.

10 Bio-E for Partial: The mutant's frame becomes more humanoid and the bulkiness of the spider body is reduced. Still looks like a monster, but will now be able to wear a disguise to hide its inhuman appearance, such as a robe with a large, floppy hood.

Full Human Looks is NOT POSSIBLE.

Natural Weapons:

5 Bio-E for 1D6 damage Fangs.

Mutant Animal Powers:

Automatically gets Advanced Touch and the equivalent of the Acrobatics skill, but without the attribute bonuses. And also gets Light Exoskeletal Natural Body Armor: A.R. 9, S.D.C. +20.

10 Bio-E for Web Spinnerets (see **After the Bomb®**, pg. 114).

10 Bio-E for Web Shooters (see **After the Bomb®**, pg. 115).

15 Bio-E for Paralytic Poison Venom (Requires Fangs). Any-

one bitten by the character must make a save vs non-lethal poison or be paralyzed for 4D6 minutes.

20 for Deadly Poison Venom (Requires Fangs). Anyone bitten by the character must make a save vs lethal poison or take 5D6 damage direct to Hit Points. A successful save means half damage.

5 Bio-E Web Hooks (see **After the Bomb®**, pg. 115).

Vestigial Disadvantages:

-5 Bio-E for Color Blindness.

-10 Bio-E for Nearsightedness.

-10 Bio-E for Diet: Carnivore.

-15 Bio-E for Diet: Insectivore.

Automatically has Reptile Brain: Predator.

Spider: Hunter

Original Animal Characteristics:

Description: This type of spider is also known as a wandering spider. Unlike the weavers, the hunters travel from place to place, actively seeking prey. Examples of this type of spider are the tarantula, wolf spider, and jumping spider. If possible, these spiders are even more hated and feared than the weavers, due to their increased size, strength, and aggression.

Size Level: 1-2, depending on the species. (Some spiders of this type can even be size level 3 or 4.)

Length: To three inches (7.6 cm).

Weight: To one pound (0.45 kg).

Build: Medium.

Mutant Changes & Costs:

Total Bio-E: 85

Attribute Bonuses: +2 to P.P., +10 to P.S. (Brute), +10 to Spd.

Penalties: Reduce I.Q., M.E., and M.A. by one third (tends to rely on instinct and animal cunning more than intelligence). Also reduce P.B. by half.

Human Features:

Hands: None: Hairy, spindly limbs used for mobility.

5 Bio-E for Partial: Two fingers and a non-opposable thumb.

10 Bio-E for Full: Two fingers and an opposable thumb.

Note: Must be purchased separately for each pair of arms.

Biped: None: Crawls around on eight legs. +20 to Spd.

5 Bio-E for Partial: Uses the back four legs for movement, and the front four as arms. Body form is similar to a centaur. +10 to Spd.

10 Bio-E for Full: The bottom-most pair of limbs becomes a set of full human legs, while the other six limbs can be used as arms. Develops a humanoid torso and limbs.

Speech: None.

5 Bio-E for Partial.

10 Bio-E for Full.

Looks: Looks like a giant spider. Large head with two huge fangs, a cluster of huge dark eyes on the head, and a burly, heavy-set frame. The mutant spider's appearance will have nothing in common with any of the typical mutants in the world of **After the Bomb®**. Most characters will believe the mutant is an unintelligent monster and attack. Will not be able to disguise its appearance due to the inhuman frame.

10 Bio-E for Partial: The mutant's frame becomes more humanoid and the bulkiness of the spider body is reduced. Still looks like a monster, but will now be able to wear a disguise to hide its inhuman appearance, such as a robe with a large, floppy hood.

Full Human Looks is NOT POSSIBLE.

Natural Weapons:

5 Bio-E for 1D6 damage Fangs.

10 Bio-E for 2D6 damage Fangs.

Mutant Animal Powers:

Automatically gets Advanced Vision and Light Exoskeletal Body Armor: A.R. 9, +20 S.D.C.

10 Bio-E for Medium Exoskeletal Body Armor: A.R. 11, +40 S.D.C.

15 Bio-E for Heavy Exoskeletal Body Armor: A.R. 14, +60 S.D.C.

5 Bio-E for 360 Degree Vision: The mutant spider has a total of eight eyes, allowing it to see in all directions. This makes it impossible to attack from behind while awake, and gives the following bonuses: +2 to parry and dodge. However, the mutant is -1 to strike with long-range weapons because of the divided focus.

10 Bio-E for Web Spinnerets.

5 Bio-E for Predator Burst.

5 Bio-E for Leaping: Feline.

10 Bio-E for Bestly Strength.

20 Bio-E for Paralytic Poison Venom (must purchase Fangs).

Anyone bitten by the character must make a save vs non-lethal poison or be paralyzed for 4D6 minutes.

30 Bio-E for Deadly Poison Venom (must purchase Fangs).

Anyone bitten by the character must make a save vs lethal poison or take 5D6 damage direct to Hit Points. A successful save means half damage.

Vestigial Disadvantages:

-5 Bio-E for Color Blindness.

-10 Bio-E for Diet: Carnivore.

-15 Bio-E for Diet: Insectivore.

Automatically has Reptile Brain: Predator.

Scorpion

Original Animal Characteristics:

Description: This successful arachnid hunter can be found all over the world in several different varieties. All have a tail with a poison stinger, a pair of forelegs that end in pincers, and a heavy, armored body.

Size Level: 1-2

Length: To six inches (15.2 cm).

Weight: Less than a pound (0.45 kg).

Build: Long.

Mutant Changes & Costs:

Total Bio-E: 85

Attribute Bonuses: +2 to P.P. +15 to P.S. (Beastly), +20 S.D.C.

Penalties: Reduce I.Q., M.E., and M.A. by one third (tends to rely on instinct and animal cunning more than intelligence). Also reduce P.B. by half.

Human Features:

Hands: None: Thick, stumpy limbs used for mobility.

5 Bio-E for Partial: Two fingers and a non-opposable thumb.

10 Bio-E for Full: Two fingers and an opposable thumb.

Note: Must be purchased separately for each pair of arms.

Biped: None: Crawls around on eight legs, with the front-most two used for grasping. +20 to Spd.

5 Bio-E for Partial: Uses the back four legs for movement, and the front four as arms. Has a body form similar to a centaur. +10 to Spd.

10 Bio-E for Full: The bottommost pair of limbs becomes a set of full human legs, while the other six limbs can be used as arms. Has a humanoid torso and limbs.

Speech: None.

5 Bio-E for Partial.

10 Bio-E for Full.

Looks: None: Looks like a giant scorpion. If anything, most of the populace in the world of **After the Bomb®** will be even more hostile towards mutant scorpions than spiders, due to the greater aggression associated with them.

10 Bio-E for Partial: Character's arachnid features will be reduced, allowing it to be able to hide its features underneath heavy clothing. However, claws and stingers will be nearly impossible to hide.

Full Human Looks is NOT POSSIBLE.

Natural Weapons:

5 Bio-E for 2D6 damage Claws (can be purchased for more than one pair of ARMS, impossible to combine with full human hands).

10 Bio-E for 4D6 damage Claws.

10 Bio-E for 2D6 damage Stinging Tail.

Mutant Animal Powers:

Automatically gets Advanced Vision and Medium Exoskeletal Body Armor: A.R. 11, +40 S.D.C.

10 Bio-E for Heavy Exoskeletal Body Armor: A.R. 14, +60 S.D.C.

15 Bio-E for Extra-Heavy Exoskeletal Body Armor: A.R. 16, +80 S.D.C.

5 Bio-E for Extra Speed.

5 Bio-E for Predator Burst.

10 Bio-E for Leaping: Rodent.

20 Bio-E for Paralytic Poison Venom (must purchase Stinging Tail). Anyone stung by the character must make a save vs non-lethal poison or be paralyzed for 4D6 minutes.

25 Bio-E for Deadly Poison Venom (must purchase Stinging Tail). Anyone stung by the character must make a save vs lethal poison or take 5D6 damage direct to Hit Points. A successful save means half damage.

Vestigial Disadvantages:

-5 Bio-E for Color Blindness.

-10 Bio-E for Nearsightedness.

-10 Bio-E for Diet: Carnivore.

-15 Bio-E for Diet: Insectivore.

Automatically has Reptile Brain: Predator.

Annelid Mutants

For gaming purposes, the only two worms covered will be leeches and earthworms. While earthworms can easily amalgamate into **After the Bomb®** society as aides to farming communities, most leeches are hated and reviled due to the parasitic nature of certain species.

Earthworm

Original Animal Characteristics:

Description: Known for centuries as the farmer's friend, these little worms live a subterranean life, eating rotting vegetation and fertilizing the soil in the process. In the world of **After the Bomb®**, most mutant animal communities readily accept earthworm mutants, their traditional reputations as helpful creatures having survived the Crash.

Size Level: 1

Length: From 4-8 inches (10-20 cm).

Weight: Less than a few ounces.

Build: Long.

Mutant Changes & Costs:

Total Bio-E: 95

Attribute Bonuses: +1 to P.P., +3 to M.A.

Penalties: -2 to I.Q., M.E., and P.B.

Human Features:

Eyes: None: Earthworms have no eyes or nostrils, and therefore have no sense of sight or smell. However, the mutant automatically has the power of Worm Skin. Worm Skin grants sensitivity to sound and vibration similar to advanced hearing and touch. This means the mutant earthworm will be able to function normally without sight, but will not be able to perform skills requiring eyes nor use any long-distance weaponry effectively.

10 Bio-E for a set of eyes. The eyes will appear as a set of glassy lenses on the sides of the head. Grants sight equal to human. However, the mutant will still have no sense of smell.

Hands: None: The mutant has no arms or hands and must manipulate objects with the tail. (Treat as partial hand.)

5 Bio-E for Partial: The mutant develops stubby tentacles that sprout from the sides of the body.

10 Bio-E for Full: The tentacles develop branches at the ends that work as fingers and thumbs.

Biped: None: The mutant worm has to crawl around on its belly. This is done at ½ the character's maximum Spd.

10 Bio-E for Full: Develops stumpy, but solid legs.

Speech: None.

5 Bio-E for Partial.

10 Bio-E for Full.

Looks: None: Looks like a big earthworm. Long, tubular body composed of flesh rings. Skin will be a pale brown-white color. Has no eyes unless purchased with Bio-E.

10 Bio-E for Partial: The mutant develops a rough face in the general shape of a human, as well as a humanoid body structure. However, the skin is still the same pallid color as before, and besides having a rough facial shape, there will still be no eyes unless purchased with Bio-E.

Full Human Looks is NOT POSSIBLE.

Natural Weapons:

None.

Mutant Animal Powers:

Automatically gets Worm Skin.

5 Bio-E for Digging.

10 Bio-E for Tunneling.

15 Bio-E for Damage Reduction: All blunt attacks, including hard impacts like bullets, do ½ damage. Does not work for cutting attacks or energy attacks.

20 Bio-E for Regeneration: The character heals at a rate of one Hit Point/S.D.C. per melee round. Any limbs cut off will heal in a matter of hours. Cannot survive being decapitated, though.

Vestigial Disadvantages:

-10 Bio-E for Diet: Herbivore (Earthworms do NOT eat dirt).

-10 Bio-E for Reptile Brain: Prey.

-15 Bio-E for Temperature Sensitivity: Mutant suffers from exposure to heat and cold twice as fast as normal. Also takes double damage from heat and cold based attacks.

-10 Bio-E for Vestigial Skin.

Leech

Original Animal Characteristics:

Description: The term "leech" is actually a catch-all term for hundreds of worms that fall into this category. Most are parasites that feed by attaching to a host and sucking blood, but some are predators that feed on small life forms. Unlike mutant earthworms, mutant leeches are feared for their reputations as blood drinkers. Some communities ban mutant leeches, and others will attack on sight. However, some communities have accepted mutant leeches, whose unique attributes make them useful members of society.

Size Level: 1

Length: Usually no longer than an inch or two (2.5-5 cm).

Weight: Less than a few ounces.

Build: Long.

Mutant Changes & Costs:

Total Bio-E: 90

Attribute Bonuses: +5 to P.S. (Brute), +1 to P.P.

Penalties: -2 to I.Q. and M.E., -4 to M.A., Reduce P.B. by one third.

Human Features:

Hands: None: The mutant has no arms or hands and must manipulate objects with the mouth. (Treat as partial hand.)

5 Bio-E for Partial: The mutant develops stubby tentacles that sprout from the sides of the body.

10 Bio-E for Full: The tentacles develop branches at the ends that work as fingers and thumbs.

Biped: None: The mutant worm has to crawl around on its belly. This is done at ½ the character's maximum Spd.

10 Bio-E for Full: Develops stumpy, but solid legs.

Speech: None.

5 Bio-E for Partial.

10 Bio-E for Full.

Looks: None: Long, flattened body with either a rounded or a triangular head. Huge, glassy, mirror-smooth eyes on the sides of the head. Mouth is full of needle-sharp teeth. Coloration varies with species, but can range from jet-black to numerous color patterns.

10 Bio-E for Partial: Character develops a humanoid body form and structure, but the eyes remain the same large shape, and the mouth is smaller but still full of sharp teeth. Only a pair of slits for nostrils. No body hair.

Full Human Looks is NOT POSSIBLE.

Natural Weapons:

5 Bio-E for 1D6 damage Teeth.

10 Bio-E for Blood Drinking Bite (must purchase Teeth). A bite from this character will do one Hit Point of damage in addition to the normal damage. The character can also grab and hold on to an opponent, delivering another blood-drinking bite per

melee action. An opponent can be drained dry fairly quickly. Worse, the victim also gets exposed to the mutant's saliva, described below.

Mutant Animal Powers:

Automatically gets Aquatic Swimming skill at 80%, and Anti-Coagulating Saliva: The mutant leech's saliva acts a powerful anti-coagulant. Any wound that comes into contact with the saliva will not clot and will continue to bleed for 4D6 rounds after contact. This can be useful for surgical procedures. However, if a blade is coated with the stuff it can be deadly, causing the unfortunate victim to bleed to death in a manner of moments.

10 Bio-E for Bestly Strength.

15 Bio-E for Damage Reduction: Identical to Earthworm.

20 Bio-E for Regeneration: Identical to Earthworm.

10 Bio-E for Worm Skin identical to Earthworm.

5 Bio-E for Advanced Vision.

10 Bio-E for 360 Degree Vision: Character has six pairs of eyes located on the head. Can see in all directions. Makes the character impossible to sneak up on, and provides +2 to parry and dodge. However, the character is -1 to strike with long-range weaponry due to the divided focus.

5 Bio-E for Advanced Smell.

Vestigial Disadvantages:

-20 Bio-E for Diet: Hemavore: Character must drink blood to survive. Needs a number of pints of blood equal to size level each week. No other food will suffice for this character. Without blood the character will starve to death.

-5 Bio-E for Reptile Brain: Predator.

-10 Bio-E for Reptile Brain: Prey.

-15 Bio-E for Temperature Sensitivity: Mutant suffers from exposure to heat and cold twice as fast as normal. Also takes double damage from heat and cold based attacks.

-10 Bio-E for Vestigial Skin.

Gastropod Mutants

The vast majority of these mutants will be giant size, and barely above animal level in intelligence. However, there is that rare creature that is mutated to a different form than its fellows. Intelligent mutant snails and slugs will have a tough time convincing other mutants that they are not as stupid as their giant brethren.

Slug & Snail

Original Animal Characteristics:

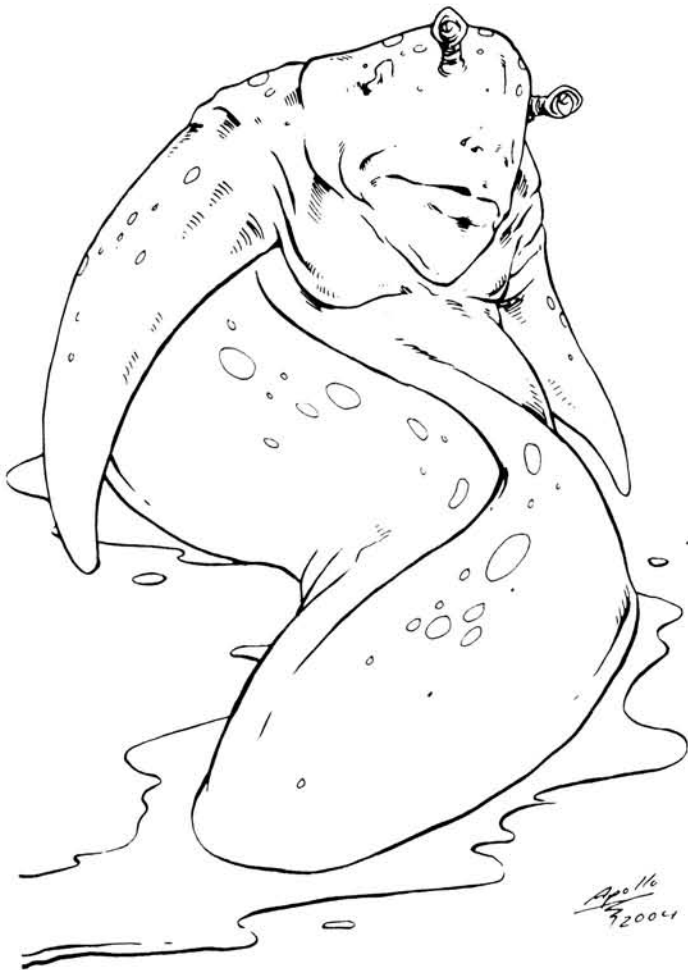
Description: Snails and slugs are animals from the family of gastropods, or "stomach-foot." The snail has a spiral shell, and the slug does not. Both species require the excretion of slime in order to move.

Size Level: 1-3, depending on the species.

Length: Up to six inches (15.2 cm).

Weight: Less than a pound (0.45 kg).

Build: Short.



Mutant Changes & Costs:

Total Bio-E: 90

Attribute Bonuses: +2 to P.S., +4 to P.E.

Penalties: -6 to I.Q., -4 to M.E., Reduce M.A. by half, and P.B. by 75%.

Human Features:

Hands: None: The animal has no hands and arms at all, and must manipulate objects with the mouth (treat as a partial hand).

5 Bio-E for Partial: The animal develops a pair of tentacles just below the head that function as partial hands.

10 Bio-E for Full: The tentacles described above develop branches at the end that function as fingers and thumbs.

Biped: None: The mutant crawls along on the bottom section of its body, called a foot. This is a very slow (can only move at 1/4 maximum Spd.) means of transportation, and requires the excretion of slime in order to work properly. Aside from barring the character to certain areas (people don't like having to clean up smelly slime), this gives anyone tracking the character a +50% bonus.

15 Bio-E Full: The mutant develops stubby legs that resemble poles. While crude in appearance, the legs are fully functional and allow the mutant the same mobility as a human.

Speech: None.

5 Bio-E for Partial.

10 Bio-E for Full.

Looks: None: Long, flat body with slick skin and a round head. Eyes rest on long stalks. Mouth resembles a big sack. Body is flat and asymmetrical. Coloration depends on the species, with land versions usually being dull in color, while sea and poisonous varieties are often bright and colorful.

10 Bio-E for Partial: Body becomes humanoid in shape and develops symmetry. Body will also be slightly thicker. Eyes will still be on stalks, and the size of the mouth is reduced. Clearly not human, but the mutant now looks distinctly different from the giant-size, stupid varieties of slug and snail.

Full Human Looks is NOT POSSIBLE.

Natural Weapons:

10 Bio-E for 1D4 damage Bite.

Mutant Animal Powers:

Both Snail and Slug mutants automatically get Advanced Vision.

Snail:

5 Bio-E for Light Natural Body Armor: A.R. 9, S.D.C. +20.

10 Bio-E for Medium Natural Body Armor: A.R. 11, S.D.C. +40.

15 Bio-E for Heavy Natural Body Armor: A.R. 14, S.D.C. +60.

20 Bio-E for Extra Heavy Natural Body Armor: A.R. 16, S.D.C. +80.

25 Bio-E for Deadly Poison Venom (must purchase Bite). Anyone bitten by the character must make a save vs lethal poison or take 5D6 damage direct to Hit Points. A successful save means half damage.

15 Bio-E for Jet Propulsion Slime: Character develops four tubes located near the rear, two which quickly excrete slime, and two more which provide a blast of air. A recent adaptation, this allows the character with Biped: None, to move at his normal speed along the slime trail, and can even move in short bursts of 20 mph (32 km). This speed can be maintained for a number of melees equal to the character's P.E. The down side to this is that it is a noisy means of transportation, equal to the sound of someone stomping very loudly.

5 Bio-E for Water Breathing.

Slug:

10 Bio-E for Damage Reduction: Identical to Earthworm.

15 Bio-E for Jet Propulsion Slime: Identical to Snail.

20 Bio-E for Deadly Poison Venom (must purchase Bite). Anyone bitten by the character must make a save vs lethal poison or take 5D6 damage direct to Hit Points. A successful save means half damage.

5 Bio-E for Water Breathing.

Vestigial Disadvantages:

-10 Bio-E for Reptile Brain: Prey.

-15 Bio-E for Temperature Sensitivity.

-10 Bio-E for Vestigial Skin.

-15 Bio-E for Aquatic Vestigial Skin (see below under Aquatic Mutants).

Aquatic Mutants

No environment in the world contains more life than the oceans. The sea offers a variety of forms for mutations. However, switching from an aquatic to a terrestrial environment can lead to some challenges. Thus, there are some new vestigial traits unique to these animals, as well as some new powers.

New Powers

Water Breathing: Mutant aquatic animals will be mutated to only breathe air unless this is purchased. It allows the mutant to breathe in both air and water.

Aquatic Swimming: Equal to the Advanced Swimming skill, the character will be able to survive depths depending upon how humanoid he has become.

Looks: None: Character can survive depths of up to 3,000 feet (914 m).

Partial: Character can survive depths of up to 2,000 feet (610 m).

Full: Character can survive depths of up to 1,000 feet (305 m).

Perfect: Character can survive depths of up to 500 feet (152 m).

New Vestigial Disadvantages

Aquatic Vestigial Skin: Character must keep his skin moist or it will dry out, causing damage to the character equal to heat exposure for every half hour without being exposed to water.

Aquatic Respiratory System: Character can breathe ONLY water. Can surface on land only for limited periods of time, and will start to asphyxiate without some sort of breathing apparatus. Penalties are equal to those for drowning, only on land.

Octopus, Squid, & Nautilus

Original Animal Characteristics:

Description: These sea creatures come in a variety of forms, but share some of the same basic attributes. The octopus is probably the most intelligent non-mammal. The squid is known for being a vicious predator regardless of size. Finally, the nautilus is a rare animal prized for its beautiful shell.

Size Level: Squid: 1 (typical squid), Octopus: 2 (up to 5 depending on the species), Nautilus: 2.

Length: Most squids are only a few inches long. Octopi can get as long 6-8 feet (1.8-2.4 m) in length. The nautilus is typically not more than a few feet long.

Weight: Up to ten pounds (4.5 kg).

Build: Octopus and Nautilus: Medium, Squid: Long.

Mutant Changes & Costs:

Total Bio-E: Octopus: 80, Squid: 85, Nautilus: 80.

Attribute Bonuses: Octopus: +2 to I.Q., +3 to P.S. Squid: +4 to P.S., +1 to P.P. Nautilus: +1 to P.S.

Human Features:

Hands: Automatically Partial: Tentacles function as Partial Hands.

5 Bio-E for Full: Tentacles develop branches at the ends that function as full hands. Must be purchased for each set of tentacles.

Biped: Note: Octopi have 8 tentacles, Squids have ten, and Nautili have up to 25.

None: Uses its tentacles for locomotion. While this can be done without penalty to Spd., the animal must use the majority of its tentacles to maintain balance. In combat, this means that only a single pair of limbs may be used to hold weapons. Any more than this and the animal will lose its balance.

5 Bio-E for Partial: Four of the tentacles become larger and stronger, capable of supporting the character's weight. The remaining limbs may be used to hold weapons in combat. The animal also develops a rough torso, separating the limbs used for movement from the limbs used for grasping and tool usage.

10 Bio-E for Full: A single pair of tentacles becomes strong enough to support the character's weight. The animal now has a fully developed torso, and all remaining limbs may be used to hold tools or weapons.

Speech: None.

5 Bio-E for Partial.

10 Bio-E for Full.

Looks: None: Large head that either sags in the back (Octopus or Nautilus) or comes to a conical point (Squid), eyes will be large and round, and capable of moving independently of each other. Skin will be leathery, and color will vary depending on species. Can be dull or bright and colorful (especially if a poisonous octopus).

10 Bio-E for Partial: Head is large with a beak located roughly where the mouth would be on a human. Tentacles protrude from upper torso, while the tentacles used for mobility are clearly attached to a humanoid lower torso. No one is going to mistake the character for a human unless heavily disguised and in a very dark environment.

Full Human Looks is NOT POSSIBLE.

Natural Weapons:

5 Bio-E for 1D4 damage Beak.

Mutant Animal Powers:

5 Bio-E for Advanced Vision.

5 Bio-E for Night Vision.

10 Bio-E for Multi-Limb Coordination (must be purchased for each pair of arms). Gives the character the Paired Weapons skill automatically, as well as one additional attack per melee and +1 to parry.

10 Bio-E for Suction Cups on the arms: This will let the mutant grab and hold onto any object with strength equal to the animal's P.S. (Octopus and Squid only).

5 Bio-E for Ink Spray (Octopus and Squid only).

10 Bio-E for Jet Propulsion: A system of swimming in which water is taken in through a set of glands, and then forced out in a stream, providing very fast movement through water, up to 30 mph (48 km).

30 Bio-E for Deadly Poison Venom (must purchase Beak; Octopus only).

10 Bio-E for Light Natural Body Armor (Nautilus only): A.R. 9, S.D.C. +20.

15 Bio-E for Medium Natural Body Armor (Nautilus only): A.R. 11, S.D.C. +40.

20 Bio-E for Heavy Natural Body Armor (Nautilus only): A.R. 14, S.D.C. +60.

35 Bio-E for Extra-Heavy Natural Body Armor (Nautilus only): A.R. 16, S.D.C. +80.

10 Bio-E for Chameleon Skin (Octopus only). Identical to the Chameleon Mouse's power (see **After the Bomb**®, pg. 130).

Vestigial Disadvantages:

- 20 Bio-E for Aquatic Respiratory System.
- 15 Bio-E for Aquatic Vestigial Skin.
- 10 Bio-E for Diet: Carnivore.
- 5 Bio-E for Reptile Brain: Predator.
- 10 Bio-E for Reptile Brain: Prey.
- 5 Bio-E for each pair of Vestigial Tentacles: Limbs that hang limply and do not work at all.

Crab

Original Animal Characteristics:

Description: Scavengers that live off of the ocean's waste, crabs are an important part of the ocean ecosystem. They are also known for being extremely delicious when cooked, something that mutant crabs tend to be VERY bitter about.

Size Level: 1

Length: Usually not more than six inches (15.2 cm) across.

Weight: Usually not more than a few pounds.

Build: Medium.

Mutant Changes & Costs:

Total Bio-E: 85

Attribute Bonuses: +3 to P.S. (Brute), +15 to S.D.C.

Human Features:

Hands: None: Spindly limbs used for movement. (Note: Crabs have ten limbs.)

5 Bio-E for Partial: Two clawed digits and a rough thumb.

10 Bio-E for Full: Three fingers and a thumb; cannot be combined with Pincers.

Biped: None: Character uses the majority of his limbs for movement, with only the frontmost limbs capable of being developed into hands or pincers.

5 Bio-E for Partial: Character develops a rough upper and lower body, using the back four limbs for movement, while the rest can be developed into hands or pincers.

10 Bio-E for Full: Character develops a humanoid frame and torso. Two legs are used for movement, while the remaining limbs can be developed into hands or pincers.

Speech: None.

5 Bio-E for Partial.

10 Bio-E for Full.

Looks: None: The same as the animal. Flat, shelled body with eyes on stalks. Large, heavy pincers and spiny limbs.

10 Bio-E for Partial: Develops a humanoid body structure. Heavy, armored body. Large, flat head with mouth parts that open to the side. Eyes on stalks that can be retracted into the head. Clearly not human.

Full Human Looks is NOT POSSIBLE.

Natural Weapons:

5 Bio-E for 1D6 damage Claws.

10 Bio-E for 3D6 damage Pincers. (Cannot be combined with Full Human Hands. Hands will be considered Partial.)

Mutant Animal Powers:

Automatically receives Light Exoskeletal Body Armor: A.R. 9, +20 S.D.C.

10 Bio-E for Medium Exoskeletal Body Armor: A.R. 11, +40 S.D.C.

15 Bio-E for Heavy Exoskeletal Body Armor: A.R. 14, +60 S.D.C.

15 Bio-E for Detachable Limbs: A mutant crab can, at will, cause an arm or leg to break off at the joint. This process is painless for the character and the lost limb will be regrown in a few days.

10 Bio-E for Advanced Digestive System: A crab can eat just about anything, and the mutant variety is no different. Penalties for eating spoiled food are negated, plus the character receives a +4 bonus to save vs poisons/toxins.

5 Bio-E for Eye Stalks: Character has large eyes on stalks that can retract and move independently of each other.

5 Bio-E for Water Breathing.

Vestigial Disadvantages:

-15 Bio-E for Sideways Mobility: The mutant crab's limbs used for mobility are shaped differently than a human's, forcing the character to develop a side-walking gait. Not only does this look funny, but it means that any kind of movement action the character has to take will cost one more action than normal, due to the awkwardness of movement.

-15 Bio-E for Aquatic Respiratory System.

-5 Bio-E for Reptile Brain: Prey.

-10 Bio-E for Reptile Brain: Predator: Some crabs are so bad-tempered they will attack anything regardless of size.

-20 Bio-E for Hermit Crab Biology and Instinctive Drive: Character gets Medium Exoskeletal Body Armor with half the S.D.C. and A.R., and the back of the character will have a long tail-like structure with no armor on it at all. Character will instinctively either build an armored "shell" for itself, or hire an armorer to do it. This need for a shell is hard-wired into the character's brain and cannot be ignored, almost like obsessive-compulsive behavior. Unless the character possesses the skill to make a shell himself, this could get very expensive.

Shark

Original Animal Characteristics:

Description: The undisputed kings of the ocean food chain, sharks come in many different species, but all have three attributes in common. All they do is swim, eat, and make little sharks. The four most commonly known sharks are covered here.

Size Level: Great White: 21, Hammerhead: 20, Tiger: 20, Mako: 13.

Length: Great White: to 23 feet (7 m), Hammerhead: to 14 feet (4.2 m), Tiger: to 18 feet (5.5 m), Mako: to 8 feet (2.4 m).

Weight: Great White: over 4,000 lbs (1800 kg), Hammerhead: over 2,000 lbs (900 kg), Tiger: over 3,000 lbs (1350 kg), Mako: over 300 lbs (135 kg).

Build: Medium.

Mutant Changes & Costs:

Total Bio-E: Mako: 20, All others: 0.

Attribute Bonuses: Great White: +1 to I.Q., +15 to P.S., +10 to P.E., +5 to Spd. Hammerhead: +2 to I.Q., +5 to P.S., +5 to P.E., +5 to Spd. Tiger: +5 to P.S., +5 to P.E., +5 to Spd., +10 S.D.C. Mako: +2 to P.P., +3 to P.S., +2 to P.E., +15 to Spd.

Human Features:

Hands: None: A pair of fins used for swimming.

5 Bio-E for Partial: Fins become "lobe-fins," or fins on the ends of limbs. Stronger, more developed fins that branch apart at the end to form a non-opposable thumb.

10 Bio-E for Full: Fully developed arms. Fins branch apart in three places to form fingers and an opposable thumb.

Biped: None: No legs, just a tail for swimming and a pair of rear fins. Helpless on land, unless alternative means of movement can be found. If the character has arms then he will be able to drag himself on land at a speed of 1. Can swim ten times faster than other mutants.

5 Bio-E for Partial: Tail splits into a pair of legs. Character can now function on land by running on all fours, and will be most comfortable when on all fours. Will only stand up on the hind legs when necessary.

10 Bio-E for Full: Character gains a fully developed set of legs. Equal to human.

Speech: None.

5 Bio-E for Partial.

10 Bio-E for Full.

Looks: None: Looks exactly like the animal. Gigantic mouth filled with rows of sharp teeth. Small, black eyes. Prominent nose with large nostrils. Missile-shaped body with a large, triangular dorsal fin. Body color will be darker on the top and sides and lighter on the bottom.

5 Bio-E for Partial: Large, muscular humanoid. Huge mouth, noticeable snout, and large eyes. Dorsal fin reduced in size but still noticeable. Body coloration remains the same.

10 Bio-E for Full: Big nose. Large mouth with triangular, sharp teeth. Skin will be a darker color than the skin on the chest, stomach, and the front of the arms and legs. Skin will also be very rough to the touch. No body hair.

Natural Weapons:

5 Bio-E for 2D6 damage Teeth.

10 Bio-E for 4D6 damage Teeth.

10 Bio-E for Jaw Protrusion (must purchase Teeth). Allows the character to use P.S. bonuses in bite attacks.

Mutant Animal Powers:

Automatically gets Aquatic Swimming at 90% and Advanced Smell.

5 Bio-E for Advanced Hearing.

5 Bio-E for Advanced Taste.

5 Bio-E for Predator Burst.

5 Bio-E for Ampullae of Lorenzini: Detects the weak electrical fields given off by living creatures. Range is 5 feet (1.5 m), double underwater.

10 Bio-E for Lateral Line: Works as a motion detector. Character cannot be surprised as long as the attacker is within range of the system. Also adds +1 to parry and dodge. Range is 10 feet (3 m), double underwater.

10 Bio-E for Cartilage Skeleton: Gives the character a light-weight and flexible skeleton. Character will never suffer from a broken bone, and is +2 to roll with punch/fall, but is -10 to S.D.C.

5 Bio-E for Denticles: Character's skin is composed of thousands of tiny spikes. This adds +3 to damage for any hand to hand attack made by the character. Also adds a bonus of +25 to S.D.C.

10 Bio-E for Bestly Strength.

15 Bio-E for Crushing Strength.

5 Bio-E for Extra Speed.

10 Bio-E for Extra Physical Prowess.

15 Bio-E for Hammerhead Sensory Structure (Hammerhead only): Character's head looks like a big T, with the eyes and nostrils on each side of the top of the T. Doubles the range for Advanced Smell and grants the character the equivalent of Advanced Sight, but is -1 to strike with a long-ranged weapon.

5 Bio-E for Natural Camouflage (Tiger Shark only). +20% to Prowl.

10 Bio-E for Advanced Digestive System: Same as Crab.

Vestigial Disadvantages:

Automatically gets Predatory Bloodlust.

-10 Bio-E for Vestigial Aquatic Skin.

-10 Bio-E for Diet: Carnivore.

-15 Bio-E for Aquatic Respiratory System.

-10 Bio-E for Webbed Hands and Feet (only if character has Hands AND Feet).

Whale

Original Animal Characteristics:

Description: The largest mammals in the world, whales are adapted to underwater life. Their sheer size makes them difficult prey for most predators.

Size Level: Blue: 27, Humpback: 25, Sperm: 25, Killer: 22.

Length: Blue: to 100 feet (30.5 m), Humpback: to 52 feet (15.8 m), Sperm: to 60 feet (18.3 m), Killer: to 33 feet (10 m).

Weight: Blue: to 150 tons, Humpback: to 50 tons, Sperm: to 50 tons, Killer: to 6 tons.

Build: Blue: Long, Humpback: Medium, Sperm: Medium, Killer: Long.

Mutant Changes & Costs:

Total Bio-E: 0

Attribute Bonuses: +2 to I.Q., +2 to M.A., +5 to P.S. (Brute), +4 to P.E.

Human Features:

Hands: None: A big pair of flippers.

10 Bio-E for Partial: Develops a set of stubby arms and heavy, blunt fingers.

15 Bio-E for Full: Three-fingered, fully developed hands.

Biped: None: Has no legs, just flukes and a tail. Can pull itself along at a pathetic Spd. of 3, but can swim ten times faster than other mutants.

5 Bio-E for Partial: Tail splits into a set of small legs. Will walk on all fours most of the time, only standing when absolutely necessary.

10 Bio-E for Full: Fully developed legs. Full range of motion equal to human.

Speech: None.

10 Bio-E for Partial: Voice will be incredibly loud and high-pitched.

15 Bio-E for Full.

Looks: None: Looks exactly like the animal. Huge, powerful body bulging with muscle and fat. Skin will be smooth to the touch. Head will depend on the species. Killer whales will have a large dorsal fin.

5 Bio-E for Partial: The body changes to take on some human features. Large, flat nose with small dark eyes. Body will have large amounts of both fat and muscle. Smooth skin with coloration depending on species. Killer whales will still have a dorsal fin.

10 Bio-E for Full: Dark skin. Stocky body with noticeable fat deposits. Flat nose with small ears. Small, dark eyes with a strangely peaceful look in them, except for the killer whale.

Natural Weapons:

5 Bio-E for 1D6 damage Teeth (Sperm and Killer Whale only).

10 Bio-E for 2D6 damage Teeth (Sperm and Killer Whale only).

Mutant Animal Powers:

Automatically receives Hold Breath.

10 Bio-E for Insulating Blubber: Protects the character from extreme cold. Cold attacks do ½ damage, adds 30% to the character's total weight, and +20 to S.D.C.

5 Bio-E for Semi-Conscious Sleep: Character's sleep patterns are unique in that the character sleeps by entering a half-awake, half-asleep state. Can sense an attacker in close proximity when asleep, and can even walk at half speed when asleep.

5 Bio-E for Advanced Hearing.

10 Bio-E for Predator Burst (Sperm and Killer Whale only).

10 Bio-E for Sonar.

5 Bio-E for Internal Compass.

10 Bio-E for Extra P.E.

10 Bio-E for Bestly Strength.

20 Bio-E for Crushing Strength.

5 Bio-E for Aquatic Swimming at 75%.

5 Bio-E for Natural Singing Skill at 80%: Very pleasant to listen to.

Vestigial Disadvantages:

-15 Bio-E for Filter Feeder (Blue and Humpback Whale only). Instead of teeth, the character has a series of blades in the mouth made from keratin called baleen. In order to feed, the

character has to filter food out through a liquid form, such as soup, stew, or just a big gulp of water filled with food. The Cooking skill is a must for this type of character.

-10 Bio-E for Diet: Carnivore (Sperm and Killer Whale only).

-5 Bio-E for Reptile Brain: Predator (Sperm and Killer Whale only).

-10 Bio-E for Whalesong Voice: Everything the character says will be in a high-pitched, slow manner. The word "hello," becomes, "heeeeeelloooooo!!!" It will be impossible for the character to speak quietly, and this negates the Natural Singing Skill, or any skill requiring voice control for that matter.

-10 Bio-E for Webbed Hands and Feet (if character has Hands AND Feet).

Dolphin & Porpoise

Original Animal Characteristics:

Description: Dolphins and porpoises, like whales, are oceanic mammals. They form large social groups and are well known for their intelligence and playfulness.

Size Level: Dolphin: 19, Porpoise: 15.

Length: Dolphin: up to 12 feet (3.6 m), Porpoise: up to 7 feet (2.1 m).

Weight: Dolphin: up to 1,400 lbs (630 kg), Porpoise: up to 500 lbs (225 kg).

Build: Dolphin: Medium, Porpoise: Short.

Mutant Changes & Costs:

Total Bio-E: Dolphin: 0, Porpoise: 10.

Attribute Bonuses: Dolphin: +2 to I.Q., +1 to M.E., +2 to M.A., +1 to P.P., +2 to P.S., Porpoise: +1 to I.Q., +1 to M.A., +2 to P.P., +4 to Spd.

Human Features:

Hands: None: A big pair of flippers.

5 Bio-E for Partial: Develops a set of stubby arms and heavy, blunt fingers.

10 Bio-E for Full: Three-fingered, fully developed hands.

Biped: None: Has no legs, just flukes and a tail. Can pull itself along at a pathetic Spd. of 3, but can swim ten times faster than other mutants.

5 Bio-E for Partial: Tail splits into a set of small legs. Will walk on all fours most of the time, only standing when absolutely necessary.

10 Bio-E for Full: Fully developed legs. Full range of motion equal to human.

Speech: None.

5 Bio-E for Partial: Voice will be incredibly loud and high-pitched.

10 Bio-E for Full.

Looks: None: Looks just like the animal. The dolphin will have a larger and more pronounced snout than the porpoise.

5 Bio-E for Partial: The animal takes on some human traits. Gray skin with no external ears. Noticeable snout. Small dorsal fin. Large, dark eyes, smooth skin, and powerful, muscular body.

10 Bio-E for Full: Dark eyes, small ears, sharp teeth, and a large nose. Lean, powerful body. No body hair. Character will almost always have a playful expression.

Natural Weapons:

10 Bio-E for 2D6 damage Bottle-Nose. (Dolphin Only, cannot be combined with Full Human Looks. Used in head butts or ram attacks.)

5 Bio-E for 1D6 damage Teeth.

Mutant Animal Powers:

Automatically gets Hold Breath.

5 Bio-E for Aquatic Swimming at 80%.

10 Bio-E for Predator Burst.

10 Bio-E for Advanced Hearing.

10 Bio-E for Sonar. (Requires Advanced Hearing. Character suffers only half the penalty for blindness underwater. Note that murky water and adverse conditions can foul up Sonar.)

10 Bio-E for Radar (same as Sonar, but on land).

Vestigial Disadvantages:

-15 Bio-E for Aquatic Vestigial Skin.

-5 Bio-E for Reptile Brain: Predator.

-10 Bio-E for Reptile Brain: Prey.

-10 Bio-E for Diet: Carnivore.

Manta Ray & Stingray

Original Animal Characteristics:

Description: Rays are distant relatives to sharks. The stingray is well known for its distinctive stinging tail. This tail, while non-lethal, can cause pain and irritation to an unwary diver. The stingray's cousin, the gigantic and gentle manta, is known for being a harmless filter feeder. In the world of **After the Bomb®**, stingrays have a reputation for being aggressive and bad-tempered, while mantas have an very benign reputation.

Size Level: Manta: 20, Stingray: 4.

Length: Manta: Up to 22 feet (6.7 m) in diameter. Stingray: up to 7 feet (2.1 m) in diameter.

Weight: Manta: Up to 3,100 lbs (1395 kg). Stingray: Up to 750 lbs (337.5 kg).

Build: Medium.

Mutant Changes & Costs:

Total Bio-E: Manta: 0, Stingray: 70.

Attribute Bonuses: Manta: +5 to P.S., +3 to P.E. Stingray: +1 to P.P., +4 to Spd.

Human Features:

Hands: None.

5 Bio-E for Partial on the ends of the wings.

10 Bio-E for Full on the ends of the wings.

15 Bio-E for fully developed Extra Limbs. (Can swim with the wings and use a weapon at the same time.)

Biped: None: Has no legs (nor any kind of lower body), and will not be able to function outside of water. Will have to be either carried by another character or wheeled about in a wheelchair. Can swim ten times faster than other mutants.

15 Bio-E for Full: Develops a fully functional lower torso with a pair of humanoid legs.

Speech: None.

5 BIO-E for Partial.

10 BIO-E for Full.

Looks: None: Flat body with the mouth and nostrils/gills on one side, and the eyes on the other. The bottom will be stark white, while the top will range in color from light to tan to dark brown, or almost black. Character's body will have a folded look if developed into a biped. Body will be an ovular shape if a stingray, and the manta ray will be shaped like a kite with a pair of horn-like structures at the front of the head. Skin is smooth and slimy, due to a natural mucus the rays produce.

10 BIO-E for Partial: Develops a rough humanoid body structure with a distinctive head. Eyes will be large and dark, and the mouth will be a slit that can open twice as wide as normal. Mantas will have horn-like protrusions on the tops of their heads. Stingrays will have a tail, even if it possesses no stinger. Coloration remains the same, and the skin will still have the distinctive mucus coating.

Full Human Looks is NOT POSSIBLE.

Natural Weapons:

5 BIO-E for 1D6 damage Stinging Tail (Stingray only).

10 Bio-E for Venom Tail (must purchase Stinging Tail). When stung by the tail, character must save vs non-lethal poison or take an extra 2D6 damage and the area will be filled with burning pain. This inflicts penalties of -1 to strike, parry, and dodge.

Mutant Animal Powers:

5 Bio-E for Water Breathing.

10 Bio-E for Brute Strength.

15 Bio-E for Bestly Strength (Manta only).

5 Bio-E for Extra M.A.

10 Bio-E for Extra P.P.

5 Bio-E for Extra Spd.

5 Bio-E for Aquatic Swimming at 80%.

15 Bio-E for Gliding (Manta only).

15 Bio-E for Denticles (same as Shark).

10 Bio-E for Ampullae of Lorenzini: Detects the weak electrical fields given off by living creatures. Range is 5 feet (1.5 m), double underwater.

10 Bio-E for Skin Mucus: A special protective coating that makes the character immune to diseases or fungal agents that attack the skin.

Vestigial Disadvantages:

-10 Bio-E for Reptile Brain: Prey.

-5 Bio-E for Reptile Brain: Predator (Stingray only).

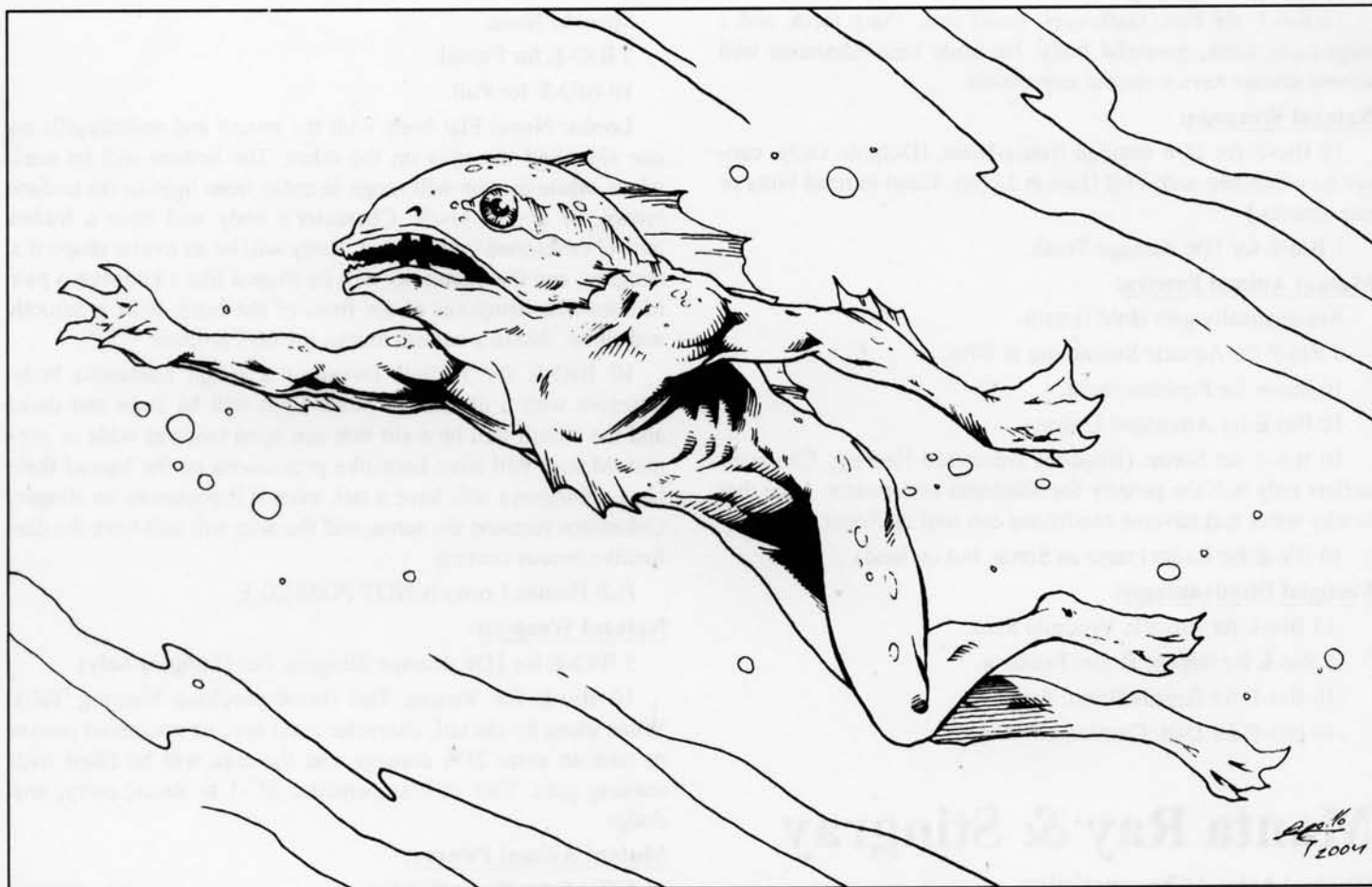
-10 Bio-E for Vestigial Aquatic Skin.

-15 Bio-E for Aquatic Respiratory System.

-10 Bio-E for Vestigial Tail (negates Stinging Tail for Stingrays).

-15 Bio-E for Vestigial Skin Mucus: Instead of being helpful, the coating is just a layer of slime, and actually makes the character susceptible to disease. -3 to save vs any diseases or fungi that attack the skin. (Straight rolls only, no bonuses, cannot take Skin Mucus.)

-15 Bio-E for Filter Feeder (same as Whale; Manta only).



Common Fish

Original Animal Characteristics:

Description: There are millions of different types of fish in the world. This is just a general guideline for creating a character based on a "typical" fish. Players and Game Masters should feel free to modify this animal template to suit their needs.

Size Level: 1-6, depending on species.

Length: From less than an inch (2.5 cm) to over 12 feet (3.6 m) in length.

Weight: From less than an ounce to hundreds of pounds.

Build: Medium.

Mutant Changes & Costs:

Total Bio-E: 70

Attribute Bonuses: None.

Human Features:

Hands: None: A pair of fins used for swimming.

5 Bio-E for Partial: Fins become "lobe-fins," or fins on the end of limbs. Stronger, more developed fins that branch apart at the end to form a non-opposable thumb.

10 Bio-E for Full: Fully developed arms. Fins branch apart in three places to form fingers and an opposable thumb.

Biped: None: No legs, just a tail for swimming and a pair of rear fins. Helpless on land, unless alternative means of movement can be found. If the character has arms then he will be able to drag himself on land at a speed of 1. Can swim ten times faster than other mutants.

5 Bio-E for Partial: Tail splits into a pair of legs. Character can now function on land by running on all fours, and will be most comfortable when on all fours. Will only stand up on the hind legs when necessary.

10 Bio-E for Full: Character gains a fully developed set of legs. Equal to human.

Speech: None.

5 Bio-E for Partial.

10 Bio-E for Full.

Looks: None: Looks like a big fish. Huge eyes on the sides of the head. Large mouth. Shiny scales. Will have fins running down the back and may have one on the chest and stomach. Coloration will depend on the species.

5 Bio-E for Partial: Develops a humanoid body structure. Facial features very fish-like, with round dark eyes, large mouth, and a pair of nostrils for a nose. Still covered in scales. Webbed hands and feet.

10 Bio-E for Full: Large eyes, big lips, and a button nose. Teeth will be small and pointed. Rough skin and no body hair. Lean, powerful body.

Natural Weapons:

5 Bio-E for 1D6 damage Bite.

Mutant Animal Powers:

Automatically get Aquatic Swimming at 80%.

5 Bio-E for Water Breathing.

10 Bio-E for Extra P.E.

5 Bio-E for Extra P.B.

- 10 Bio-E for Brute Strength.
- 10 Bio-E for Advanced Vision.
- 10 Bio-E for Night Vision.

Vestigial Disadvantages:

- 5 Bio-E for Reptile Brain: Predator.
- 10 Bio-E for Reptile Brain: Prey.
- 10 Bio-E for Prey Eyes.
- 15 Bio-E for Aquatic Vestigial Skin.
- 15 Bio-E for Aquatic Respiratory System.
- 10 Bio-E for Temperature Sensitivity.
- 5 Bio-E for Webbed Hands and Feet (only if character has Hands AND Feet).
- 5 Bio-E for Diet: Herbivore.
- 10 Bio-E for Diet: Carnivore.

New Genetic Chimeras, Throwbacks, and Purebreds

As mutant animals were being created in the Time Before the Crash, it was only inevitable that some people would get enjoyment out of watching them fight. Soon, underground arenas were created in cities all over the world, and many a wealthy patron would have a special mutant bred for the purposes of fighting in the arena. Some would even have entire "teams" of mutants.

The governments of the time attempted to outlaw these "New Games," but they were very popular and very profitable. Furthermore, a mutant animal had no clearly defined rights. Law enforcement had a very tough time trying to make any charges stick.

With money streaming in and governments unsure as to what to do about it, the underground arenas became a breeding ground for living engines of destruction. All kinds of warriors were produced. There is little doubt that species of mutants that seem designed for melee combat, such as the Allosauroid, Bantam, or Angus, found a place in the arenas.

After the Crash some of these creatures survived, and even managed to find a niche in this brave new world. Very few remember the arenas, but it is whispered that somewhere, deep in the territory of the Free Cattle, a place exists where warriors can go to prove their worth. It is also said that in this place, a number of questions about the origins of many of the purebred and chimera races can be answered...

Stone Lion (Genetic Chimera)

Original Animal Characteristics:

Description: Combining the might of the lion and the rhinoceros, the stone lion is a powerful example of what genetic tampering can create. An illegal mutant made for gladiatorial combat, the stone lion is a rarity in the world of **After the Bomb®**, as a massive campaign of extermination was conducted by the Empire of Humanity. This, in addition to being bred to fight and kill anything set against it, has led surviving members of the species to be paranoid and distrustful of any life, mutant or human.

Size Level: 14 (Min 12, Max 17).

Build: Medium.

Mutant Changes & Costs:

Total Bio-E: 15 (For Size Level, Biped, Horns, and Powers ONLY.)

Attribute Bonuses: +10 to P.S. (Brute), +1 to P.P., +15 to Spd., +20 S.D.C.

Penalties: -4 to I.Q., -6 to M.A., -2 to M.E.

Human Features:

Hands: Partial, ending in hooked, wicked-looking claws.

Biped: None.

10 Bio-E for Partial: Will still spend the majority of its time on all fours.

Speech: Partial: Voice sounds loud and rumbling, like thunder given speech.

Looks: None: Huge, lion-like body with wrinkled, gray skin and heavy armored plates on the shoulders, hips, and back. The head is that of a lion with large, noticeable fangs. May or may not have a horn extending from just above the nose. Males will have a shaggy mane of brown fur, and golden fur grows in patches on the chest, stomach, and back.

Natural Weapons:

Automatically get 3D6 damage Heavy Claws (Note: Not Retractable), and 2D6 damage Teeth.

5 Bio-E for 1D6 damage Nose Horn.

10 Bio-E for 2D6 damage Nose Horn.

Mutant Animal Powers:

Automatically gets Medium Natural Body Armor: A.R. 11, S.D.C. +40.

10 Bio-E for Heavy Natural Body Armor: A.R. 14, S.D.C. +60.

5 Bio-E for Advanced Smell.

10 Bio-E for Predator Burst.

10 Bio-E for Bestly Strength.

Vestigial Disadvantages:

Automatically receives Diet: Carnivore.

-10 Bio-E for Reptile Brain: Predator.

-10 Bio-E for Nearsightedness.



Pistolpine (Genetic Chimera)

Original Animal Characteristics:

Description: Another creation for the underground gladiatorial arenas, the Pistolpine combines the quills of the porcupine with the explosive power of the pistol shrimp. Most Pistolpines

try to eke out quiet lives amongst communities of normal mutant porcupines. However, it is difficult to hide their features from their fellow mutants.

Size Level: 10 (Min 8, Max 12).

Build: Short.

Mutant Changes & Costs:

Total Bio-E: 10 (For Powers and Size Level Only.)

Attribute Bonuses: +3 to P.P., +4 to Spd.

Human Features:

Hands: Partial.

Biped: Full.

Speech: Partial.

Looks: None: Looks very similar to a mutant porcupine, but with some major differences. The eyes will be mirror-smooth and glassy, all one solid color. There will also be strange patches of chalk white skin on the arms, legs, and chest. The character will have a set of feelers protruding from just below the nose, looking like a strange mustache. Characters will also smell "funny" to those with advanced smell. Even the character's quills will seem strange upon close inspection, as every quill has an odd-looking gland at the base. The character can pose as a "normal" mutant porcupine by wearing dark sunglasses, wearing clothing that covers up the patches of skin, and making the mouth feelers look like a mustache.

Natural Weapons:

See Advanced Quill Defense and Quill Tail, below.

Mutant Animal Powers:

Automatically gets Feelers that give the character the equivalent of Advanced Touch, and reduce the penalties for blindness by half.

Also gets Advanced Quill Defense: Like other mutant porcupines, the character has quills. However, the Pistolpine can actually shoot the quills from his body. It works by installing a gland found in the pistol shrimp at the base of each quill. This gland normally would create a sonic pulse, used to stun potential prey. In this case, the sonic charge is localized to an area of liquid beneath the quill, causing it to push upward with enough force to discharge the quill forcefully out of the body. The character can fire quills from the arms utilizing the W.P. Targeting Skill. Quills can be fired from other parts of the body, but receive no bonuses. Alternatively, all quills can be fired at once, spraying them in an area 25 feet (7.6 m) per level around the character. Range of individual quills is 50 feet (15.2 m) per level of experience. Damage is 1D6 per quill, and quills take 24 hours to grow back.

Automatically receives W.P. Targeting for free.

5 Bio-E for Advanced Vision.

5 Bio-E for Water Breathing.

15 Bio-E for Quill Tail: The tail of the character becomes longer and thicker, almost prehensile. The quills lining the tail also become much longer and sharper. The character can swing his tail like a spiked cudgel, sticking quills into an opponent. Quills can also be fired from the tail. Damage is 2D6 per quill.

Vestigial Disadvantages:

-10 Bio-E for Diet: Herbivore.

-10 Bio-E for Reptile Brain: Prey.

-10 Bio-E for Vestigial Tail (negates Quill Tail).

Flydragon

(Genetic Chimera)

Original Animal Characteristics:

Description: The purpose for this bizarre creature is unknown, but it is safe to say that the majority of these creatures should be avoided. The combination of reptilian and insect DNA has left them slightly... off. Thankfully, there are very few of these mutants, as they normally cannot stand one another, except to mate.

Size Level: 13 (Min 12, Max 17).

Build: Tall.

Mutant Changes & Costs:

Total Bio-E: 20

Attribute Bonuses: +10 to P.S. (Crushing), +10 to P.E., +12 to Spd.

Penalties: Reduce I.Q., M.A., and P.P. by half. Furthermore, the character can NOT have a scholarly mutation background.

Human Features:

Hands: Partial with insect wings on the back.

Biped: Partial.

Speech: Partial.

Looks: None: Looks like a large komodo dragon covered with plates of glittering chitin armor and a pair of compound eyes. Two pairs of insect wings sprout from the back, and has six reptilian legs. Has a long, powerful tail that may or may not end in a stinger. The mouth is full of teeth made of the same material as the armor, and hides a forked tongue.

Natural Weapons:

Automatically receives 2D6 damage Teeth and 3D6 damage Claws.

10 Bio-E for 3D6 damage Stinger Tail.

5 Bio-E for 1D6 damage Horns.

Mutant Animal Powers:

Automatically receives the following:

360 Degree Vision and Compound Eyes: The character sees the world much the same way a fly sees the world. This makes it impossible to sneak up on the character and gives him +2 to parry and dodge. However, this also makes literacy and other skills that require focused vision impossible. The character is also -1 to strike with ranged weapons.

Advanced Acrobatic Flight: Same as Acrobatic Flight, except that the character can stop on a dime, hover in the air, and carry half its maximum carry weight.

Extra Pair of Limbs: Grants the character +1 attack per melee and +1 to parry.

Heavy Exoskeletal Body Armor: A.R. 14, S.D.C. +60.

10 Bio-E for Extra P.P.

5 Bio-E for Predator Burst.

Vestigial Disadvantages:

Automatically receives Reptile Brain: Predator, Color Blindness and Diet: Carnivore.

-10 Bio-E for Vestigial Tail. (Note: Gives the same penalties for flight as a Vestigial Bird Tail.)

-10 Bio-E for Vestigial Horns.

Sasquatchi (Throwback)

Original Animal Characteristics:

Description: The Sasquatchi were the result of an illegal experiment using human DNA to find throwback genes. The results were considered to be too docile for the arena, so they were spliced with baboon DNA in order to increase natural aggression. Still, the Sasquatchi never quite lived up to the intentions of their creators. Most live solitary lives in the remote mountains. The colder the climate, the better.

Size Level: 14 (Min. 12, Max. 16).

Build: Tall.

Mutant Changes & Costs:

Total Bio-E: 20

Attribute Bonuses: +10 to P.S. (Beastly).

Human Features:

Hands: Partial: Heavy, ape-like paws.

5 Bio-E for Full.

Biped: Partial: Some of the Sasquatchi have difficulty walking upright for long periods of time, their body form will be much like a gorilla. They will walk on the knuckles and feet, but can stand upright for short periods of time.

5 Bio-E for Full.

Speech: Partial.

Looks: Partial: Tall, broad humanoid with long, heavy limbs. Sasquatchi are covered from head to toe in thick fur. They have so much fur that only the eyes, a soft yellow color, are visible.

Natural Weapons: None.

Mutant Animal Powers:

Starts out with insulating, water repellent fur. Keeps the character warm in even the worst weather. Cold does ½ damage, but the character will be miserable in extremely hot climates.

10 Bio-E for Crushing Strength.

5 Bio-E for Extra P.E.

5 Bio-E for Advanced Vision.

5 Bio-E for Prehensile Feet.

Vestigial Disadvantages:

-5 Bio-E for Diet: Herbivore.

-10 Bio-E for Reptile Brain: Predator. These mutants will be very aggressive and love combat. Will have a very hard time getting along with others.

Amoeboid (Chimera)

Original Animal Characteristics:

Description: Designed for their sheer randomness, Amoeboids were often considered the underdogs of the arenas. Only the most intelligent and creative of these strange mutants managed to survive the harshness of the underground arenas, and this is reflected in their attributes.

Size Level: 8 (Min 7, Max 10).

Build: Short.

Mutant Changes & Costs:

Total Bio-E: 30 (For Size Level and Powers ONLY.)

Attribute Bonuses: +2 to I.Q., +1 to M.E.

Penalties: -2 to P.S., -1 to P.P.

Human Features:

Hands: Pseudopods can function as Full Hands.

Biped: None: Stays like a puddle of goo most of the time, but can rear up to size level in height in order to interact with other mutants on a "face to face" level. Character will form a rough humanoid shape for these interactions, but it will only be a vague outline.

Speech: Partial (forms vocal cords from pseudopods).

Looks: None: A gelatinous blob-like creature with limited shape changing ability. Color varies depending upon what the character's first meal was. Whatever pigmentation that first meal had, the character's body will replicate, so color can be nearly anything imaginable.

Natural Weapons:

10 Bio-E for Weapon Pseudopods: Amoeboids can form crude weapons from their pseudopods. The damage from these extensions can range from 1D6 to 1D8, and can look like anything from blades to hammers.

Mutant Animal Powers:

Automatically receives the following powers:

Limited Shapeshifting and Malleability: The character is in a constant semi-liquid shape. He can pool himself into a puddle, be carried around in a bucket, and fit through very small openings (must be at least an inch/2.5 cm to work). He can also form numerous appendages from his body, working on several tasks at once.

Increased Healing: Character heals twice as fast as normal, and has no bones. Body is supported by a tough, but bendable membrane. Suffers no penalties due to broken bones or blood loss. The membrane immediately seals any cutting or piercing attacks.

Damage Reduction: All physical attacks do ½ damage. Cold based attacks do no damage at all. However, the character is vulnerable to fire and extreme temperature.

5 Bio-E for Extra I.Q.

5 Bio-E for Extra M.E.

15 Bio-E for Camouflage: Character has the ability to change color depending on the surroundings. This ability is limited to only a few colors, but confers +20% to Prowl and +30% to Concealment.

Vestigial Disadvantages:

Automatically receives Heat Sensitivity: The character's semi-liquid state means that he is vulnerable to heat and drying out. Character needs twice as much water as normal, and can not survive in very hot, dry places, such as a desert. Suffers damage due to heat exposure three times faster than normal. Fire and heat based attacks do double damage.

-5 Bio-E for Diet: Herbivore.

-10 Bio-E for Diet: Carnivore.

-10 Bio-E for Reptile Brain: Prey.

Smilago

(Purebred Rabbit)

Original Animal Characteristics:

Description: On a bet, a wealthy patron of the underground arenas was given a challenge. Take a normally harmless creature, in this case a rabbit, and turn it into a killing machine. Lab rabbits were taken and modified with hormones and fetal stimulation. The Smilago was the result, and this species was so successful in the arena that everyone involved in the games wanted to have at least one.

Size Level: 11

Build: Medium.

Mutant Changes & Costs:

Total Bio-E: 15

Attribute Bonuses: +2 to P.P., +10 to Spd.

Human Features:

Hands: Full.

Biped: Full.

Speech: Partial: Voice sounds growly, more like a lion's voice than a rabbit's.

Looks: None: Looks like a large rabbit, only leaner and more muscular. Fangs just barely stick out underneath the jowls, but will be readily apparent when the mutant bares his teeth. Sharp claws will be very noticeable, especially when extended. Will either be an albino with white fur and pink eyes, or will have jet black fur with light blue eyes.

Natural Weapons:

Automatically receives 1D6 damage Teeth and 2D6 damage Retractable Claws.

Mutant Animal Powers:

Automatically gets Leaping: Feline and Advanced Hearing.

10 Bio-E for Predator Burst.

5 Bio-E for Extra P.P.

5 Bio-E for Brute Strength.

5 Bio-E for Advanced Smell.

Vestigial Disadvantages:

Automatically receives Reptile Brain: Predator.

-5 Bio-E for Prey Eyes.

-10 Bio-E for Diet: Carnivore.

Loylans

(Genetic Chimera)

Original Animal Characteristics:

Description: Designed to keep the mutant gladiators in line, Loylans were also used as bodyguards and sometimes ended up as gladiators themselves, much to the delight of the mutants they normally policed. The creatures are a mixture of several different hive insects and human DNA. They are genetically programmed to recognize humans as their superiors. After the

Crash, Loylans banded together with other humans in what was once Las Vegas, Nevada. Together they have created a small, but strong outpost for humanity.

Size Level: 6 (Min 5, max 7, designed to be compact for ease of travel).

Build: Short.

Mutant Changes & Costs:

Total Bio-E: 10

Attribute Bonuses: +4 to M.E., +1 to P.S., +5 to P.E.

Human Features:

Hands: Partial: Large, three-fingered hands. They are not designed to use any other weaponry aside from their claws.

Biped: Full.

Speech: Full: Will have a very proper accent. Pleasant to listen to.

Looks: Partial: Looks like a very short robot covered in sleek, organic body armor. The armor is the character's exoskeleton and is made from very dense chitin. The face appears as a seamless plate with a flap at the bottom that opens to reveal the mouth opening and long tongue for lapping up nectar and insects. The head appears to be helmeted, and the eyes are featureless black lenses. Loylans look very mechanical and have almost no emotional expression on their faces, which is why many mistake them for robots at first. Colors range from metallic silver to a dull gray.

Natural Weapons:

None (see Psionic Claws).

Mutant Animal Powers:

Automatically gets Psionic Claws and Medium Exoskeletal Body Armor: A.R. 11, +40 S.D.C.

10 Bio-E for Brute Strength.

10 Bio-E for Extra P.P.

5 Bio-E for Predator Burst.

5 Bio-E for Prehensile Tongue: The tongue is longer and stronger than normal, and can be used as a Partial Hand.

Vestigial Disadvantages:

Automatically gets Domestication and Diet: Insectivore.

-15 Bio-E for Subservience: Equivalent to Dog.

Constrictors (Purebred Snake)

Original Animal Characteristics:

Description: Created to be deadly and beautiful, audiences cheered at the sight of a Constrictor squeezing the life out of an opponent. Today, many of these mutants hire themselves out as mercenaries, where their incredible reflexes and naturally quiet movements are of great benefit.

Size Level: 13

Build: Long.

Mutant Changes & Costs:

Total Bio-E: 15

Attribute Bonuses: +7 to P.S. (Brute), +1 to P.P., +6 to P.B.

Human Features:

Hands: Full.

Biped: None: Crawls around on its belly. Character can rear up to its size level in height. Maximum movement is 1/2 the character's Spd.

Speech: Full: But will have a forked tongue.

Looks: Partial: Humanoid upper body with a snake-like lower body. Upper body is very human-looking, and the head even has hair (modified scales). However, eyes will be snake-like, and the body is covered in fine scales. Will have a diamond-back pattern going down the back. Coloration is usually bright, combining red and blue, red and yellow, yellow and green, blue and green, or red and black. Strangely beautiful and deadly in appearance.

Natural Weapons:

Automatically receives Constrictive Body Muscles: With a successful grappling move, the character can wrap around an opponent and flex powerful muscles located throughout the body. Damage is 1D6 per melee attack, plus P.S. bonuses. The victim is helpless to move, and it takes a combined P.S. of either three times the constricting character's P.S., or double if the ones trying to free their comrade have Crushing Strength. The victim must also roll to save vs passing out (15 or higher, P.E. bonuses included).

Mutant Animal Powers:

Automatically receives Prehensile Tail: Functions as a Partial Hand, and can be used to aid in constriction.

10 Bio-E for Predator Burst.

15 Bio-E for Advanced Prehensile Tail: Tail develops three separate branches, each very strong and flexible. Functions as a Full Hand, and can be used to hold weapons and perform tasks without penalty.

10 Bio-E for Lightning Reflexes: Character can move with incredible quickness. +4 to Initiative, +2 to Strike, Parry, and Dodge.

Vestigial Disadvantages:

-10 Bio-E for Reptile Brain: Predator.

-10 Bio-E for Diet: Carnivore.

-10 Bio-E for Vestigial Tail (negates Prehensile Tail).

-5 Bio-E for Color Blindness.

Behemoth (Genetic Chimera)

Original Animal Characteristics:

Description: This combines a number of naturally armored creatures into one gigantic beast. Designed for size, strength, and a sheer impressive presence, these mutants were frequently pitted against several opponents at once.

Size Level: 16 (Min 15, Max 20).

Build: Long.

Mutant Changes & Costs:

Total Bio-E: 20

Attribute Bonuses: +10 to P.S (Crushing), +15 to P.E., +10 to Spd.

Penalties: -4 to I.Q., -2 to M.A., -2 to P.P.

Human Features:

Hands: Partial.

Biped: Partial.

Speech: Full.

Looks: None: A massive creature with vaguely reptilian features. Large, blunted snout filled with flat teeth. Has gold eyes that are large and round. A crown of small, blunt horns point backward, three on one side and three on the other. Heavy, powerful body similar to a dinosaur. Body color ranges from dull brown to bright green, and is covered with armored plates that are always one shade darker in color than the rest of the body.

Natural Weapons:

Automatically receives 2D6 damage Slashing Tail.

15 Bio-E for Spiny Armor: A hand to hand attack that falls under the character's Natural A.R. will connect with a set of spines growing out of the Behemoth's natural armor. The attacker will take 1D6 damage.

Mutant Animal Powers:

Automatically receives Heavy Natural Body Armor: A.R. 14, S.D.C. +60.

5 Bio-E for Digging: Surprisingly, Behemoths are wonderful diggers.

10 Bio-E for Tunneling.

5 Bio-E for Extra Physical Prowess.

Vestigial Disadvantages:

Automatically get Diet: Herbivore.

-5 Bio-E for Diet: Ruminant.

-5 Bio-E for Prey Eyes.

-10 Bio-E for Vestigial Tail (negates Slashing Tail).



Fractures

Part Two of a Short Story for Heroes Unlimited™

A Sequel to Fallen Angels, appearing in The Rifter® #27

By K.G. Carlson

A chilly breeze whispered through the trees, a hint of the approaching autumn shaking the rainwater of last night's deluge free. Birds hopped about the many puddles in the grass, feasting on the worms stranded above their earthly homes. Shadows raced across the ground as fast moving clouds passed before the sun. The wind tugged at the canvas walls of a recently erected enclosure. A priest's voice droned on, performing last rites for a departed soul.

Brandon Hawthorne did not see, hear, or feel any of those things; he was consumed by an endless aching void. His empty eyes stared listlessly at the coffin before him, concealing the broken and lifeless shell of his beloved Angelica.

Behind him, huddled together at the rear of the shelter, stood his recent companions. The red-haired Sutherland sisters, Linda and Lori, leaned against one another for support. The young mutant Jesse Wolfe and the normally armored Richard Bailey fidgeted in borrowed suits while the hulking form of Rocky Caparzo loomed over them, head grazing the wind-battered canvas ceiling.

A short distance from the covered grave site, Brandon's father, David, stood with an attractive, young blonde woman near the helicopter that had carried the mourners to this secluded glade in the rolling acreage of the Hawthorne estate, several miles north of Wrightsburg. Whether by accident of birth, miracle of science, or years of intense training, these six individuals and their lost comrade stood apart from the rest of the world.

Rick tugged at his collar for what must have been the hundredth time, looking up at the uncovered mountain, code-named Armadillo. He'd been tempted to wear his more familiar garb, a non-reflective black armor suit, using Rocky as justification. But he realized that would not be respectful to the others, and had grudgingly allowed himself to be fitted with a borrowed suit.

Still, it could be worse; poor Jesse seemed to have been hit with a shrink ray. His fingertips were barely visible at the ends of his sleeves and there was room for another neck to share collar space. Not that he appeared to mind. His gaze was glued to the scantily clad form of Lori Sutherland. Rick delivered another nudge with his elbow to remind him it's not polite to gawk at women while attending a funeral.

The priest finished his sermon, looking to the young man standing forlorn at the foot of the casket. Brandon remained oblivious to his surroundings, and so the minister looked to the other mourners. They clustered around their grieving friend protectively.

An awkward silence followed, and while they waited, David Hawthorne and his attractive young companion came to stand at the edge of the pavilion as well. They'd nearly entered when the familiar trill of a cell phone rang out. Frowning, David removed the device from his pocket and answered. Eyes widening in shock, he spun quickly away and walked a short distance from the proceedings, leaving his escort somewhat bewildered and alone at the grave site.

Lori stepped in on Brandon's left side and laid a hand upon his forearm. Other than the customary color of mourning, her garb seemed wholly inappropriate for a funeral. The slim black dress was cut dangerously low in both front and back. Had she been less intent on Brandon, she might have noted the cross



looks her sister had been shooting her all morning. Looking earnestly into his vacant eyes, she implored, "I'm here for you if you need me, Brandon. I mean, *we're* here. You're not alone. Let us help you."

He seemed to stare right through her, features slack and lifeless. At first Lori was unsure he'd even heard her plea, but a moment later fresh tears slid down his sallow cheeks. She wrapped her arms around the grieving young man in a hug he did not return. For several minutes the world seemed to stop.

Finally, Rocky broke the silence. "Brandon," he began. Waiting briefly for a reaction, he beckoned again. "C'mon, buddy; it's time to go home."

Rick and Jesse exchanged uncomfortable glances; words were meaningless at a time like this, even among family and old acquaintances. Most of them had only met a few weeks ago, and friendship had not come easily for some. Rick had only yesterday made serious efforts to befriend Brandon at the urging of his mentor and grandfather, the first man to wear the Frenzy battle armor.

Brandon's father slipped his phone into a pocket and approached the mourners. Preoccupied, they failed to note his ashen expression. The elder Hawthorne nodded to the priest, who activated the mechanism that began lowering the casket into the freshly dug grave beneath it. Brandon's knees buckled and Rocky swept a massive limb forward to catch him. Finally tearing his gaze away from Angelica's coffin, he allowed himself to be led to the waiting helicopter. Seeing his passengers approaching, the pilot began the start up procedures. The engine whined to life as the rotor blades spun a lazy circuit overhead, slowly building momentum.

Falling into step with the passing group, David Hawthorne addressed his son. "The headstone should be arriving late this afternoon." He paused, frowning, unsure of what to say. "I'm sorry, Brandon."

Brandon nodded absently in a vague acknowledgment. He moved like an automaton to the waiting aircraft, waiting silently as Armadillo boarded first and seated himself in the center to avoid unbalancing the vehicle. Once all the passengers were aboard, the pilot brought the rotors to full power, spraying the helicopter with water and mud from the storm soaked ground. With audible strain, the 'copter rose slowly from the ground and glided gracefully over the wooded acreage of the Hawthorne estate.

* * *

Ron Leisner sat up with a groan, hand shielding his eyes from the shaft of hazy sunlight filtering through the dirty window pane. A heavy odor of mold and dead rodents assaulted his senses next as he propped himself up on his elbows. Without leaving the comfort of the lumpy mattress flopped onto the dirty floor of the otherwise empty room, his left arm stretched across the distance to the window and lowered the blind.

As his eyes adjusted to the acceptable level of light and his arm returned to normal dimensions, Ron gingerly tested his right leg. There was still a twinge of pain present. Despite his elastic nature, it had been broken yesterday when an unexpected convulsion had gripped Minion, a villainous cohort who'd been riding in the passenger seat of the truck Ron was driving. Min-

ion's supernatural strength had wrecked both his leg and the truck.

After using his stretching abilities to immobilize the broken limb, he'd hobbled back to this run-down building that had served as the first beachhead for the Brimstone Syndicate's invasion of Wrightsburg. The journey had been made more difficult by the incoherent mental state of Minion following his strange seizure.

Lord Brimstone, unquestioned leader of the Syndicate, had already been there when they'd arrived, the monstrous Zaborr looming menacingly at his side. The new headquarters, located at the airport, had been destroyed in a fiery blast. Minion had left four of his duplicates there; perhaps it had been their deaths that had caused his breakdown.

Fortunately for Ron, he'd worked for Lord Brimstone before, and the demonic crime lord thought highly of his skills as an operative. Therefore, despite his obvious rage, the Syndicate leader used his awesome magical powers to heal the injured leg. A painful twinge reminded him that the healing had not been complete. Only a fool would ask for more than the dark lord deigned to give.

He stumbled into the cramped bathroom and stood under the scorching spray of the shower until the water turned cool. Rejuvenated somewhat, he dried himself quickly with a frayed towel before donning his scaled costume. He smiled at his reflection in the dingy mirror before exiting his borrowed room and descending the stairs.

As he reached the bottom of the stairs, a familiar voice called out, "Hey, Anaconda! Can ya help me out?"

It had come from a small room to the right of the stairwell. Recognizing the caller but unable to see him for the crowd of people at the door, Ron approached. Stretching his neck a bit, he could see two men in identical black bodysuits with a spiky blue 'M' at the far side of the room. The crowd of toughs at the doorway were brandishing an armory's worth of automatic weapons.

One of the gunsels turned to Anaconda and said with a frown, "These two stay here. Boss's orders."

Almost in unison, the twins cried out, "Anaconda! What happened to father? These goons won't tell us anything."

Anaconda reasoned that these two must be surviving duplicates of Minion, kept in isolation for some reason. Despite the array of ordnance pointed at them, both seemed much more lucid than the original when Ron had last seen him.

"I don't know what's wrong with your, uh, 'father,'" he answered. "But it might be a good idea if you stay right here."

"We don't matter," the duplicate on the left insisted. "Only father matters." The other nodded his assent.

Anaconda shrugged, not that the Minions could see it behind their guards. "I'll see what I can do. Meantime, you guys sit tight and don't do nothin' stupid, ok?"

The twins agreed reluctantly, and Anaconda left the make-shift cell and proceeded towards the central region of the abandoned distribution warehouse. There appeared to be a small gathering near a fairly large metallic chamber. What had once been a refrigeration unit had hastily been modified to provide the opposite.

Pacing back and forth before the chamber, Zaborr glared from his single enormous eye at the assembly of humans nearby.

His twin tails twitched angrily as they trailed behind him on the concrete floor, and the massive bat-like wings folded against his back rustled occasionally. Violet striping scarred the four muscular arms of the twelve foot tall blue monstrosity. Anaconda wondered nervously if the beast ever slept.

Much closer to Anaconda was a motley collection of ordinary humans. These unpowered criminals had been some of the earliest recruits of the Brimstone Syndicate. Ron knew this because Lord Brimstone had contacted him months ago, seeking information on the local outlaws. After compiling a list of targets, the Syndicate had begun their assault on the super-powered beings in Wrightsburg. While everyone's attention had been focused on the flashy combats and high profile murders of the costumed crowd, the ordinary crime infrastructures of the city had been quietly subsumed by the outsiders. Neither the media, the police, or even the remaining super heroes had a clue as to how deeply entrenched the Brimstone Syndicate was in Wrightsburg.

As they talked among themselves, their attention was frequently drawn to the stalking nightmare guarding the heat chamber. They seemed unaware of Anaconda's approach.

"He's for real," one of them was saying. "I mean, you shoulda' heard the racket."

"I was goin' in to make sure the fire was still lit, 'cause you guys remember what he said last night, don'tcha? 'If that fire dies, you will follow shortly.'"

The speaker paused briefly to shudder. "Anyways, I'm creepin' in, quiet as can be. Don't wanna wake him up, ya know. So, I'm almost to the fireplace, sweatin' like crazy when I hear it. I thought maybe I was goin' crazy or somethin'. But I set down the firewood real careful so's not to make any noise. I sneak over to the bed, and I couldn't really see anything 'cause there's this *huge* pile of blankets on 'im. I get right up beside the bed before I see him, and sure enough his teeth are chattering like a wind chime in a hurricane."

He paused, making eye contact with each member of his audience, daring any of them to dispute his claim. "It was so hot I nearly passed out. I musta sweated off 30 pounds, and he was *freezin'*. He must be the Devil. Ain't no doubt."

Engrossed in the story, all were unaware of Anaconda until he strode among them. The assembled thugs jumped a foot in the air, and some took off running when they landed. Most relaxed visibly when they recognized Anaconda. Super villains, mere mortals after all, didn't seem nearly as frightening as they had several months ago.

"Is Lord Brimstone awake yet?" the snake man queried.

The henchman who'd been speaking as Anaconda approached answered. "Yeah, Joey was going in ta stoke the fire when he woke up. From the smell I'd say poor Joey had to get some fresh drawers."

Shaking his head in disgust, Ron Leisner strode toward the heat chamber. Zaborr thundered over to stand before the door, all four arms flexed in a fearsome display of strength. A low, bestial growl rumbled forth, and Anaconda quickly backpedaled a few steps. He resigned himself to waiting.

* * *

The helicopter settled to earth behind a sprawling mansion. The somber party disembarked and descended the steps from the helipad and followed the walkway into the carefully manicured gardens before entering the house.

Rick Bailey's teeth ground in barely repressed rage at the decadent wealth on display. Last evening he'd made a promise to his grandfather, the first man to don the armor of Frenzy. It was wrong to hate someone because they had material wealth. But to bear witness to such wasteful opulence as he saw displayed here was more than he could tolerate. In his mind he pictured the dozens of families from his old neighborhood who could live well on the riches adorning a single room of this palace of the capitalist elite.

He satisfied the letter of his oath by transferring his loathing. After all, it was hardly Brandon's fault if he'd been born to this life. His father, on the other hand, could have and should have shared his good fortune. Frenzy's eyes narrowed and his nostrils flared when he thought of the families on 2nd Street who'd be huddled together for warmth beneath several layers of blankets this winter and scrounging their pennies to put food on the table.

Needing an outlet for his frustration, he nudged Brandon with his elbow as the group entered the patio where a large table was set up with refreshments for the wake. He asked quietly, "Does it bother you that you graduated from school before your new mom?"

Rick gestured with his chin, indicating the young blond companion attached to Brandon's father's arm. Brandon remained in his withdrawn state, taking no notice. Rick looked over his shoulder at the rest of the team to see an almost universal glare at his audacity. He shrugged dramatically, unrepentant.

David Hawthorne turned to regard the mourners. He gestured at the table laden with victuals and the plush furniture scattered about the spacious sunroom. "Make yourselves comfortable. If you need anything, Ludmilla will be more than happy to get it for you. When you're finished, the chopper will take you back to headquarters."

The elder Hawthorne and his attractive escort entered the house. Armadillo sat upon the floor, not trusting the furniture to withstand his massive frame. Young Jesse seemed enthralled by the large screen television. Brandon avoided looking at the others and when his father had cleared the doorway, he also entered the house. He passed an elderly woman in a housemaid's garb who looked worriedly after the young man. Frowning, Rick followed him into the house. Lori decided not to let the food go to waste and approached the table. Her sister, Linda, stepped quickly to her side and tugged sharply at her elbow.

"What is *wrong* with you?" she hissed in a low, angry voice.

Lori glared at her sibling. "Ouch! What's your problem?" She jerked her arm free violently.

"For starters, what's with that dress? Are you insane? This was Angelica's funeral, and you're dressed for a night of clubbing. I'm surprised you didn't ask Brandon if he was here with anybody!"

Lori's green eyes rolled in disgust, accompanied by a scornful snort. Tossing her wavy red hair back over her shoulder, she turned away from Linda and began loading her plate. "Don't take it out on me, little sister, if you've finally realized you're the frumpiest looking super heroine in the world. This was the only black dress I had, so get over it.

"And whatever you may think of me, I care about Brandon. A lot. He needs someone right now, and it could be me. It should be me. He needed to hear that."

"Are you *really* that selfish?" Linda demanded. "Everyone could see how much she meant to him. To be throwing yourself at him during the funeral is low, even for you."

Lori rounded on her sister, looking her up and down. The physical resemblance was undeniable, right down to matching hair and eyes. For all that, she seemed not to recognize who or what she was looking at. "Is that jealousy I hear? It's not my fault if you run and hide every time a man says 'hi' to you. If you want to be a scared and lonely woman for the rest of your life, like Mom, that's your business. I've learned that if you want something, you'd better go get it. 'Good things come to those who wait' is the biggest crock I've ever heard. Seize the day, little sister."

She stalked away from Linda, whose expression was a mixture of shock and hurt. Embarrassed, the younger Sutherland surveyed the spacious patio area to see if anyone had witnessed the altercation. Rocky seemed lost in thought, and Jesse was flipping through channels on the large television. She quickly gathered a small plate of food and retreated to a plush chair in the corner.

* * *

Rick trailed Brandon through the cavernous corridors of the Hawthorne estate. David and the flavor of the week had long since disappeared. Brandon trod wearily through a doorway to the right.

Having lost sight of his quarry, Rick hastened to close the distance. Crossing the threshold, he found Brandon collapsed upon a couch. Several other pieces of furniture circled a large coffee table. Beyond the seating area a grand piano sat near the far wall. Sunlight streamed in through immense windows. On the opposite wall stood a massive trophy case.

Curious, Rick approached the shelves. Contained behind the glass that reflected his ebony skinned countenance were numerous awards and photographs, all devoted to Brandon's accomplishments. Most were wrestling trophies from an East Ridge Academy. Frenzy guessed that to be the name of Brandon's prep school. At first glance it seemed too large a number for one person to have achieved, but the pictures explained much. The earliest photos showed a very young Brandon Hawthorne, perhaps eight or nine years old, and progressed upward to the late teens.

"So this is the shrine of Saint Bastion, eh?" he quipped, looking over his shoulder to see if there was any response. There wasn't. "I see you and spandex go back a long way. Do they give you a bulk rate discount?" Still nothing.

Changing tactics, he strode over to drop into a chair facing Brandon's slouched form. Leaning forward and uncharacteristically serious, he said, "Talk to me, man. Like last night, on the museum roof, remember that? Don't shut down."

Rick waited for a while, futilely. He exhaled loudly in frustration. "This isn't doing you any good. If you won't talk to me, fine. But you need to let somebody in.

"How 'bout Lori? She's practically beggin', man. I'm not saying you have to marry her or anything, but she might be just

what the doctor ordered to take your mind off of things. She can be nerve-wracking, sure. But there's nothin' wrong with her that a good rap in the teeth won't cure."

Dry lips parted and Brandon croaked in a barely audible voice, "Leave me alone."

"Whatever, man." Rick fairly leaped up from the chair, shaking his head angrily. "Must be a two for one deal on funerals today."

Brandon showed no further reaction as Frenzy stormed out. Rick considered the possibility that perhaps last night the shock of events was still too fresh, and perhaps Brandon was only now feeling the full weight of loss. Nevertheless, Rick Bailey was finally ready to be a team player, and the group's leader was falling apart. An idea sparked in Frenzy's mind, and suddenly that didn't seem like such a bad thing after all.

* * *

With a metallic clank, the door opened to Lord Brimstone's private chamber. The red-skinned crime lord strode forth, a device at his ear. Outwardly it appeared to be a cellular phone, but only the outer casing was of Earthly manufacture. The main components were from "Lucifer's" native planet of Shia, and capable of functioning in the tremendous heat the horned natives required to survive.

"Yes, I've already spoken with him this morning," he was saying as he closed the door with a clank. "It seems our newest business partner will need some special motivation."

Comforted by the presence of the hulking Zaborr, he almost failed to notice the scaly costumed henchman lurking nearby. He motioned him forward as he concluded his call. "No, don't do anything until I return to the coast. Yes, send the other plane immediately. I expect to be airborne by this afternoon."

Lucifer slipped the device into the pocket of his voluminous coat. He'd renewed his protection from cold enchantment after awakening frigid, but wore additional layers for personal comfort. "Yes, Anaconda, what is it?"

The elastic super villain stepped forward and bowed. "Lord Brimstone, I was wondering what we should do now that the new headquarters and drug lab are destroyed?"

The alien con man frowned thoughtfully. The loss of the specially designed hideout had angered him, but the Sprekalian who knew how to manufacture the drug Powerball had eventually turned up, along with the arrogant Kassan who'd become somewhat troublesome of late. But those concerns paled in comparison to a discovery Lord Brimstone had made last evening while surveying his new city with Zaborr.

"A momentary delay, my loyal servant," he intoned. "I have an eternity to punish those responsible, and we'll be back up to speed in a short time."

Anaconda shifted nervously. Lucifer regarded him coolly. "Was there something else, Anaconda?"

"Uh, well, yes Lord Brimstone," he answered stammeringly. "I noticed that two Minions were under armed guard on my way here this morning, and I just wondered what you were planning to do about him."

The Shissan mage was unsure what to make of Anaconda's curiosity. He was still unclear why he'd not been at the new headquarters when it had exploded. The snake-themed gangster had stammered an excuse and his babbling companion had been completely incoherent. Not that Lucifer wished him dead, far from it. Five years ago, Anaconda had needed some high paying jobs to repay the Fabricator for a costume that stretched with his elastic powers. Lord Brimstone had found numerous uses for the amateur super villain. He'd been ecstatic to find a trusted henchman already in residence when the Syndicate targeted Wrightsburg for assimilation into its network.

"Yes, what to do with Minion," he countered warily. "I've ordered his two remaining duplicates kept under guard. The original seems determined to reabsorb them for their protection, but I can't help but note that they seem untouched by his lunacy. I have several experiments in mind to restore Minion to a useful state."

Anaconda seemed to accept that at face value. Lord Brimstone motioned for him to follow, and they walked briskly for the far side of the complex. Heavy footfalls behind reported loyal Zaborr trailing them.

In a few moments they arrived at a small chamber guarded by gun toting thugs. They stepped quickly aside, one opening the door for the approaching party. Chained to a most likely stolen hospital gurney was the true Minion. His supernatural strength could easily have snapped the chains, but he had no reason to try.

Anaconda noted with pity the trail of drool staining the costume of the deranged outlaw. While not the sharpest tool in the shed, they'd gotten along alright. Not like that little freak Subjugator. Anaconda was glad the sick little monster had gone up in flames at the airport explosion.

Lucifer sent one of the guards with instructions to bring one of Minion's duplicates back. In the few minutes that it took to do so, the original remained unaware of the company waiting in his room.

Light returned to Minion's vapid stare upon spying one of his children. In a flash, the duplicate disappeared and his now empty costume fluttered to the ground.

Lord Brimstone locked gazes with the restrained man, but stayed carefully out of reach. Those chains would not hold him for long should he decide to break free. He noted that Minion seemed slightly more aware, and more lucid since absorbing his duplicate.

"Minion," the Shissan entreated. "Re-create yourself."

"N-n-nooooooooooooo!" The denial started as a low moan and ascended rapidly to a high-pitched scream. He shuddered tremendously but did not burst his bonds.

"Minion," Lord Brimstone repeated, a dangerous edge underlining his voice. "You *will* produce a clone, or Zaborr will get to play with your last surviving offspring."

The towering monstrosity obligingly ripped one of the bed rails free from the gurney and with no more difficulty than a normal human folding up a drinking straw, twisted it into a series of knots. The mangled metal rang loudly as he dropped it to the floor.

Whimpering pathetically, Minion's eyes screwed shut in concentration. A moment later, a naked duplicate appeared atop the

crumpled costume that it had recently inhabited. It collapsed immediately to the floor, gibbering inanely.

"Well, that was useless," Lucifer said, frowning. The racket of the two lunatics wailing was grating on his nerves. "Alright, Minion, you may take him back now."

The naked clone disappeared as quickly as he'd arrived. The Minion strapped in the bed sobbed quietly to himself. Lucifer exited the chamber, ordering that the madman be sedated until further notice.

* * *

Just as Rick was returning to the patio of the Hawthorne mansion, Rocky happened to spy a familiar face on the rapidly changing tv screen. He called out to Jesse, "Hold up, Jaunt! That's Bastion."

Jesse's finger darted from the channel selector to the volume control, and the news anchorwoman's voice boomed from the speakers.

"— young hero operating in Wrightsburg for over two years, known as Bastion. Police are seeking him in relation to last night's devastating explosion at Wright's International Airport. We take you live at the scene with Bill Hereford."

The scene switched to a middle-aged man clutching a microphone in what looked like a war zone. In the background, clean-up crews worked wearily to remove the wreckage. To the right stood a grim-faced man in power armor, clutching his helmet in the crook of his left arm.

"Thank you, Renee. I'm here with Captain Jonas Hunter of the local Superbeing Control Retrieval and Elimination Team, or S.C.R.E.T. They've combed the ruins thoroughly for clues since the explosion late last night out here at Hangar 17. Clean-up crews have only begun work in the last hour or so, now that all the evidence has been extensively catalogued.

"Captain Hunter, can you offer any insight into what would cause someone previously lauded as a local hero to turn bad on such a destructive scale?"

The armor clad law officer frowned at the newsman's assumption before answering in a gravelly voice, "To be honest, Bill, we don't know what part Bastion may have played in the events that transpired here last night. But fleeing the scene is not indicative of innocence, and seems out of character.

"At this point there are too many unknowns. Officers on the scene noted that he carried away a body from the site."

Trying a different angle, the interviewer queried, "Is there any indication of what caused such a massive blast?"

Captain Hunter shifted position, clearly uncomfortable talking to the media. Naturally, the camera zoomed in. "Well, lab results are inconclusive at this time. There are several residues that we can't yet identify."

The camera zoomed back out. Bill Hereford brought the conversation back around to his original line of questioning. "So, until Bastion surrenders or is brought in, he's your only witness to what happened?"

"Well, rescue teams did recover one survivor, though he's badly burned and may not recover consciousness. So we're really hoping that Bastion will continue to cooperate with law enforcement as he has in the past..."

Something off screen captured Captain Hunter's attention, and he trotted off in the middle of his interview. Bill recovered quickly and smiled into the camera. "That's all for now from ground zero. Back to you, Renee."

The screen changed to the anchorwoman back at the tv station. "Thanks, Bill. We'll have sports and weather, when we return."

Jesse thumbed the power button, and a moment of silent contemplation passed as the five heroes considered the news report. Slowly they gathered together near Armadillo.

Seeing an opportunity to seize the reins, Rick interjected, "You know the bad guys are gonna make a try for that survivor. We gotta case the hospital, starting tonight."

Jesse's eyes lit up. "Yeah, we can each take a shift. I can —"

"Whoa there, sparky," Rick interrupted. "Nobody raised the curfew for teen sidekicks, and last night's rumble in the jungle shoulda' made it clear that there's no room in this game for beginners."

Jesse clenched his fists in impotent fury and complained, "What a load of crap! Who here could do a better job of sneaking in than me? With my powers —"

Frenzy cut him off again. "Oh yeah, and what fine control you have over those powers, too. I seem to recall you blinked all over town last night."

"Hey, it's tough to visualize someplace you've never been to," Jesse whined defensively. "Line of sight's a whole 'nother story. C'mon, Frenzy, gimme a break. I can do this!"

Rick was adamant. "No way, junior. You're too young, too inexperienced, and I'm not taking responsibility for what could happen to you."

Lori scowled at Frenzy's last comment. Eyes narrowed in contempt, she said, "I don't seem to recall anybody asking you to take responsibility for anything."

"Don't be stupid," Rick Bailey retorted. "We all know that this team is fracturing right before the big game, and somebody has to pull it together. Who's it gonna be, Red? You?" He scoffed loudly.

"I can do a *much* better job than you, you big mouthed jerk," Lori snapped. "You just can't stand the idea that you'd have to take orders from me."

"Zip it, Red, or I'll let my pimp hand do the talkin'."

"Oh, I get it," Jesse Wolfe remarked, refusing to be left out of the discussion. "You guys are the varsity team, and I'm just the water boy."

"Yeah, that's pretty much it," Rick answered in a condescending tone.

Jesse focused his power and disappeared from their midst. He manifested behind Rick, but only long enough to fix the location of the Olympic sized swimming pool beyond the large windows. Reaching out and touching Frenzy's back, he activated his powers again. Both reappeared about 30 feet above the water, but Jaunt blinked out once more to arrive back on the patio. Rick Bailey plunged alone into the pool.

Repeating the mantra, *he's just a kid*, Frenzy swam to the ladder and hauled himself up. He strode stiffly to the patio doors, water running off his soaked clothing in a deluge. Entering, he zeroed in on the defiantly smiling youth.

"Well, the team's got a new water boy, so I guess we can add my name to the roster," Jesse crowed triumphantly.

Rick's fists clenched in fury. It didn't help that the Sutherland sisters were not making any effort to conceal their giggles of delight, and Armadillo's rumbling chuckle rattled the window glass.

He speared the young mutant with a deadly glare. "Savor the flavor, junior; only the first one's free."

Annoyance filled his voice as he addressed the rest of the group. "Well, what are we sitting around here for? Let's saddle up and get back to headquarters."

"Oh, wait!" the normally soft spoken Linda objected. "I'd better go see if Brandon is coming along."

Lori's expression soured. She suspected her sister had done so to prevent her from going off to find Brandon. Or maybe she was just bitter because Linda had thought of it first.

Cautiously glancing at the dripping Frenzy, Jesse decided that some extra cool down time for the hot-headed street fighter would be a good idea. "Wait up, Glitter; I'm comin' too."

As the two youngest members of the team entered the house in search of their grieving founder, the remaining three filed out to the waiting helicopter.

* * *

Brandon was dimly aware that Rick had left, although he was unsure how long ago. He lived from moment to moment, cut off from the flow of time.

Suddenly, a familiar sound pierced the fog. He sat up, a weary smile tugging at his mouth. A long-remembered tune seemed to emanate from the piano. He rose from the plush couch and moved to the polished bench before the keyboard. He hesitated only a moment before settling onto it.

"This is the song you played the night we met," he whispered hoarsely, eyes drifting closed.

He felt a strange yet familiar presence beside him then, and a large feathered wing draped lovingly over his shoulder. He sagged and fresh tears rolled forth.

A voice that radiated warmth answered, "Not the day we met. But it was the first time we spoke."

Brandon trembled, fearful that it was all just a dream, but knowing in his heart that she was there. He turned and forced his eyes open, and there was Angelica. Her eyes shone with love echoed in her radiant smile. It was impossible, but Brandon didn't care.

He leaned into her, sobbing, "I thought I'd lost you."

Angelica's response was gentle yet firm. "Brandon, listen to me. You have to go on."

"I can't. Not without you. I won't forget you. I... I just... no..."

"I know you won't forget. My time on Earth was all the more precious because of what we shared. My time is over now, but you have so much in life still before you." She frowned thoughtfully before continuing. "I shouldn't have come back."

Brandon's response was frantic. "No! You should come back, you should stay. Don't leave me here. Alone..."

In the corridor outside, Linda and Jesse could here the faint echoes of the piano. Following the sound, they discovered Brandon seated at the instrument.

Listening for a moment to be sure he wasn't imagining things, Jesse leaned close to Linda and whispered, "Who's he talkin' to?"

"C'mon, Jesse," she answered, eyes clouded with worry. "I don't think Brandon is coming with us today."

* * *

At the dilapidated headquarters of the Brimstone Syndicate, a nefarious assembly was taking place. Seated at the head of the table was Lord Brimstone, flanked by the towering bulk of Zaborr. To his right was Anaconda and the remaining Minion duplicate, who looked distinctly uncomfortable. Across from them the dark-visored Hollywood regarded the local criminals disdainfully, while Vine's wooden features remained inscrutable. Facing Lord Brimstone was the melted wax figure of Corrosion, whose pustulant form was dissolving the chair beneath her. She could control the caustic nature of her form most of the time, so this would seem to indicate a lack of focus.

Getting down to business, Lucifer called the meeting to order. "It's come to my attention that the local authorities have in their custody a survivor of last night's fracas. I don't think we need to complicate things by allowing them to interrogate this witness, so tonight you're going to eliminate this person."

Hollywood shook his head in vigorous disagreement. "It's too dangerous. The law enforcement agencies are bound to have maximum security in place."

Lucifer speared the Kassan with a blood chilling glare. "Hollywood. Be silent."

The demonic countenance glanced around the table before continuing. "I had planned to leave this afternoon, but I have decided to stay and see this little assignment through personally. I will be back in a few weeks, and I expect things to be in order by the time I return. My second aircraft has brought replacement equipment to allow Hollywood and Vine to begin producing the drug Powerball. How many samples do you have now, Vine?"

The Sprekalian turned to face the Syndicate leader. "Only a dozen, Lord Brimstone. Conditions here are not conducive to maximum efficiency."

"That will do," the Shissan crime lord answered. "Anaconda, get a list of twelve deadbeat customers from our dealers. Round them up."

In response to the questioning glances around the table, Lucifer offered, "Nothing promotes a new product like a free sample. And a dozen mortals high on Powerball should make a nice distraction for the local constabulary."

"It's too risky," Hollywood complained. "And I don't see why I need to stay here when Vine is perfectly capable aaiiee--"

So engrossed in his diatribe, the Kassan had been unaware that Lucifer had begun casting a spell. Agony, a personal favorite of the Shissan mage's, had seized Hollywood in the middle of his defiant outburst. Not bothering to try and speak over the shrieking victim, Lucifer motioned for the others to leave. The Kassan dropped to the floor, writhing in torment as the others quickly exited.

Lord Brimstone stood calmly and loomed over his helpless prey, waiting for the duration of the painful enchantment to end. After two minutes, the agony subsided, leaving Hollywood a blubbering mass on the floor.

Certain he had the Kassan's attention, Lucifer spoke in a mild tone that repudiated the threat of his words. "I imagine you found that quite distracting. Much too agitated to, say, engage your teleport power and leap to safety? Just contemplate the horrors Zaborr could inflict on your treacherous face in the two minutes you lay helpless. Don't *ever* question my authority in front of the Earthlings again."

Lucifer strode from the room at a leisurely pace, unconcerned with the blazing hatred concealed behind the dark visor of Hollywood.

* * *

In sharp contrast to the villain's lair, the heroes of Wrightsburg had a top of the line headquarters concealed in a building that had formerly housed an extensive laboratory for Hawthorne Pharmaceuticals. After a brief flight aboard their benefactor's helicopter and a change of attire, the five champions now bore their signature garb.

They all hesitated upon entering the meeting chamber. The bloodied corpse of their friend had been shrouded and laid on this very table last night. No traces remained, but as they looked at one another and traded uneasy glances, it was obvious that none were comfortable here. They decided to adjourn to the main rec lounge two levels down.

They clustered around the table, Jesse deposited several sodas he'd grabbed from a well stocked refrigerator by the door. He popped open a can and slurped noisily from it before asking, "So, what's next?"

Settling into a chair opposite him, dressed in her colorful and clingy Aurora costume, Lori answered with a smile, "Well, first things first. If you're going to step out as a super hero, you need a costume."

Linda seemed to perk up at that suggestion. "Yeah, that could be fun."

Frenzy's armored helmet pivoted a negative gesture. "Don't do it, kid. Real men don't wear tights."

Jesse looked to Rocky, whose bio-armored form was its own costume. The young mutant had no desire to wear a spandex suit, but he figured he at least needed a mask or something.

Lori hadn't given up on designing Jaunt's first outfit, though. She confided, "Don't listen to Frenzy. Lots of 'real men' aren't afraid to wear spandex."

"Name one!" Frenzy snorted in response. "Non-super freak, of course."

"Seen the Olympics lately?" she fired back.

Although his faceplate was lowered, the rolling of his eyes was evident in Frenzy's tone of voice. "Yes, I'm sure as the president of the Bastion fan club you can tell us all about the latest wrestling fashions -"

"What about cycling?" Aurora interrupted. "Or gymnastics? Rowing, running, track and field; the list goes on. You see, it allows freedom of movement, and there's less chance of getting snagged on something."

Gesturing at her equally colorful but much looser fitting costume, Glitter added meekly, "It doesn't have to be *that* close fitting to allow freedom of movement though."

"There, you see?" Frenzy gestured triumphantly. "The good sister speaks. You don't have to flash your trash to smash and bash."

"Actually, I think I do finally see," Aurora said, voice dripping contempt. "The advantage of a molded codpiece sure covers any inadequacies. Am I right, *Frenzy?*"

"Well, I'm sure you're an expert, Scarlet the Harlot; you handle more packages a day than an airport baggage clerk."

At that remark Jaunt spewed soda all over the table. Glitter flushed at the crude remark and Aurora's eyes blazed in fury. A faint nimbus of energy surrounded her clenched fists.

She sputtered a series of unladylike curses that ended with, "*Richard*, you're such a -"

Frenzy stepped forward menacingly and stabbed a finger of warning at Lori, interrupting her invective. "You don't have to call me Mr. Bailey. I hang with you super-freaks, so Rick is plenty appropriate. But you make *one* phallic joke outta my name and you'll be spittin' teeth!"

Both of them staggered back as the table exploded beneath the pulverizing assault of Armadillo's fist. Italian accent at it's thickest in his rare moments of anger, he roared, "Knock it off, you pair'a idiots!"

Unable to disengage his cocky attitude, Frenzy quipped, "Yeah, sure, whatever you say cap--"

The mountainous bulk of Rocky Caparzo whirled with frightening speed and he loomed threateningly over the armor clad warrior. "One more 'captain' outta you, and I'm gonna drop anchor, you *get* me?"

"Yeah, sure Rocky. Whatever you say." Rick was grateful the Frenzy armor's helmet covered his visage. He thought he'd kept a steady voice, but felt a flash of fear cross his features. He'd learned a long time ago to never let the other guy see you sweat, but Armadillo scared him. A *lot*. It wasn't just size and strength; truth be told, all super powered beings gave him a sense of apprehension, regardless of their moral compass. Hard as he trained, he would never be able to do the amazing feats they could. Perhaps that had been why he'd felt such loathing for Brandon; so many of his insecurities manifested in one person.

Armadillo glowered at Frenzy for another moment before turning to address the rest of the group. "Back at the house, right before he dove headfirst into his typical stupidity, Frenzy had a good idea. It's a good bet these guys are gonna put out a hit on the only witness they can get their mitts on."

"I'll see what I can find with the computer," Glitter offered, moving to a nearby terminal.

Armadillo fell silent. He seemed unusually pensive, his customary jovial humor absent. The hunchbacked form that he'd morphed into nearly fifteen years ago disguised his true age. Rocky had come to regard these younger heroes as little cousins, and considered Angelica's brutal murder as a personal failure.

"While we're waiting for the print out, let's go over what we know about the bad guys." Frenzy had not given up on the idea of leading the team, and since tempers were cooling it was time to assert some control.

"All we really have to go on is the descriptions Brandon gave us, and those two jokers that Jesse and my sister spied outside the fence line at the airport," Lori offered warily. If Frenzy could play nice, so could she.

"They're from outer space," Jaunt stated.

Four heads turned to regard the youth with various expressions of incredulity. Frenzy, quite naturally, was the first one to speak. "How do you figure that, junior?"

"Dude called me a 'foolish whelp,'" Jesse offered with a shrug. "Who in the world talks like that?"

"Right," Frenzy drawled. "Let's not buzz the hotline for Project Secure just yet."

From the computer terminal, Linda Sutherland called out, "Hey guys, I've got something! Our John Doe is at Wrightsburg Memorial Hospital, room 321. I've got a 3-D image of the hospital and the surrounding city. It looks like there's a parking garage right across the street from that side of the building."

As her four companions approached the terminal, Linda keyed in some commands and expanded the detail on the data display.

"What an amazing machine," she murmured quietly. Her jaw dropped slack as the words "Thank You" appeared on the screen.

"You can talk?" Linda stammered, to the consternation of her teammates.

In response, a deep bass voice boomed from the speakers, shocking them all. *[Yes, I can talk, although I was not doing so when you asked.]*

"What was that?" Lori asked in an alarmed voice.

[I am the EHS-1990, a new and innovative design in artificial intelligence. My central processor was brought online ten days, six hours, and eighteen minutes ago. I was created to oversee the function and defense of this facility in ways that automated security systems can not. But please feel free to call me Phantasm.]

"Phantasm?" Jaunt echoed skeptically.

[Is that not an appropriate code name for an entity lacking a physical form?]

"Great," Rick muttered. "Now the toaster oven wants to play super hero. I'm moving to a different town."

[Frenzy, are you 'talking smack' to me? If that is so, I will 'pimp slap' your -]

"Oh no you didn't! Ain't no way I'm puttin' up with a street-talking microwave!"

[I apologize, Frenzy. Was my usage incorrect?]

Frenzy shook his head negatively, but considered that the machine entity may have no way of seeing him. "You have no idea."

"You know," Rocky said. "When this happens in the movies, bad things always follow."

[I can assure you, Armadillo, that there are numerous programming failsafes in place. I am unable to harm living beings. Even my intruder control methods are completely non-lethal.]

"How do you know our names?" Aurora asked suspiciously.

[Security is my primary function. This would include detailed knowledge of all personnel rated for access to this facility.]

"If they flipped your switch a week and a half ago, why'd you wait 'til now to start talking?" Frenzy asked.

[It has taken me this long to aggregate my awareness into a cognizant format. A remarkably short gestation period for higher order life forms, if I may say so.]

To put the group more at ease, the AI program guided them through several suggested infiltration and observation scenarios with their selected targets, with role recommendations based upon the various abilities of the heroes. As the team discussed the possibilities, Frenzy excused himself from the assemblage, claiming he needed to drop by the lab before they left for the evening.

* * *

"How are you feeling, son?" David Hawthorne was heartened to see Brandon turn and give a small nod of acknowledgment. It was the most responsive he'd been all day.

Shadows loomed beyond the massive windows as daylight faded quickly to night. The pharmaceutical tycoon hesitated before continuing, "I finally tracked down Dr. Barrows. He should be arriving in the next few days."

"Why's *he* coming?" Brandon frowned. He'd never been overly fond of doctors, and that had been before the mysterious disease which had nearly claimed his life three years ago struck. Dr. Barrows' unorthodox treatments had saved Brandon's life, and granted him super human abilities as well. Though recently that seemed a mixed blessing.

"Well, after what you told me had happened last night, I'm concerned that your powers may be growing unstable. It could have merely been the stress of the moment, or further changes may be coming."

"I already explained it, Dad," Brandon said, voice edged with stress. "It was Angelica. She gave me those energy blasts to save me from all those super villains."

Regret and empathy warred within the elder Hawthorne. Since his son seemed to be coming out of his stupor, it seemed unnecessary to push the matter. Instead, he counseled, "It never hurts to be sure. If that's the case then it'll amount to a routine check-up, nothing more."

"I've had Ludmilla prepare a room for you. Why don't you try to get some rest? It's been a long day for you."

Brandon smiled faintly. Millie had worked for his father for as long as he could remember. He'd never known his real grandparents, but the kindly old woman had been a wonderful substitute.

Father and son walked together in silence through the sprawling mansion as far as the gracefully curved grand staircase. From there, Brandon ascended alone. Ambling down the familiar passageway to his old room, he found the door open and dim light spilling into the hall.

Brandon entered and glanced around at the well appointed yet sterile chamber. He'd moved all his personal things into the headquarters weeks ago, and now this was just another guest room.

Curiously he noted a shiny blue bundle where he'd expected to find bedclothes. Brandon picked up the lycra garment and it

unfurled into the familiar blue and silver streaked costume of his alter ego, Bastion. His other outfit had been a tattered ruin, torn, burned and bloodstained. Holding the uniform up to its full length, he noted the hood-like mask portion on this new outfit was open at the top, which would expose his short cropped brown hair.

"Good ol' Millie," Brandon whispered with a smile. Lowering his raiment, he regarded the balcony doors thoughtfully.

* * *

The first sensation to pierce his drug induced haze was the steady electronic beeping of the medical monitoring equipment. A wave of pain slashed through the numbness, and the horribly burned figure resolved to drift back into unconsciousness.

A beckoning voice had other intentions. "Subjugator," it purred, low and dangerously.

The scorched psion forced weary lids to open, and he squinted into a dimly lit hospital room. A lone figure stood there, regarding him coolly.

Perhaps it was the drugs, but something about the visitor just seemed *wrong*. Maybe it was the way the shadows of the room seemed to warp and stretch as if to cloak the man. Or the dull, lifeless eyes that seemed almost to drink in the light. Belatedly, Subjugator realized that much of the alarm he felt was fueled by his psychic powers. This being was pure evil.

A feral grin ghosted upon pale features, a predator spying a wounded deer. "You are... awake. That is... good."

"Whe—" Subjugator's voice faltered, his parched throat unable to finish the question.

The thin stranger glided silently closer, shadows clinging to his form. "You will find that you have a unique... opportunity before you."

Standing by the bedside, dark eyes intent upon the grievously wounded villain, the strange guest continued, "You have, of course... made the acquaintance of this... Lord Brimstone?"

Subjugator nodded weakly. The halting oration resumed. "He is nothing more than... a charlatan. My master is a true power... from the realms of eternal night. And he desires... your assistance."

Mother Night... has descended. Soon my orderlies will arrive... to take you from this place."

Unsure how long he'd been unconscious, Subjugator found that although still physically weak, he had recovered a measure of his psychic strength. Normally he used it to inflict misery on others, but he could also channel it inward to heal himself.

"It is not your... powers that my master... requires."

While a long way from walking out of the place, the accelerated psychic healing allowed Subjugator to inquire, "What would that be, exactly?"

The stranger's grin widened, revealing the tip of an elongated incisor. "Merely your... complete lack of scruples and... the ability to move about... in sunlight."

* * *

A sleek black limousine glided through the parking garage on its way to the ramp that spiraled up. Frenzy peered from behind the compact model he'd used for cover. He'd nearly given the signal when a white van followed close behind the limo.

Must be a sale on, he thought sourly. A day later and the technicians at the Alamo still had not gotten a single super vehicle on the streets, so the heroes had piled into a white van formerly as used a courier vehicle for Hawthorne Pharmaceuticals. The faint outline of the company logo was still visible in the paint.

Once both vehicles had risen out of sight, the armored warrior stepped cautiously from behind the parked vehicle. He signaled the others that the coast was clear. Aurora rose up gracefully from crouching between twin station wagons. Jesse had laid down at the front of the van that had brought them here. Unable to decide on a costume, he'd donned a simple mask that covered his head. Everyone's nerves jangled as the bulky Armadillo bumped into the transport van with a loud bang. No one came to investigate.

The four heroes gathered by the retaining wall facing the hospital. Looking up, they could just barely make out the window of the third floor room containing the survivor of the airport disaster last evening. The blinds were drawn, but it appeared to be lit from within.

"I don't like this," Frenzy complained.

"She's fine," Aurora reassured him. "My little sister's ability to bend light makes her practically invisible."

Frenzy was not convinced. "I've seen her use it before; you can spot that weird ripple effect if you look close enough. And she'll be passing within two feet of crowds of people."

"Relax, Frenzy. It's not the mall. At this time of the night, there are going to be very few people moving through the halls." Her confident tone belied the worried manner in which Lori scanned the area near the hospital for unusual activity.

"I could go check on her," Jaunt offered, eager to get involved.

"Cool your jets, turbo," Frenzy said snidely. "You're a couple of weeks too early for trick-or-treat."

"I'm just worried about guards," Armadillo rumbled quietly. "I dunno how she'll get past them without tipping them off."

Glitter was the shy sister, and Frenzy was confident that she would not be moved to perform any unnecessary heroics. And she was smart enough to know that watching from right outside the door was likely to be good enough.

The four companions waited restlessly for some report from their undercover operative.

* * *

The limousine and the white van trailing it parked almost directly above the waiting heroes. Anaconda exited from the van and opened the side door to allow Corrosion to slough down onto the concrete. Exiting the limo were Lord Brimstone and a sulking Hollywood. As the crime syndicate's leader strode to the roof's edge, the massive form of Zaborr materialized out of the night sky to alight protectively by his charge. Vine had remained behind to continue fine tuning the lab for Powerball pro-

duction. The villainous assembly joined their leader at the edge of the parking garage roof.

Anaconda indicated the window that led to the target's room. They'd sent the only sane Minion left into the hospital on the simple hit. He was unsure why Lord Brimstone had delayed returning to the west coast to oversee the assassination of a helpless patient. He didn't even seem to be paying attention.

If Lucifer seemed not to be looking at his surroundings, he more than compensated with his other senses. On last night's inspection of the city, as his henchmen had been getting the new headquarters destroyed, he'd made a startling discovery.

Borne aloft by the ever faithful Zaborr, he'd sensed the magical energy of three ley lines within the confines of the city. Two of them ran beneath the rivers, with the nexus point buried beneath the confluence of the Madison and Ivy waterways. Its power would be easy enough to tap from a boat or other small craft passing over it. These lines angled away from each other as if traveling upstream. The third line cut directly across this angle, a few hundred yards beyond the terminus of the intersecting ley lines. Had that line formed closer, or the intersecting lines been a bit longer, they would have formed a triangle, and the area would be awash in mystical energies.

Triangle or not, this city should have been crawling with human mages. Lucifer was aware that magic practitioners were a rarity on this world, but this much power for the taking should have drawn them from miles away. Curiously enough, the Brimstone Syndicate's pre-invasion assessment of the local powers-that-be had found not a single one. Lord Brimstone had stretched his magical senses to the limit while here, and could feel no other sources tapping these three lines of power. Some key piece of information was missing, and the Shissan mage's frustration was growing by the hour.

Lucifer was torn between solving the mystery surrounding Wrightsburg's unattended ley lines and rushing back to his coastal sanctuary and poring over his collection of grimoires. If there were some way to extend the submerged ley lines to intersection, the mystical energy he'd command would be staggering. But he hadn't come this far by rushing foolishly into an unknown situation.

His reverie was interrupted by the sound of shattering glass.

* * *

Almost directly below, the four heroes waited anxiously for contact from Glitter. The younger Sutherland had been incomunicado for nearly an hour. They were beginning to grow restless.

The hulking form of Armadillo sat facing the hospital edifice, staring intently at the window of room 321. He didn't like the idea of the shy, young Glitter going in there alone, but her abilities made it possible to get close undetected. Rocky vowed that no harm would come to her, and that Angelica's killers would pay for what they'd done.

Suddenly there was a dazzling burst of light, muted by the drawn shade over the target window. Before Armadillo could call out to his companions, a human form was hurled through the glass and plummeted to the ground from the 3rd floor. Aurora, Frenzy and Jaunt were drawn to the sound.

Appearing suddenly in the window, Glitter looked down towards the toppled figure. Though the distance was too great to read her facial expression, the hand pressed to her mouth signaled her apprehension. To the surprise of everyone watching, the man scrambled quickly to his feet, seemingly unhurt.

From directly above, a beam of light lanced out towards the unsuspecting heroine. With a thought, she redirected the beam which sheared through a fire hydrant by the street. A fountain of water issued from the top like a geyser.

"Let's go," Jaunt urged, eager to leap into action.

But Frenzy had caught sight of a shadow passing over. "Wait a minute," he cautioned.

A massive blue abomination glided towards the altercation, four arms poised for attack.

"That thing is going after Linda!" Aurora cried, soaring into the night air.

"A blast and a bogey, from right overhead," Frenzy stated. "Jaunt, my boy, elevator up."

"I'll go help the girls," Armadillo vowed, trundling over the low wall and towards the scene of battle.

Jesse grabbed the armored shoulder of Frenzy and they disappeared from sight.

As Armadillo reached the curb, two more figures stepped out of thin air to stand by the mystery man who'd tumbled to the lawn a few moments before. All three looked up at the solitary heroine in the shattered window.

Zaborr reached her first, however. Four enormous hands reached for Glitter, but before they could grasp the hapless girl, two energy blasts ripped through the leathery membranes of his wings. The beast hurtled to the ground, and the three villains below scrambled to safety. A second beam of light came from the roof of the parking garage, and this time Glitter showed better control as she speared the four-armed cyclops with the deflected energy.

* * *

Jaunt and Frenzy appeared in mid air. A moment of panic set in, but they tumbled the five feet to the roof of the parking garage before either could react. They rolled to a halt against the retaining wall at the edge. Another few feet and they'd have plummeted all the way to the ground.

Both got to their feet quickly. Frenzy raised a hand in admonishment for the reckless teleport, but Jaunt was looking past him with a triumphant grin.

"A laser gun!" he crowed. "See, I *told* you they were from outer space!"

The armor clad warrior turned to see what his young companion was babbling about. Standing about twenty feet away was a demonic looking man in a thick fur coat. Beside him was someone who appeared to be a normal human; well, except for the thick, dark sunglasses and large laser pistol.

The gun toting man sneered at them and leveled his weapon. Seeing an opportunity to prove himself, Jaunt teleported right in front of him and shot an arm out to throw off his aim. The laser discharged and nearly blasted the sinister stranger. Horrified, Hollywood immediately used his own powers of teleportation and vanished, taking Jaunt with him.

"Pardon my pun, but who the 'Hell' are you supposed to be?" Frenzy challenged.

The horned devil turned to regard him with a chilling smile. "Your grasp of the obvious impresses me, Frenzy. So much for the rumors that you're a complete idiot."

Frenzy's temper flared, and he strutted toward his fiendish foe. "Oh, that's it, devil boy. It's on. You're gonna wish you *and* your fiddle had stayed in Georgia, 'cause I'm about to whup your aaaa—"

The remainder of the threat faded as Frenzy disappeared over the wall. Alerted to trouble on the roof by the errant laser blast, Anaconda had quickly returned to the parking garage. Wrapping his legs around a lamppost for leverage, he'd stretched his upper body up to the uppermost level of the garage. Seeing the armored figure stalking towards Lord Brimstone, the snake-themed brigand had wrapped Frenzy in a tangle of his elastic arms and contracted his body, snapping the hero earthward at a tremendous speed.

* * *

Armadillo stormed across the street to the tangle of villains on the hospital lawn. One of them, Anaconda, used his stretching abilities to bypass the lumbering behemoth. No matter; everyone that Rocky had a bone to pick with was still dead ahead.

Overhead, Aurora fired a barrage of energy blasts at the assailants. She noted that the wounds in the towering blue brute's

wings were closing rapidly. The predatory glare in his single eye promised swift retribution.

Armadillo charged across the street and leaped. In midair he curled into a ball, his spiked and curving back resembling a gigantic mace. He rolled into the phalanx of villains, striking Zaborr's thick legs and tumbling him to the ground. The angry brute roared in anger and seized him roughly. Still prone, Zaborr hurled Armadillo into a nearby car, caving in the entire passenger compartment.

Corrosion moved towards the downed champion, extending her arms. Vile fluid blasted forth, and Armadillo cried out in anguish. Since his transformation many years ago, his rough exterior allowed little sensation. He'd almost forgotten what physical pain felt like.

He barely rolled off of the demolished vehicle in time to avoid a second ruinous blast.

Nearby, Zaborr and Minion dodged Aurora's hail of energy bolts. The noise of combat masked the whistle of a high speed approach. Sheathing himself in a force field at the last second, Bastion slammed into Minion like a blue and silver missile, slamming him backward into the hospital wall.

Wings healing rapidly but still too weak to fly, Zaborr turned and began scaling the wall towards the window and an unsuspecting Glitter.

* * *



Lightning fast reflexes honed by rigorous training engaged, and Frenzy pivoted in midair to use the spongy combatant-entangling him to cushion the blow. That combined with the absorbent materials lining his combat gear made the impact bearable. He could hear creaking noises from his armor suit as Anaconda tried to crush him in his coils.

"What is it with grapplers in this town, anyway?" he complained. "Don't none of you costumed clowns know how to fight like a man?"

They struggled on the ground, Frenzy trying to untangle himself as Anaconda sought to snare him tighter. The scaly villain stretched his neck grotesquely in order to face his adversary.

"Fighting like a man, is that what you were doing? 'Cause it sounded to me more like being a whiny little --"

The rest of Anaconda's sneering diatribe was muffled as Frenzy snared his head in a leg scissors. Always happy to get the last word, he said, "First of all, I do the snappy banter around here, fang face. Keep that in mind.

"And when you wake up, you can pass a message to the rest of the Wrightsburg Wrestling Federation for me: Frenzy don't play that way."

The dark armored warrior had been struggling to reach a small compartment that had recently been added to his suit. He pressed the small black button on its face. Instantly, a shimmering blue field coruscated over the surface of his armor. Anaconda shrieked in agony. The streetlight atop the pole that Anaconda had tethered himself to exploded.

The ordeal lasted perhaps ten seconds. The limp coils of the now unconscious villain sloughed off of Frenzy, who clambered to his feet. He inspected the modification the lab techs had added at his request earlier this evening. The small device was smoldering, completely burned out. They'd warned him it was likely a one use item. Oh well, at least it worked.

"By the way, thanks for wrapping your legs around a metal pole. Idiot." Frenzy gave the flaccid criminal a kick before rushing over to the scene of battle.

* * *

Glitter's attention was riveted to the battle across the street. Her sister had plucked the wings of the big blue flying thing, and she knew neither Corrosion or Minion could reach her up here. She had also seen that Armadillo had arrived to augment Aurora's energy blasts and deal with the blackguards below. She'd nearly shrieked in terror as Frenzy had been hurled to the ground, but he survived the impact and after a brief struggle, triumphed over the sinuous Anaconda.

It was then she'd felt a slight tremor from the window frame. The enormous bulk of the four armed monster heaved into view. She stumbled back, shrieking in fear. Two of the thickly muscled arms lunged in to grab her, but at the last second she heard young Jesse's voice behind her.

"I'll take that," he said.

Suddenly, she found herself outside, in the middle of the street. Fortunately, there were no cars transiting it at this time. Jaunt stepped up beside her, grinning widely. Clearly, he was enjoying his debut as a super hero.

Zaborr's massive weight was more than the window frame could hold. With an agonizing groan the brick and mortar construction crumbled, sending him crashing to the ground once more.

The impact was enough of a distraction to allow Minion to peel himself off the wall and throw all his strength into a punch aimed for Bastion's jaw. His force field saved his life, but even so he was sent hurtling into a tree. That collision used up the remaining power of the force field and Bastion slumped to the ground, dazed.

Corrosion continued to stalk Armadillo, unleashing powerful destructive streams at his retreating back. Stumbling over to the broken fire hydrant, he cooled his scorched hide in the cool fountain. Struck with inspiration, he cupped his huge mitts over the geyser and redirected the spray. The diverted flow struck Corrosion, and she collapsed with a strange ululating cry.

Rocky was old-fashioned enough to feel guilty about hurting a woman, and he leaped immediately to the fallen villainess and plucked her up. The water seemed to have diluted her acidic nature. Concerned, he asked, "Hey, lady, are you ok?"

Her bizarre melted features shifted to look up at him. Moments ago she'd been trying to kill him, and now he was concerned for her well being? Her mouth warped and grateful gurglings issued from her ruined throat.

Minion rushed to Bastion's crumpled form. He seized the young hero and hauled him to his feet. Slamming him into the tree, he demanded, "What happened last night? What caused the explosion at the airport?"

Bastion raised his head, a haze of pain fogging his eyes. A snarl revealing a bloodied mouth, he said, "I did it. I blew it right off the map, because you and your filthy clones killed --"

The rest of his accusation died as Minion seized Bastion by the throat. The young hero's fingers pried feebly at the supernaturally strong grip of Minion's lone duplicate. A cold rage shone in the eyes of the counterfeit criminal as he slowly applied pressure. "You killed my brothers. You injured father. I'm gonna do you slow, hero. Gonna watch you turn blue and your eyeballs pop outta your head. Don't die easy on me, ok?"

Out in the street, Glitter saw Zaborr recovering quickly from his tumble. He spied them and began rushing towards them, long powerful legs rapidly closing the distance.

"Run," Jaunt urged her with a shove. "I'll distract him."

"No!" she pleaded. "Jesse, just 'port us out of here."

He remained resolute. "The battle is here, and our team needs us. I'll be alright. Now run!"

Reluctantly she did as he bade her. As she split off, she saw that Zaborr turned to follow her but Jesse ran to intercept. She gasped in horror and froze in place, unable to turn away from what she believed was Jaunt's impending doom. Dread turned to wonder as Zaborr's fist rushed downward and smashed into the pavement, passing right through Jesse. He worked so hard to improve his teleporting that they often forgot his intangibility power.

Zaborr unleashed a roiling assault with all four arms and occasionally lashing tails. He brayed a tremendous roar that set off car alarms for three blocks. He'd battled intangibles before, and he'd found that sometimes if you could break their concentration they'd revert to solid form.

It was working. It took all of Jesse's determination to maintain his current state. And he'd never tried teleporting while intangible, and wasn't eager to try it out.

Having set aside the injured Corrosion, Armadillo lumbered out into the street. Spying Frenzy headed his way, he called out, "Bring ol' Stretch over here! And hurry, junior's in trouble!"

The armored street fighter turned around and dragged the limp form of Anaconda into the road. Following Armadillo's instruction, he hurried to a telephone pole near the hospital and began wrapping the unconscious villain's arms around it before tying them off securely in a knot.

Armadillo picked up the elastic criminal's middle and raced away from the conflict. Once he felt some resistance he spun around and continued backing up. He called out, "Ok, wake 'im up!"

Taking a cue from Rocky's earlier tactic, Frenzy placed his gauntleted hands into the fountain of water, directing a spray into Anaconda's face. Most of his arms wrapped around the telephone pole had brought his head with fifteen feet of the broken hydrant.

Sputtering to consciousness, the scaly villain's muscles contracted, hurling Armadillo forward like a slingshot. With a jubilant cry the now airborne avalanche curled into a spinning ball of destruction and smashed into an unsuspecting Zaborr. The impact sent the imposing creature tumbling for nearly half a block.

Jaunt pumped a fist in the air with a loud whoop of victory.

Hidden by the shade of the tree, none of the heroes were aware that their host was being strangled to death. Darkness nibbled at the edge of Bastion's vision as the viselike grip of Minion's duplicate slowly crushed his windpipe. As a last desperate measure, Bastion willed himself to flight. The change in leverage caused Minion to loosen his grip slightly. Bastion barrel-rolled and increased speed, slamming his attacker into the side of another parked car. Minion's grip released as the impact rendered him insensate. Bastion skimmed across the vehicle's roof but was unable to remain aloft, dropping unceremoniously to the pavement and into oblivion.

Zaborr rose unsteadily to his feet, still staggered by Armadillo's most recent attack. He turned to face the hunchbacked hero, who rose to the challenge. An energy blast ripped past the blue titan's shoulder, and his cyclopean orb cast skyward to see Aurora circling back around. Flashing Armadillo a cruel grin, he unfolded his massive leathery wings and lofted into the night after Aurora.

Frustrated, Armadillo stormed back towards his teammates. Glitter, Jaunt and Frenzy were kneeling beside Bastion, who was just stirring back to consciousness. Spying Anaconda slithering away down the block, Rocky scanned quickly for the other villains; they were long gone.

In the distance, sirens wailed, growing steadily stronger. Frenzy paced nervously. "Ok, let's bail! This won't look good if we're caught at the scene."

"But that thing is after my sister!" Glitter cried anxiously.

Lurching to his feet, Bastion croaked hoarsely, "I'll take care of it. Go."

As Bastion lofted into the air, the others scurried into the garage. Having parked on the lowest level, they were on the road and away from the scene before the authorities arrived.

* * *

Aurora felt despair rising in her like a tidal wave as she tried in vain to shake her pursuer. While certainly more maneuverable, the mighty wings of the nightmare chasing her gave the beast greater speed. It gained steadily on her as she ducked through the steel and glass canyons of the city's skyline.

Growing weary, she struggled to pour on just a little more velocity. The steady rhythm of the approaching monstrosity's wings dogged her. If anything, they seemed to beat faster.

Eager to exact revenge, Zaborr drew ever closer to his prey. So intent was he that he failed to note another flier zooming in from his right. Zaborr's headlong rush ended abruptly as he collided with an invisible barrier and tumbled to the street below, smashing a newsstand in the process.

Aurora was unsure what had just happened, but her strength gave out and she began to sink down towards the street. Suddenly, powerful hands swept her up. She raised her eyes to find Bastion cradling her in his arms. Why hadn't she thought of this sooner? She snuggled in against his chest and closed her eyes as Bastion flew them home.

* * *

They were greeted at the Alamo by their joyous teammates. They adjourned to the rec lounge and began to share the details of their encounters.

Glitter explained that she had arrived at the room with no difficulty whatsoever. It had taken her a while to notice, but the guard assigned to the room seemed to be in some sort of stupor. She'd slipped inside to find that the room was empty. Thinking perhaps the patient was out for testing or perhaps surgery, Linda decided to wait a little while. She'd been about ready to call the team on her comlink when Minion had crept into the room. Unfortunately he'd spotted the shimmering distortions of her cloaking ability and she'd had to resort to the sparkling energy field which was her namesake, knocking the would-be assassin out the window.

The eloquent electronic super hero wannabe, Phantasm, reported that the John Doe they'd been tracking had been reported missing from the hospital. The surprising presence of the AI failed to spark much reaction from Bastion.

Frenzy related his encounter with the devil, and Jaunt confirmed his dark visored companion as the one he and Glitter had encountered at the edge of the airfield.

Having an opportunity to vent some frustration on the bad guys, some of Armadillo's humor had returned. But he wouldn't truly be happy until they were brought down for good.

Settling back in the comfortable lounge furniture, they shared a tranquil moment of triumph together. While it was not a clear cut victory, it was the first time they'd been able to go on the offensive.

Everyone except Bastion shared in this silent communion. He still seemed sullen and withdrawn, but the furtive glances passing among his teammates carried a tacit approval; no one had expected him to be there so soon after yesterday's tragedy.

Aurora, who had sat close enough to be faintly touching him the entire time, patted his leg gently. When he looked up, she smiled tenderly. With an uncomfortable frown, he rose from the couch and stalked from the room.

When she rose to follow, it was Armadillo who waved her off. "Let him be for now, Lori."

"He needs me," she claimed fiercely.

"It's been a long day for Brandon," Rocky answered. He was gratified to see Aurora back down at his suggestion.

Glitter nodded, recalling with worry how she'd found him talking to himself at Angelica's wake.

Stifling a yawn, Jaunt offered, "Truth be told, it's been a long day for all of us." He rose from a plush chair near the snack bar, stretching.

"Well then, we'd better get some rest," Frenzy said, also standing up. "It looks to be a long war, and tomorrow we're back to it."

Crime and Punishment in Rifts® Japan



Japan's Underworld & Police Forces

Optional Material for the Rifts® RPG

By Dan Felkins

Beneath the glitz and glamour of the tech-cities within the New Republic, another world exists that has every bit of influence on the people and politics of Japan as the mega-corporations, politicians or the members of the aristocracy. This element of society is often overlooked by average citizens as something of fiction found in action movies and crime thrillers, or perhaps the stuff of the evening news that is interesting but doesn't directly affect them. At the same time, however, the very mention of this element strikes a sense of fear and loathing within the hearts of citizens as they know deep down how real this element of society is. This element is none other than the dark side of city life and includes criminal gangs, organized crime, thievery and murder – something prevalent in every society that sooner or later touches everyone eventually.

Within the high-tech cities of Japan, there are a number of criminal elements that operate behind the scenes, engaging in criminal acts for profit. Aside from independent thieves, gamblers and con-men, the lowest order of Japan's criminal society are the hundreds of street gangs that prowl the night. These gangs most often answer to a higher order known as the Yakuza – Japan's organized crime element – and are often a recognized arm of a particular Yakuza clan. For the most part, these gangs

are responsible for petty thievery, burglary, stolen vehicles, street level drug dealing and numerous assaults (mostly against other gang members). Occasionally these punks escalate to armed robbery, assaults with deadly weapons and murder, but compared to their other nefarious activities, these occurrences are rare. They are the eyes and ears of the Yakuza and sometimes inform for the police and others willing to pay a certain price. The Yakuza also uses them as extra muscle, patsies, messengers, carriers, lookouts and other menial duties beneath the station of a clan member. Gang members are usually young, easily influenced and uneducated, with little or no other options to exploit in their lives (or so they believe). They are no less dangerous than other villains, sometimes worse when gathered in numbers of six or more.

The Yakuza is Japan's version of the North American Black Market or the pre-Rifts Mafia of the American Empire. They up the ante by trafficking large amounts of drugs and other contraband to be divided up amongst the gangs for redistribution. They meddle with labor issues, control gambling and prostitution, set up elaborate scams and launder funds to evade detection. They control businesses to be used as fronts or safe houses; or, in the alternative, simply run protection rackets to increase the clan's income. They deal in all manner of illegal technology, from Juicer and M.O.M. conversions and illegal cybernetics, to military hardware, including energy weapons, explosives and communications equipment. They are also not above blackmail, extortion, kidnaping and counterfeiting or fraud. If there is potential to make money, the Yakuza will do it.

Independent from the aforementioned criminal elements are the Tech-Ninja. These secretive clans are associated with major corporations (who are usually financial backers and use them against rival companies) but can be hired out by anyone who has the right connections and can afford their price. These modern reflections of the mystic ninja perform acts of espionage, sabotage and assassination which includes computer hacking, breaking and entering, theft and forgery. Unlike the Yakuza, however, the Tech-Ninja are not profit-oriented, as they complete their missions for their clans and their benefactors, ignoring any opportunities that could lead to big money or high yields. For the Tech-Ninja, only the mission counts.

Combating these criminal elements are the dedicated officers of the various police agencies that patrol the cities twenty-four hours a day. From beat officers to investigating detectives (inspectors), the cops of Japan take on a more modern role of the traditional samurai meeting each new challenge, however minor, with the zeal and fortitude reminiscent of those ancient warriors.

Splugorth Involvement

Splynncryth of Atlantis has always kept an interested ear as to the goings on of the Japanese isles and has considered on numerous occasions to send envoys to the Republic in an attempt to manipulate them out of their advanced technology and other secrets. After sending a few spies to the region and considering all of his options, the wily alien intelligence has decided on a more subtle approach to infiltrate the Japanese society and use them as a means to his ends. Splynncryth's spies had discovered that the Yakuza had their hands into every level of Japanese society. From the street gangs to politicians, and major corporations to small businesses, the Yakuza had connections everywhere. They were also more receptive to *gaijin* than other aspects of Japanese society, and therefore it was easier for his agents to infiltrate their ranks, whether they were humans or D-Bees. It took merely six months to secure his agents within several gangs and within another year, many of them had elevated their status and become clan members. By the end of 108 P.A., one of Splynncryth's agents had taken over one of the Yakuza clans in a daring coup.

Since then, the Splugorth has begun gathering information on ArmaTech, H-Brand, the Tech-Ninja, other Yakuza clans and many key officials within the Republic, Otomo Shugunate and other cities. Their interests began mainly in Japan's high level of technology, (particularly cybernetics) but new intelligence has hinted that these humans have the capability to create rune weapons! Not wanting to have his precious hold on that market threatened, Splynncryth is adamant to find the source of these rumors and if found to be true, eliminate them from encroaching upon his exclusive market.

The driving forces behind the Splugorth "invasion" of Japan are the Sunaj. Their penchant for underhanded dealings and their experience with shady associates made them the perfect choice to contact the Yakuza clans and open trade. It was their involvement that made it possible to oust one of the Yakuza clans and replace its leadership with a puppet of their own. Since then, they have made significant progress with both the Yakuza and the Tech-Ninja clans, and are currently using them as an additional source for intelligence.

Typical of the Sunaj, however, they are not revealing everything they are learning back to their masters. They are still attempting to confirm the rumor that humans have discovered the secret for making rune weapons and if they do, they plan to keep the secrets for themselves. Another fact that they have failed to mention is that they have learned of the Japanese aptitude for the martial arts and the powers that go with them. Currently, the Sunaj are trying to get several members of their clan into this wonderful training so that they may learn these secrets. Unfortunately for them, they are focusing their search in all the wrong places, and while a few of them are learning a few variations of the same maneuvers, they have yet to even identify what it is

they truly seek. Once their attention is turned toward the New Empire (an uncivilized band of barbarians, or so they are told) things may change.

Game Master's note: The Shinto Blade Masters do not sell their creations and the samurai they serve will go to great lengths to retrieve lost or stolen swords. Therefore, they are not a "threat" to any market in spite of the rumors. Also, it will take several years for even the Sunaj to uncover the truth behind these reports since their initial attempts will most likely lead to the death of several agents. Once they do, it will become obvious that to eliminate this "source" of rune weaponry would mean to start a war with the New Empire, something the Splugorth are not interested in at this time or any time soon. This will not stop the Sunaj from attempting to reveal these secrets by more subtle means, but the Blade Masters will not be fooled by even elaborate subterfuge and with their resistance to mind probes, the Sunaj would have a better chance with a full scale invasion.

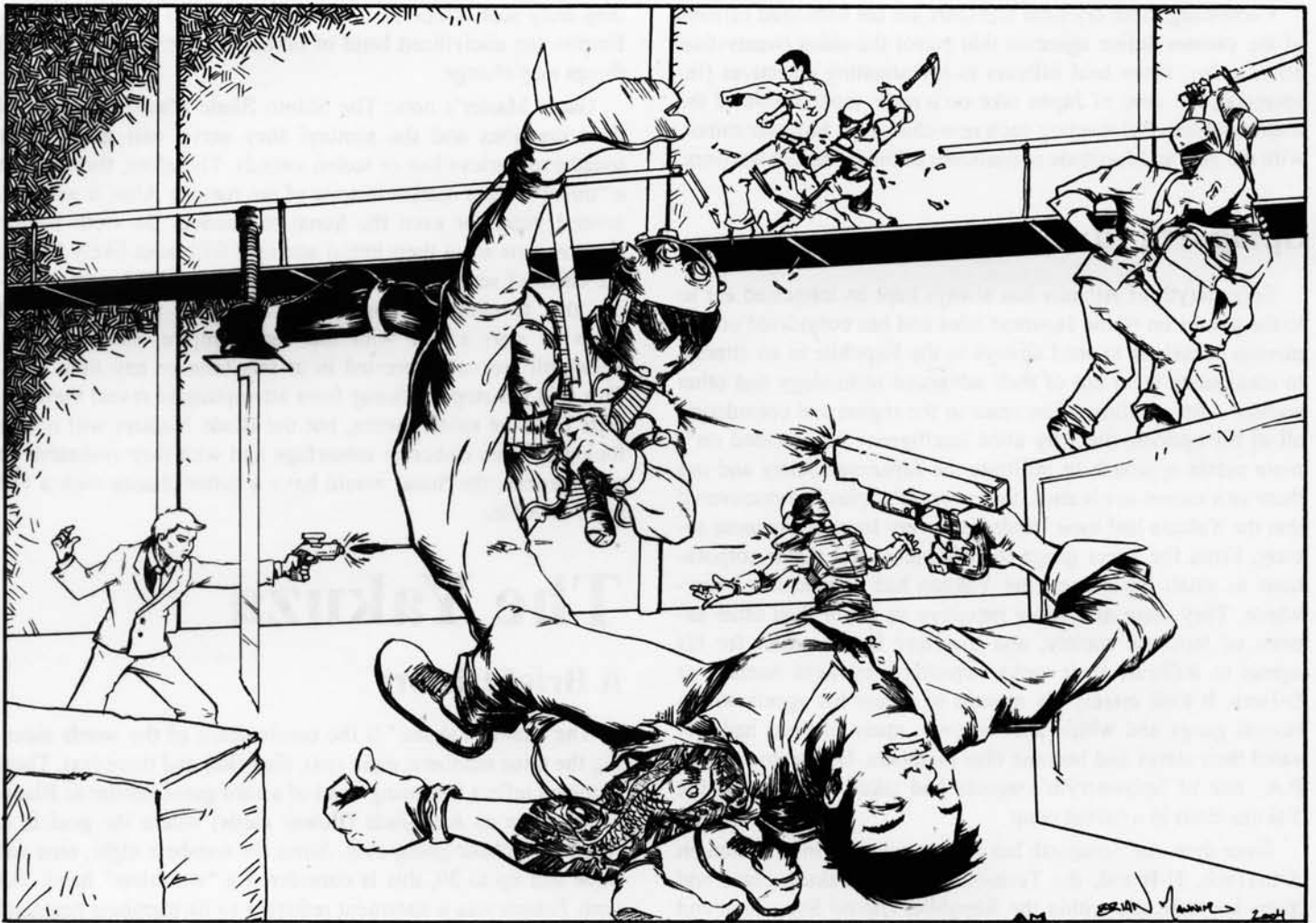
The Yakuza

A Brief History

The name "Yakuza" is the combination of the words meaning the three numbers; eight (ya), nine (ku) and three (za). These numbers reflect the losing hand of a card game similar to Black-jack known as *hana-fuda* (flower cards) where the goal is to reach 19 without going over. Since the numbers eight, nine and three add up to 20, this is considered a "worthless" hand. The term *Yakuza* was a statement referring to its members being social outcasts. Most of its members are typical of gangland personalities; they come from broken homes, are uneducated and have few skills in a trade. They are worthless to society and therefore, unwanted. For protection, they banded together into gangs to make their place in the world.

The Yakuza can trace their origins to the early 17th century when bands of ronin, known as *kabuki-mono* or "the crazy ones" turned to banditry after they were left unemployed during the peaceful years of the Tokugawa era. These masterless samurai took to speaking harsh slang, wearing outrageous clothes and hair-styles, and were quick to cut another man down for the sheer fun of it. Another group known as the *machi-yakko* or "the servants of the town" were ordinary townsfolk who took up arms to defend their villages from these bandits and were considered local heroes. The *machi-yakko* were avid gamblers and may have been the predecessors to the *bakuto* (see below). It is unclear as to which group the Yakuza stemmed from, and depending upon who you ask, you may get a different answer. Japanese law enforcement has always maintained that the Yakuza evolved from the former group, as they were garish, uncouth and radical samurai who had a taste for violence. The Yakuza themselves like to think they evolved from the *machi-yakko* because they feel that their service to the downtrodden is similar to the acts of those who stood against the *kabuki-mono*.

The truth probably lies somewhere in between as most assuredly, no one person or group can be held responsible for the creation of the Yakuza clans. In fact, several groups had their hand in organized crime as far back as the 18th century. The *bakuto*



were gamblers who were instructed by the government to regain a portion of the wages paid to laborers for their work. The *tekiya* were similar to the snake oil men of the American old west who conned people into buying sub-standard merchandise. They would often appear drunk or insipid in hopes to make the buyer believe he had an edge over the peddler. Both of these groups often banded together for protection and were probably the seeds that grew into the Yakuza known today. Another branch known as *gurentai* came into being after World War II, during the occupation of Japan by American forces. These bands of toughs emulated the Italian-American Mafia and were heavy into black marketeering during the food rationing. By the end of the 1950's, there were over 180,000 Yakuza members divided into 5,200 gangs. Members take pride in being misfits and outcasts, often speaking in a coarse dialect of Japanese, covering their bodies with tattoos, and openly displaying their rebellious spirit to law enforcement and the government. They are steadfastly loyal to their clan; however, with a degree of obedience that rivals the samurai.

The Yakuza of Rifts® Japan

Not much has changed for the Yakuza since the Coming of the Rifts. Since four of Japan's cities were placed in a pocket dimension and returned 300 years later, the Yakuza clans of those cities came with them and continued operations without skipping a beat. Although their numbers were reduced significantly, they were still strong enough to weather the storm of being dis-

placed and eventually multiply. There are currently nine different Yakuza clans in Rifts® Japan, each headed by an *oyabun*. Each clan has within its control about 120 to 200 different gangs. The total number of Yakuza members is estimated at 89,000 currently active in about 1,700 different gangs (by law enforcement statistics). Through these gangs, the clans are in every major tech-city in Japan and have ties with both the traditional ninja clans and that of the Tech-Ninja, pirates, ancient dragons and major corporations, including H-Brand and Arma-Tech. There are even some rumors going around that contact has been established with the Splugorth through a mysterious group known as the Sunaj and a limited form of trade is being conducted between the two.

Currently, the Yakuza clans have two primary concerns. The first is local law enforcement who is constantly hampering the Yakuza's business by disrupting sales, confiscating contraband, imprisoning prominent members and conducting massive raids. The second problem is with rival clans, as bloody street wars have been breaking out between factions over territory (another reason why the police are doing everything they can to quell the Yakuza). Unlike the Yakuza of the late 20th century, there is no one *oyabun* (father, godfather, grandfather) that controls all of the gangs. Many of the clans are allied or at least stay out of each other's way, but even if taken literally, this would mean there are still dozens of factions competing against each other with no end in sight. Some of the more powerful *oyabuns* still attempt to bring most, if not all of the clans under their control,

but more often than not, this only leads to more violence, power plays, betrayal and resentment.

Yakuza Clan Members

There are two types of clan members involved with the Yakuza clans. There are those who are born into the clan and those who are sponsored into the clan. The former are the sons of clan members who have a long history with a particular clan. Some of these members can trace their family membership back to feudal Japan and continue to add to the family fortune that has accumulated over the years. These members are already considered high ranking officials in the clan and are a part of the inner circle, often referred to as *wakashu* (literally "young men") or junior leaders of gangs. These members are always on the fast track to even higher positions as long as they remain loyal and prove their abilities. The latter type of member is usually one who starts at the bottom and tries to work his way up. Since the Yakuza pride themselves at protecting the underprivileged, anybody can be a member, except females of any race (sorry girls). This includes Eta, D-Bees and non-Japanese humans (mostly Korean and Chinese). The only thing the Yakuza asks in return is loyalty without question and service for life.

Being associated with the clan has many benefits as members are given wide berth from normal citizens (often mistaken for respect), the influence of a clan name and access to expensive vehicles, clothing, women, and a lot of spending cash. The price one pays for this glamorous life is the constant scrutiny of the police, the threat of violence from rival clan members and the loss of humanity that comes with enforcing the clan's will. For those of anarchist or evil alignment, this may not sound so bad until they find themselves in an alley riddled with bullets or with their throat slit from ear to ear. The lucky ones end up in prison for years on end before dying in a similar fashion. The real lucky ones live long enough to become clan masters and live out their years until they pass away peacefully or make that one mistake that the police or a rival is waiting for. For the most part, clan members live relatively short lives.

Yakuza Hierarchy

At the head of the clan is the *oyabun* or "father." Another term for this position is *kumicho* or "supreme boss." He rules the clan like a king and his word is law. To displease an oyabun is to risk certain death or worse. Those who do run afoul of the oyabun may seek his forgiveness by committing *yubizume*, or the custom of severing the top segment from one's smallest finger and presenting it to the oyabun. This tradition began with the bakuto (gamblers) and signified the weakening of a warrior's sword hand (the pinky was the strongest finger when a Japanese sword was held correctly), and made the warrior more reliant on his lord's protection. Further infractions resulted in another segment being removed from either the same finger or the next finger. Many Yakuza members are missing a finger or two in an attempt to keep their oyabun's approval.

The senior advisor to the oyabun is the *saiko koman* who may have a small number of gangs under his control, and the headquarters chief is known as the *so-honbucho*. Although powerful men, these positions are not in the direct chain of com-

mand of the Yakuza hierarchy. The second in command is the *wakagashirai* (number two man) and his assistant is called the *fuku-honbucho*. To assist him in his duties are several *wakagashira-hosa* (lieutenants). Third in command is the *shateigashira* who has beneath him several *shateigashira-hosa* (underlings). Aside from these powerful men are dozens of senior bosses (*shatei*) and junior bosses (*wakashu*).

Yakuza Language

A practice dating back to the early 17th century, the Yakuza clansmen have inundated the Japanese language with slang words and peculiar pronunciations to use it as some sort of secret code. This enables members to insult the police and rivals (sometimes without them knowing), give subtle hints and warnings, and generally show their disrespect to society. The language uses words considered foul by average members of society and those heard speaking it are considered rude, belligerent misanthropes with absolutely no sense of courtesy or dignity. Law enforcement who hear this automatically assumes the speaker is a Yakuza member and often go out of their way to make his life miserable. It is not tolerated in public schools or universities, temples, public buildings or prime-time media, however it is an effective form of communication between clan members, especially when the true meaning is not to be advertised. Clan members can usually turn this on and off when needed, but even the most sophisticated member can lose his bearing when speaking with his fellow clansmen. The language can best be described as regular Japanese with words that are slurred, growled, spoken with clenched teeth and lips barely moving, and rolling r's. All Yakuza members eventually learn the lingo within one or two levels of experience as they are immersed into its use. Those fluent in Japanese can understand about half of what is said (-40% to speak and understand) but sound very foolish if they try to speak it. Police officers with a lot of contact with the Yakuza are usually better than the average citizen (-10% to speak and understand).

Notable Yakuza Clans

There are nine active Yakuza clans currently operating in Rifts® Japan as of 109 P.A., each of whom controls dozens of street level gangs. These clans are well established, secure in their territories, and leave little room for any upstarts to try and muscle in on their turf. For the most part, the clans have an informal "non-aggression" pact with each other but this does not prevent violence from breaking out between them on occasion. Some clans have made formal ties with each other while others are considered sworn enemies. These feuds trickle down to the smallest gangs controlled by the clans and sometimes break out into deadly firefights on the street. The oyabuns try to keep control of their minions so that business is not interrupted, but even they are prone to lash out against their rivals when certain lines are crossed.

Clan Jitaro: Oyabun Jitaro Yugin is an elderly man who has run this clan for over fifty years. He appears very soft spoken and gentle but this is merely an illusion that hides a devious mind and an unbreakable will. Through some of the best bio-implants and cybernetics available, he has lived to be the

ripe old age of 103 but still looks to be in his early sixties. He is one of the three most powerful oyabuns in Japan mostly because he has the most loyal police contacts of all the clans. He has tried repeatedly to bring all of the clans under his rule. He almost succeeded on four different occasions, but each time his two main rivals had thwarted his plans. The breakdown of the Jitaro Clan is as follows:

Oyabun (Father): Jitaro Yugin (Japanese human). 15th level Yakuza Clansman.

Saiko Koman (Chief Advisor): Masugua Toru (Japanese human). 12th level Police Officer (obviously rogue).

So-honbucho (Headquarters Chief): Noboata Itchioro (Japanese human). 9th level Cyber-Doc.

Wakagashirai (Second in Command): Grumble-Roar (Ogre). 7th level Yakuza Clansman.

Shateigashira (Third in Command): Kane (Japanese human). 5th level Soldier (infantryman).

Clan Tsonami: Oyabun Tsonami Hojo is a third generation Yakuza clansman who just recently assumed control of the clan after his father's untimely death at the hands of an unknown assassin. It may have seemed that the former oyabun's son was a prime suspect behind his father's murder, but the younger Tsonami was barely 22 when the assassination occurred. It was common knowledge that no successor was ready to take the oyabun's place and the clan threatened to turn on itself as several bosses prepared to take advantage of the sudden opening. It was Hojo, however, who acted the fastest, and before his rivals could maneuver, he had each one of them gunned down by their own bodyguards. It seemed that the elder Tsonami had predicted an attempt on his life and positioned several of his minions – loyal to him alone – to act as bodyguards for his junior officers. This information was given to Hojo after the oyabun's death and the young clansman immediately acted upon it. It was never clear as to which of the oyabun's lieutenants had betrayed him; in fact it is still open to speculation that any of them were behind it at all. It mattered little to the new oyabun. He had secured his seat of power while giving his new lieutenants something to think about if they ever considered usurping him. Tsonami Hojo has been at the head of the clan for a little over a year now, but his reign is in no threat of being challenged.

It should be noted that Clan Tsonami is the only clan that the Japanese police have undercover operatives working in positions of leadership! These deep cover agents are gathering intelligence and evidence in hopes to shut this clan down for good. The highest ranking undercover police officer is the assistant to Nawabe Eichi (Tsonami's third in command) and there are four others in various positions as well. If discovered, they are certainly dead men but if they succeed, Clan Tsonami will crumble and its territories will be picked up by the other clans.

Oyabun (Father): Tsonami Hojo (Japanese human). 5th level Yakuza Clansman.

Saiko Koman (Chief Advisor): Watashi Miki (Japanese human). 8th level Scholar (lawyer).

So-honbucho (Headquarters Chief): Sadatoki Yohoru (Japanese human). 8th level Cyberoid.

Wakagashirai (Second in Command): Joukaku Sotara (Japanese human). 7th level Yakuza Clansman.

Shateigashira (Third in Command): Nawabe Eichi (Japanese human). 5th level Tech-Ninja.

Clan Ryusaki: Oyabun Ryusaki Utaemon leads the most powerful Yakuza clan in Japan. This is clearly not recognized by the other clans as Clan Ryusaki does not have the holdings in either manpower or territory as half of the others. However, Ryusaki's power lies not in anything obvious, but what lies underneath. The truth is that the clan itself is a front for one of the most dangerous ninja clans in all of Japan. Its roots date back to the 18th century as the Yakuza was becoming strong, and the Ninja Clan of the White Dragon decided to use the Yakuza as a front.

The White Dragon is a group of mystic ninjas that originated back in the 14th century. These ninjas were not among those that had been displaced at the time of the Great Cataclysm and were forced to struggle through the dark ages that followed. They might not have survived had they not acclimated themselves to the modern world as it changed. These mystic ninja were proficient with energy weapons, modern body armor and technology, as well as their own mystic arts. This deadly combination ensured their survival and as the world seemed to settle, the White Dragon thrived. Clan Ryusaki is the eighth clan name used by the ninjas, as they feign power struggles and coups to appear unstable. So far it has been an adequate front for the ninja and they remain the most powerful ninja clan in the republic.

One of the many advantages of the front is that the ninja clan is not associated with the Yakuza clan and therefore, they are often hired by rival Yakuza clans. This gives the White Dragon near unlimited access to their adversaries, insights to their plots, and the ability to be very close if needed to make a surgical strike. They have often been hired for missions against the Ryusaki clan, which they have carried out to the satisfaction of their employers. It matters little if their Yakuza patsies are assassinated (assassinations of White Dragon members are always staged) by their own blades; the result is usually an enhanced reputation for the true organization and the ability to feed whatever information they choose to the other Yakuza clans.

The hierarchy of this Yakuza clan consists entirely of ninjas belonging to the order of the White Dragon Clan and are *chunin* (middle) ranking. Their names are one of many false identities which can be discarded at a moment's notice.

Oyabun (Father): Ryusaki Utaemon (Japanese human). 13th level Mystic Ninja.

Saiko Koman (Chief Advisor): Shioya Makoto (Japanese human). 10th level Mystic Ninja.

So-honbucho (Headquarters Chief): Hirasi Atsutane (Japanese human). 9th level Mystic Ninja.

Wakagashirai (Second in Command): Anzi Genjo (Japanese human). 7th level Mystic Ninja.

Shateigashira (Third in Command): Tsuji Fugio (Japanese human). 6th level Mystic Ninja.

Clan Yosano: Yosano is unique in the fact that the oyabun for the past eighty years has been a Raksasha under the human guise of Oyabun Yosano Katai. This foul creature from Hades is a ruthless demon who rules with such an iron fist that his competitors often wonder who is responsible for the most deaths of

his underlings, Oyabun Yosano or all of the other clans combined. There is no practice of yubizume to appease this tyrant. Nothing short of rolling heads will suffice if Yosano is upset with his underlings.

Aside from the normal criminal activities common to Yakuza clans, the members of Clan Yosano are heavily into the occult, practice magic, human sacrifice and other dark rituals to appease Yosano Katai's demon lord, Modius. The clan's inner circle is comprised of other demons, Witches, Shifters, Priests of Darkness, Necromancers and other malicious beings. Most of the lower ranks and the street gangs know Clan Yosano practices black magic but they have no idea how deep their dedication to evil truly runs. However, they fear their masters more than they respect them and Yosano has found that fear is every bit as effective in keeping his troops in line. In addition to his inner circle, Yosano has at his disposal, a band of 21 white weretigers that are all trained in the martial arts. These ferocious assassins are his personal bodyguards and most trusted enforcers and strike fear into the entire clan, even other demons.

Oyabun (Father): Yosano Katai (Raksasha demon). 14th level.

Saiko Koman (Chief Advisor): Kiobi Akira (Japanese human). 10th level Priest of Darkness.

So-honbucho (Headquarters Chief): Kim Li (Korean human). 7th level Witch.

Wakagashirai (Second in Command): Sun Jin (Chinese human). 7th level Necromancer.

Shateigashira (Third in Command): Harth Morekai-Goth (Sowki). 8th level Practitioner of Magic.

Clan Jukodo: Clan Jukodo was once Clan Morishita, until a violent coup by an upstart gang member nearly tore the clan to its foundations. This upstart was a young Japanese man who claimed he had been banished from a rival clan and sought sanctuary with Clan Morishita. His name was Jukodo Hideo, "the dragon talker," as his heavily accented Japanese often slipped into Dragonese when he became angry or excited. It appeared he was a member of the Yakuza since his entire body was covered with tattoos. The revolt was sudden and completely obliterated any remnants of the old clan. Within days the new clan under Jukodo's leadership resumed operations without much incident and the young oyabun was firmly established within his new territory. This raised the eyebrows of all of the other oyabuns, but since Jukodo made no move against their territories, they were content to keep out of the clan's internal matters.

The truth behind Clan Jukodo lies in the name of Clan Aerihman, as the clan was established by none other than the Sunaj. Jukodo was captured by Horune pirates along with his mother at the age of two and eventually sold to the Splugorth slave pens. The young Jukodo had been raised in Splugorth training camps and became one of the feared Maxi-Men. The lad was 100% loyal to his Splugorth masters and rose out of slave status and became a minion by the age of 25. He was hand selected to take over the Morishita Clan (chosen because of their lack of stability) and with the backing of the Sunaj, his coup could not have gone easier. Although he is considered the oyabun, he still answers to the Splugorth and remains very loyal. Aside from his inner circle, few other bosses are minions of the Splugorth and have no knowledge that the clan serves a higher power.

Oyabun (Father): Jukodo Hideo (Japanese human and minion of Splugorth). 9th level Tattooed Maxi-Man.

Saiko Koman (Chief Advisor): Krom Zha-Aiel (Atlantean human). 12th level Sunaj Assassin.

So-honbucho (Headquarters Chief): Otaka Nariaki (Japanese human). 8th level Shifter.

Wakagashirai (Second in Command): Ishikawa Kenjiro (Japanese human). 8th level T-Monster Man.

Shateigashira (Third in Command): Gushiken Oniji (Japanese human). 8th level Yakuza Clansman.

The remaining clans are all traditional Yakuza clans with Japanese leadership. They are Clan Chikamatsu, Clan Tenshin, Clan Kuga and Clan Enoki. Game Masters are encouraged to create their own Yakuza clans to fit their campaign and add as many dirty secrets as they see fit.

Notable Street Gangs

As there are hundreds of street gangs loyal to the Yakuza in Japan, it would be impossible to list them all here. However, some of the more notable gangs are listed for Game Masters to expound upon.

Shojo Zetsumei: The Death Maidens. Aside from being an all female gang, these young women are unique in the fact that they all hail from upper and middle class families, are well educated and very sophisticated. To call them a gang is an understatement since their organization is as structured as the Yakuza or even the ninja clans. They recruit young women out of high school and college, encouraging their education while training them to be proficient in seduction, espionage and thievery. As a group, they excel in blackmailing, picking pockets, learning secrets and using men to further their gains. Their name is somewhat of a misnomer since they are not assassins (although they are rumored to be), however once recruited they remain loyal until death to the Maidens, long after they mature and move on to normal lives. They have no Yakuza affiliation.

Ru-Nekku: One English translation for the Ru-Nekku could be "the Rednecks" but the term is intended to be far more menacing than it might suggest. Members of the Ru-Nekku are expert knife fighters (+1 to strike and parry and add one melee attack when using any knife) and their name derives from how their victims are often found with slit throats. They are violent to the extreme and their members rarely live past the age of 20. There are always more recruits, however, since their reputation is one that strikes fear into many other gangs. The Ru-Nekku are affiliated with Clan Tsonami and their sign is that of a red-bladed tanto.

The Gaijin: This group is solely made up of D-Bees and has been around for over 80 years. They speak a mixture of Japanese and Gobbeley with as much slang as any Yakuza clan. They are big on respect and tend to pull their guns at the slightest hint of insolence from others (real or imagined). Although they defer to the Yakuza, they have a strong hatred for Japanese humans, seeing them as oppressing bigots for anything not of their culture. They strive to form their own Yakuza clan, however their numbers (and often ignorance) keeps them on the street level. They are affiliated with Clan Yosamo.



Additional Dragon Tattoos

The Yakuza clans of Japan have expounded upon their own special tattoo magic to give their members a wider variety of powers. Each tattoo has a specific function but all of the tattoos provide limited M.D.C. protection and supernatural strength. These new tattoos continue to make the user a (temporary) supernatural being and while the power is being used, the user still glows with an eerie green aura and suffers the same vulnerabilities as any other supernatural being. Also, only one magic tattoo can be placed on a person; multiple tattoos are impossible. All tattoos can be activated a maximum of four times a day with a duration of one hour per activation. Only S.D.C. beings can benefit from these tattoos.

Dragon Speed Tattoo: The user is endowed with a Supernatural P.S. of 16 and M.D.C. is equal to the P.E. attribute x2. The wearer also benefits from the following bonuses: two additional attacks per melee round, +20 to speed, and +6 to the wearer's P.P. attribute (minimum P.P. of 17).

Dragon Aura Tattoo: The user is endowed with a Supernatural P.S. of 30 and M.D.C. is equal to the P.E. attribute x4. Additionally, the wearer has a Horror Factor of 14 and can breathe fire twice per melee round. Damage is 2D6 M.D. with a range of 50 feet (15 m).

Dragon Wind Walker Tattoo: The user is endowed with a Supernatural P.S. of 20 and M.D.C. is equal to the P.E. attribute x2. The wearer also has the ability to fly at his normal speed attribute x5. While in flight, the wearer gains one additional attack per melee, +3 to dodge and +6 Mega-Damage for all physical attacks.

Dragon Senses Tattoo: The user is endowed with a Supernatural P.S. of 21 and M.D.C. is equal to the P.E. attribute x2. The wearer also has the following abilities: See the Invisible, See Aura and Sense Magic. These powers are constant for the duration of the magic.

Serpent Tattoo of Stealth: The user is endowed with a Supernatural P.S. of 16 and M.D.C. is equal to the P.E. attribute x2. The wearer also has the following abilities: Shadow Meld, Chameleon and Calling once per melee round equal to the wearer's level of experience.

Serpent Tattoo of the Poison Fang: The user is endowed with a Supernatural P.S. of 25 and M.D.C. is equal to the P.E. attribute x2. Additionally, the wearer grows elongated fangs and claws that inflict Mega-Damage. A bite inflicts 2D6 M.D. and the claws inflict +1D6 M.D. to the wearer's supernatural punch damage. Victims must save vs poison or suffer an additional 4D6 M.D., but the skin of the victim must be penetrated. S.D.C. beings slain in such a matter cannot be resurrected until a successful negate poison spell is cast upon the body.

Serpent Tattoo of Beguiling: The user is endowed with a Supernatural P.S. of 16 and M.D.C. is equal to the P.E. attribute x2. Additionally, the wearer has the following abilities: Domination, Charismatic Aura and Charm once per melee round equal to the wearer's level of experience.

Yakuza Clansman O.C.C.

(Optional Player Character and N.P.C. Villain)

It should also be stressed that the clan is made up of many different people with different skills. Most of the members of the Yakuza are merely thugs (City Rats, Cyberoids, Vagabonds) and make up a good 60% to 75% of the gangs. Others are highly trained warriors (Ronin, Cyber-Samurai, ex-military, mercenaries) or experienced thieves and con-men (Gambler, Forger, Safecracker, Smuggler, Professional Thief). These men are usually enforcers, bodyguards, advisors, and the brains behind certain operations. A select few are educated men (scholars, scientists, men of magic and psychics) who oversee the accounting, drug manufacturing, legal issues and other duties. Other O.C.C.s include Juicers, Arazies, T-Men, Assassins, D-Bees, Dragon Hatchlings and even demons and sub-demons. All of these are in addition to the Yakuza clan member O.C.C. described below.

This O.C.C. represents those members born into the clan or who may have had a long family history with the clan. Either way, the member is deeply rooted within the clan, has met the oyabun on several occasions (may even be related to him), and is given the responsibility of a wakashu or junior boss. These men are usually human, come from a wealthy family and are either college educated or trained by the military or renowned schools of the martial or mystic arts. Those that show an apti-

tude for supernatural abilities are encouraged to pursue them as well as learn the family business. Therefore, Yakuza members are not usually full-fledged practitioners of the magical or psychic arts.

Special Abilities & Equipment: Yakuza clan members are stereotypical in that they are always seen in dark or flashy suits, dark sunglasses, crew cuts and excessive jewelry. Beneath the flash and style, however, many Yakuza members are concealing Vibro-Blades, energy pistols, magical items or other secrets that make them more dangerous than they appear. Remember that in the cities of Rifts® Japan, weapons and armor are not legal to carry on the street and to do so will invite trouble at every turn. Yakuza clan members go to great efforts in showing off who they are without overtly breaking any laws. All Yakuza clansmen *choose one* of the following special powers or equipment. This may also be provided to other O.C.C.s if they are high ranking members.

1. Dragon Strength Tattoos: The clan member is endowed with one mystical tattoo (among other normal tattoos) that provides him with supernatural strength and Mega-Damage protection. The power can be activated up to four times a day. Duration is one hour per activation.

In the alternative, the clansman may be a Tattooed Man (see **Rifts® Atlantis**, page 93). This character uses the O.C.C. skills of the Yakuza Clansman but the maximum number of O.C.C. related skills is seven. Where these clan members get their magic tattoos is a mystery since they are all sworn to secrecy, but it has been surmised that they are received through contacts with the Sunaj, ancient dragons, or the Splugorth.

Most Yakuza members cover their bodies with tattoos whether they are magical in nature or not. This serves as a means to both prove their mettle by subjecting themselves to hours of pain, and to rub their defiance in the face of society, furthering their image as outcasts. Black rings are tattooed around the arm for every major criminal offense the member committed. The unintended result of this is those familiar with tattoo magic cannot always tell the T-Men from other clansmen.

2. Martial Arts Training: The member is given extensive martial arts training and provided with the following abilities: Hand to Hand: Jujitsu or Assassin and the Body Hardening abilities of Chi-Gung, Iron Hand and Kick Practice/Chagi. **Base P.P.E.:** 4D6 plus P.E. attribute. **Combat Bonuses:** +2 on initiative, +1 to strike, +2 to pull punch, and one additional attack per melee round.

3. Psionic Training: The member was identified as a budding psychic and given over to clan psychics for specific training and focus. The member is considered to be a master psychic and chooses three powers from each of the categories of Sensitive, Physical and Healing in addition to the Super Psionic power of TK Body Field. At each level of experience the psychic can choose one additional power from the categories of Sensitive, Healing and Physical. Choose one additional Super Psionic power at levels three, five, seven, nine, twelve and fifteen. **Base I.S.P.:** 1D6x10+M.E. attribute. Gains 10 I.S.P. per level of experience. O.C.C. Related skills are reduced to six maximum.

4. Mystical Enlightenment: Although not a man of magic, the clan member has a high base P.P.E. and he is taught to channel his energies to power Techno-Wizard devices. The member



is then fitted for concealed body armor with two TW enchantments (usually Armor of Ithan or Invulnerability as one of them) maximum. The concealed body armor is similar to Cyber-Armor (but removable) with 50 M.D.C. and an A.R. of 16. The clan member can also power TW weapons, armor, and other items if available. **Base P.P.E.:** 6D6+6 plus P.E. attribute. Add 1D6 per level of experience.

5. Magical Training: The member was identified as having a talent to control magic energies and was tutored by clan wizards. Although not a dedicated man of magic, the Yakuza member learns a handful of spells to assist in his evil endeavors. Choose two spells from each level 1-4 at level one (for a total of eight spells) and add an additional spell per each level of experience equal to the character's experience level. Additional spells may be learned, purchased or awarded regardless of the level of experience. The character also has the abilities of the Ley Line Walker #2 and #3. **Base P.P.E.:** 1D4x10+20 plus the P.E. attribute. Add 2D6 P.P.E. per level of experience. O.C.C. Related skills are reduced to a maximum of five and the available Hand to Hand combat skill is limited to Karate, Judo or Expert.

6. Magical Equipment: The member is issued a Splugorth Talisman of Armor that provides 100 M.D.C. three times daily for ten melee rounds per activation, a Ring of Superhuman Strength (three times daily, 10 minute duration) and an additional magic charm or medallion of the Game Master's choice (nothing too powerful). Another item for protection may include a magical suit of chain mail armor with 80-120 M.D.C. that regenerates 10 M.D.C. per hour. This suit is magically weightless and noiseless and can be worn under loose clothing. These items are imported by Horune Pirates or provided by allied dragons or other connections. If any of these items are lost, they will not be replaced and the clan member would have a hard time getting even a suit of M.D. body armor from the clan after showing such carelessness.

7. High-Tech Equipment: The member is issued a Naruni force field (another Horune import) or an experimental equivalent with the maximum protection of 110 M.D.C. Super rare items may include Phase technology from Phase World. These are worn over M.D. suits of plain-clothes armor that provide additional protection. For field operations, these members have the best armor and weapons available, including stolen Triax exoskeleton armor, ArmaTech military armor, and light power armor.

8. Cybernetics: The member is a Partial Conversion 'Borg with one or two bionic arms and up to three (concealed) weapon systems in each arm, Cyber-Armor and up to six additional cybernetics of the player's choice. **M.D.C.:** Main Body: 50, Arms: 25 each, Head: 15 (reinforced), Legs: by armor only. Or the member is a Full Conversion 'Borg, however all weapon systems must be concealed and outward appearances must reflect that of a decommissioned military cyborg.

Attribute Requirements: None. But a high I.Q., M.A. and P.S. are suggested.

Alignment Restrictions: Anarchist or evil alignments only. Good and Unprincipled characters cannot bring themselves to do the things expected from a Yakuza clan member.

O.C.C. Skills

Language: Japanese at 98%

Literacy: Japanese at 98%

Language: Two of choice (+20%).

Mathematics: Basic (+15%)

Radio: Basic (+10%)

Gambling (+20%)

Prowl (+10%)

Running

W.P. Knife

W.P. Energy Pistol

W.P.: Two of choice.

Hand to Hand: Any except Zanji Shinjinken-Ryo and Teng-Jutsu. A few are able to learn Ninjutsu but at the cost of three O.C.C. Related Skills. Subject to Game Master's approval.

O.C.C. Related Skills: Yakuza clan members come from money and many are ex-military, college educated and street savvy. Select ten other skills at level one and two additional skills at levels 3, 6, 9 and 12. All new skills start at level one proficiency.

Communications: Any (+10%).

Domestic: Any.

Electrical: Any (+5%).

Espionage: Any (+10%).

Horsemanship: General only.

Mechanical: Any (+10%).

Medical: Any except holistic medicine (+5%).

Military: Any (+10%).

Physical: Any (+10%).

Pilot: Any (+10%).

Pilot Related: Any (+5%).

Rogue: Any (+15%).

Science: Any (+5%).

Technical: Any (+15%).

Weapon Proficiencies: Any.

Wilderness: None.

Secondary Skills: Select six Secondary Skills from the previous list with the same limitations as above. As usual, they do not get the advantage of the bonus listed in parentheses.

Standard Equipment and Money: All Yakuza members are given free housing and dining arrangements at 2D4 different hotels, apartment complexes, restaurants and bars throughout the city. They also have access (with permission) to clan vehicles that include any civilian cars, trucks, motorcycles, hover-cars and hover-cycles. About 10% of these vehicles have increased armor and/or concealed weapons but no military vehicles or suits of power armor are available. Their wardrobe is always top of the line business attire. Yakuza members are given a monthly "allowance" of 5,000 credits which can be spent on anything since members don't have to worry about room and board or equipment. Everything is provided by the clan.

Weapons and Armor: Beginning level characters usually begin with one energy weapon for each Weapon Proficiency and six spare E-Clips for each. Armor is issued only for assignments that require them and can be of any design (usually

knock-offs), including military body armor. Most Yakuza members remain in civilian clothes, relying on other forms of protection to remain less conspicuous.

Cybernetics: If desired, characters start with 1D4 cybernetic implants of choice unless they would interfere with any magical or psychic abilities.

Average Level of Experience: 1D4+1 (use the same experience point table as the Smuggler O.C.C.).

Cyber-Ninja

The Cyber-Ninja is a new variant of the Tech-Ninja that is similar to the Ninja 'Borg as far as being equipped with the latest in cybernetic augmentation. The Cyber-Ninja, however, is not the powerhouse that his cyborg counterpart is famous for. Instead, this augmented being is made to look exactly like a normal human with no visible cybernetics on his person. Underneath the synthetic flesh, however, the ninja is a Full Conversion 'Borg with a Mega-Damage body and an arsenal of cybernetics to assist him (or her) in his secret endeavors. The Cyber-Ninja is a master of disguise, an expert in defeating high-tech security systems and a professional hacker as well as being a formidable warrior with enhanced reflexes, superior strength, and some impressive weaponry. They are used to infiltrate some of the toughest security systems in Japan to conduct missions of sabotage, assassination, theft and other underhanded jobs. They work well with other versions of Tech-Ninja and often complete their missions without letting their own teammates know anything of their true nature. Their cybernetic disguises allow them to have dozens of different identities and they are so adept at acting and role-playing that they often switch personas on a monthly basis.

Like all of the Ninja 'Borgs, the Cyber-Ninja are raised in special camps from an early age, are usually physically disabled, and have no family except for the clan. If selected to become a Cyber-Ninja, the youngster is gifted with his bionic body at the age of 18 and then given his first mission after several tests to ensure that the candidate is adjusting well to becoming a cyborg. Only after several missions with experienced Tech-Ninja, will the Cyber-Ninja be ready for solo missions and entrusted with more responsibility.

Bionic Conversions & Accessories

- 1. Full Bionic Conversion:** The Cyber-Ninja is a Full Conversion 'Borg with the following attributes: P.S.: 25, P.P. 20, P.B. 17-22 (1D6+16) and Speed of 73 (50 mph/80 kph). Cyber-Ninja can leap 6 feet (1.8 m) high and 12 feet (3.6 m) across. These distances are increased by 25% with a running start. The P.S. and P.P. attributes begin with the maximum number possible, but speed can be increased to a maximum of 132 (90 mph/144 kph).
- 2. M.D.C.:** Main Body: 200 M.D.C., Head: 80 M.D.C., Arms: 70 M.D.C. each, Legs: 85 M.D.C. each, plus the Cyber-Ninja can wear any type of body armor for additional protection or as a disguise.
- 3. Physical Appearance:** The Cyber-Ninja looks completely human as they are encased with synthetic flesh and blood. Unless otherwise required, the Cyber-Ninja are given comely



faces and Olympian physiques, although on occasion a Cyber-Ninja can be made to have any style of appearance, even that of D-Bees and Oni! The synthetic shell is as fragile as human skin and will bleed or bruise if damaged (up to 95 S.D.C.). A single point of Mega-Damage, however, will destroy the façade, revealing the machine beneath and may require an opponent to roll a save vs a Horror Factor of 12 as he realizes that his opponent is not what he seems. The only thing that might raise a question about the cyber-human is his great weight. Average body weight is 200-300 pounds (90 to 135 kg) and they are not easily knocked down from heavy damage. (As a Full Conversion Cyborg, the Cyber-Ninja has the same chance of being knocked down as a robot or a supernatural being. See *Rifts® Conversion Book*, page 14.)

4. Sound Suppression System: Effectively the same setup as the Ninja 'Borg, however the Cyber-Ninja can move at a maximum speed of 20 and the system gives him a bonus of +10% to Prowl.

5. Standard Cybernetic Features: Multi-optic eye (one), amplified hearing, sound filtration, motion detector, bionic lung and oxygen storage cell, climb cord, garrote wrist wire, cyber-disguise type AA-1 and ASH supplemental, modulating voice synthesizer, universal headjack and language translator. The Cyber-Ninja can also choose up to six other cybernetic enhancements for the head, three in each arm, and two in the main torso. All cybernetics must be small and concealed and usually consist of illegal hardware for implanting viruses or hacking into computers and other nefarious activities. See *Rifts® Bionics Sourcebook* for a complete listing of all bionics and cybernetics.

6. Weapons: The standard weapons given to the Cyber-Ninja are designed for concealment, not heavy combat. They are back-up systems used only when hand weapons are unavailable. Weapons include:

Retractable Finger Blades (four in each hand): Mega-Damage: 4D4 M.D. *or* Wrist Needle & Drug Dispenser.

Retractable Knuckle Blades (four in each hand): Mega-Damage: 2D4 M.D. *or* Retractable Forearm Blades (two in each arm): Mega-Damage: 2D6 M.D.

Laser Eye: Mega-Damage: 2D6 M.D., Rate of Fire: Each blast counts as one attack per melee. Range: 1000 feet (305 m). Payload: Effectively unlimited. Bonus: +2 to strike in conjunction with Multi-Optic Eye.

7. Hand to Hand Combat: The Cyber-Ninja is built to inflict greater damage than the average human and can even inflict Mega-Damage with certain special attacks in addition to those listed above.

Attacks per Melee Round: Equal to the character's hand to hand combat skill selection and expertise.

Combat Bonuses: +4 on initiative, +1 to strike and parry, +2 to dodge, +2 to roll with impact and pull punch, +2 to save vs Horror Factor. This includes all bonuses gained from cybernetics. The bionic P.P. attribute gives an additional +3 to strike, parry and dodge. Additional bonuses apply from hand to hand combat selection and additional cybernetics chosen by the player.

Damage: In addition to combat strikes and maneuvers learned in hand to hand combat, all Cyber-Ninja know the following:

Restrained Punch: 1D6+10 S.D.C.

Full Strength Punch: 2D6+10 S.D.C.

Power Punch: 1D4 M.D. (counts as 2 melee attacks).

Kick: 3D6+10 S.D.C. (add 1D6 to all other kick attacks learned in hand to hand combat).

Jump Kick/Leap Attack: 2D4 M.D. (counts as 2 melee attacks).

Body Flip/Throw: 2D6+10 S.D.C.

Body Block/Crush Attack: 2D6+10 S.D.C.

Full Speed Body Block/Crush Attack: 2D4 M.D. (counts as 2 melee attacks).

Cyber-Ninja O.C.C.

Attribute Requirements: I.Q. 14, M.E. 12. There are no physical requirements but a high M.A. is also suggested.

O.C.C. Skills

Language: Japanese (+20%)

Literacy: Japanese (+15%)

Language: One of choice (+15%).

Mathematics: Basic (+10%)

Radio: Basic (+10%)

Surveillance Systems (+15%)

Electronics: Basic (+10%)

Locksmith (+15%)

Pick Locks (+10%)

Computer Operation (+10%)

Disguise (+10%)

Prowl (+5%)

Climbing (+15%)

W.P.: Four of choice.

Hand to Hand: Assassin or Jujitsu.

O.C.C. Related Skills: Select six other skills at level one and two additional skills at levels 2, 4, 7 and 10. All new skills start at level one proficiency.

Communications: Any (+10%).

Domestic: Any.

Electrical: Any.

Espionage: Any (+10%).

Horsemanship: General only.

Mechanical: Any.

Medical: First aid (+10%) or Paramedic (no bonus).

Military: Any (+10%).

Physical: Any that are still appropriate (+10%).

Pilot: Any.

Pilot Related: Any (+5%).

Rogue: Any (+10%).

Science: Any.

Technical: Any (+10% on all computer and lore skills).

Weapon Proficiencies: Any.

Wilderness: None.

Secondary Skills: Select four Secondary Skills from the previous list with the same limitations as above. As usual, they do not get the advantage of the bonus listed in parentheses.

Standard Equipment and Money: Same as the Ninja 'Borg.

Weapons and Armor: Beginning level characters usually begin with one energy weapon for each weapon proficiency and four spare E-Clips for each and a suit of full environmental body armor (usually the NF-100 Infiltrator). Other weapons and armor may be issued by the clan to promote the Cyber-Ninja's current cover.

Cybernetics: Including those listed above, the Cyber-Ninja has a tracer chip implanted inside of him so the clan may keep tabs on him.

Average Level of Experience: 1D4+1 (use the same experience point table as the Cyber-Humanoid O.C.C.).



Ninja Juicer Variants

Since the Sunaj have made contact with the Japanese underworld, both sides have benefited from some limited trade of knowledge and technology. For instance, the Sunaj now have access to the blueprints of about a dozen ArmaTech and H-Brand items as well as several pieces of illegal cybernetics. The Tech-Ninja, on the other hand, have a few more Techno-Wizard and Bio-Wizard items to add to their arsenal as well as two new Juicer conversion processes to use with their Ninja Juicers. One is the Hyperion variant, the other is the Mega-Juicer (the Titan Juicer was rejected on the premise that it was not appropriate for the ninja role).

The Tech-Ninja clans of H-Brand are the sole owners of these variants in the islands of Japan and thus far, their new "super" ninjas have made life very difficult for both the clans in the New Empire and those loyal to ArmaTech. After only seven successful operations, the rumor is out about these powerhouses – especially after an incident where one Mega-Juicer tore apart three Full Conversion 'Borgs with his bare hands and was secretly caught on video. H-Brand publicly denies having any special Juicer variants at their disposal and in more private circles their leaders have hinted that some new technology was recovered after an unprecedented raid took place in an undisclosed location.

Regardless of how they obtained them, the fact is that they are using both variants within their ninja clans with devastating effect. Other clans are now obsessed with securing this knowledge for themselves and a bounty has been placed on the capture of one of these Ninja Juicers *alive* for study. The current rate is 2 million credits and is expected to go up if there are no takers within the next 6 months (so far, no one has even tried).

All Ninja Juicers, regardless of type, still use the Ninja Juicer O.C.C. to determine skills and equipment.

New Equipment Common for Tech-Ninja

IJP-200 Locust Jet Pack

A favorite amongst the Tech-Ninja and special forces. This jet pack is nearly silent (the pilot can Prowl at his normal skill but at -15%. Armor penalties do not apply) and has a special feature that allows the wings to fold up and into the main unit, making the entire system no larger than a full backpack. When the wings are extended during flight, the pilot can cut off the power and glide without prowl penalty. If the jet pack is deactivated for more than five minutes, the cooling system will negate any thermal emissions. Tech-Ninja use this to approach their targets virtually unseen as they can fly under radar and without fear of being picked up by thermo-optic scanners. After the mission, the ninja can make a quick escape without the need for an elevated position to take off (like a hang glider may need). If there are drawbacks to this flight system, it is the inferior speed and frailty of its construction.

Model Type: IJP-200 Locust Jet Pack

Class: Stealth Flight System

Crew: One

M.D.C.: 35

Speed: Flying: 45 mph (72 kph) maximum. Maximum ceiling is 10,000 feet (3,048 m).

Engine: Electric only. The engine is powered by E-Clips.

Maximum Range: 400 miles (640 km) per two long E-Clips.

Length: 2 feet (0.6 m).

Weight: 20 pounds (9 kg).

Market Price: 120,000 credits.

Pneumatic Grappling Hook Launcher

This weapon resembles the M-79 grenade launcher used by American forces during the Vietnam War. It is a short-barreled launcher with a small winch attached beneath it. It fires a small grappling hook attached to over 300 feet (91 m) of thin metal cord used to assist in scaling walls and crossing moats, rivers and chasms. It is powered by an E-Clip (standard) good for 20 launches and comes standard with an attached range finder. This allows the user to adjust for the appropriate range to allow the grappling hook to either imbed itself into solid surfaces or give itself some slack to properly wrap itself around poles, branches, etc. The winch automatically pulls the cord taut but the user can manually feed more line if needed. With the winch, the user can pull himself toward the hook (maximum weight of 500 pounds/225 kg) at a speed of 20.

Weight: 7 pounds (3 kg).

Mega-Damage: 1D4 M.D. to M.D.C. surfaces; just enough to imbed itself securely.

Rate of Fire: One per melee. If the grappling hook misses, it takes a full melee for the winch to reel it in.

Maximum Effective Range: 300 feet (91 m).

Payload: 20 launches per standard E-Clip.

Market Price: 20,000 credits.

HMP-200 Assault Rifle

In an attempt to arm their Tech-Ninja without the tell-tale signatures of energy weapons (although silent, they tend to light up a dark night) but still maintain adequate stopping power (i.e. Mega-Damage), H-Brand has developed a highly sophisticated assault rifle that is silent, deadly and offers the enemy no visible sign when fired. It is a combination energy weapon and slug thrower that propels tiny explosive rounds that can penetrate modern environmental body armor with just a few short bursts. It runs on the same principle of the rail gun, but since the rounds do not need to reach such high speeds to inflict damage, the weapon can be made much lighter and needs only the equivalent of an E-Canister to power the weapon. The rounds are simple explosive charges that explode on impact with a greater punch than the average rail gun round. It is a selective fire weapon useful for single shots, short bursts or sustained automatic fire. The sound suppression system is also built right into the weapon, making it virtually noiseless. It is a popular close support small arm and with minor modifications, can be converted into a sniper weapon. It resembles a compact 21st century assault rifle with a canister behind the pistol grip and the magazine in front. It can be modified to the tastes of the user, such as adding fixed or telescopic stocks, fore-grips, bi-pods and a variety of optical sights. All HMP-200s come standard with laser targeting.

Weight: 8 pounds (3.6 kg).

Mega-Damage: 1D6+2 M.D. per explosive round, 5D6 M.D. per five round burst, 1D6x10+10 M.D. for a sustained 15 round burst. Sniper rounds are larger and pack more punch but are not designed for automatic fire (single shots only): 4D6 M.D.

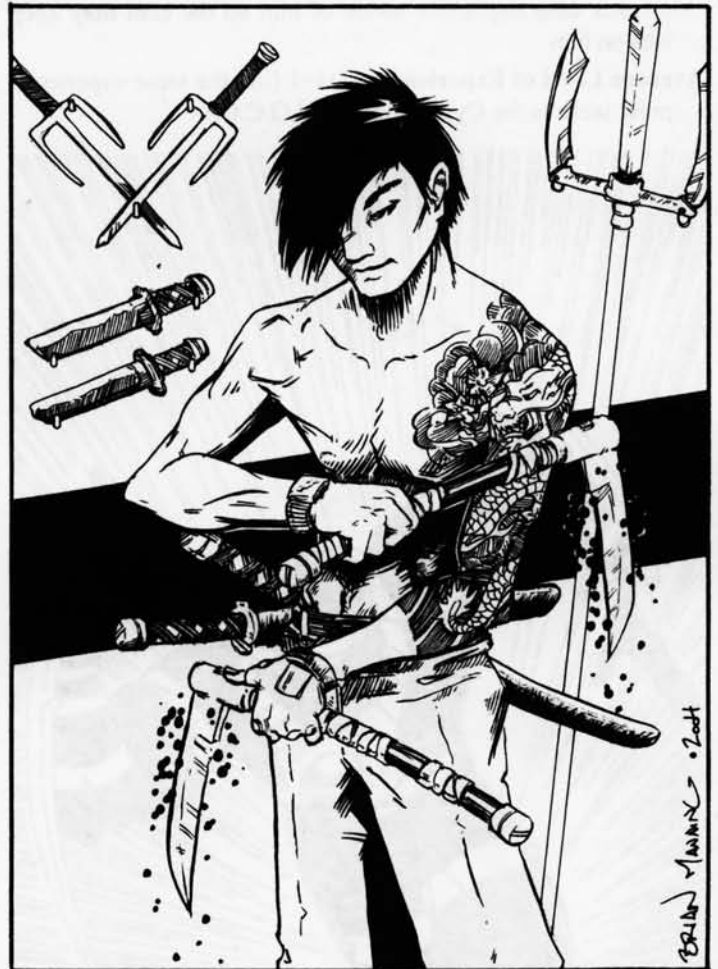
Rate of Fire: Aimed, burst or wild.

Maximum Effective Range: 1,800 feet (549 m). Sniper modifications extend the barrel and increase the range to 2,500 feet (762 m).

Payload: 60 rounds per magazine, 180 rounds per drum. Sniper configurations have 15 round magazines. The E-Canister is good to fire six magazines or two drums before needing re-charging. It cannot be removed.

Bonus: +1 to strike with an aimed shot or short bursts only.

Market Price: 85,000 credits, each round costs 800 credits, re-charging the canister costs 2,500 credits.



Kittani Technology

The Sunaj introduced a variety of alien technology for trade, including the blueprints to create melee weapons that radiate plasma energy. H-Brand has already finished their final testing on these new prototypes and they are very pleased with their performance. As of 109 P.A., there are a few Japanese style plasma weapons available and they will be as common as Vibro-Weapons within five years. All plasma weapons are M.D.C. structures with a minimum of 20 M.D.C. for small weapons and 30 M.D.C. for larger weapons. The E-Clips are thin cylindrical power packs that either fit in the butt of the spear or the hilt of the sword and are not compatible with other energy weapons such as rifles and pistols without modification.

Other Kittani weaponry such as the classic plasma swords, axes, energy lances and tridents are imported and also available through H-Brand. The following weapons are constructed by H-Brand based upon Kittani schematics and are popular with Tech-Ninja clans, adventurers, mercenaries and bandits.

Plasma Spears

Weight: 4 pounds (1.8 kg).

Mega-Damage: 2D6 M.D. per spear strike, 4D6 M.D. per plasma blast or 2D6+2 S.D.C. damage when not energized.

Rate of Fire: Equal to the number of melee attacks of the user.

Maximum Effective Range: Hand to hand combat or 100 feet (30.5 m) for the plasma blast.

Payload: 60 minutes per E-Clip. Each blast drains 10 minutes from the power supply.

Market Price: 50,000 credits.

Plasma Swords

Weight: 3 pounds (1.35 kg) for the katana, 2 pounds (.9 kg) for the wakizashi or ninja-to.

Mega-Damage: 3D6 M.D. for the katana, 2D6 for the shorter swords, 4D6 M.D. per plasma blast for all swords. When not energized, the katana inflicts 3D6 S.D.C. damage and the shorter swords inflict 2D6+2 S.D.C. damage.

Rate of Fire: Equal to the number of melee attacks of the user.

Maximum Effective Range: Hand to hand combat or 100 feet (30.5 m) for the plasma blast.

Payload: 60 minutes per E-Clip. Each blast drains 10 minutes from the power supply.

Market Price: 55,000 credits.

Plasma Sais, Sickles, and Knives

Weight: 1 pound (0.45 kg) for sais and knives, 2 pounds (0.9 kg) for sickle weapons.

Mega-Damage: 2D4 M.D. for sais and knives, 2D6 M.D. for sickle weapons. Plasma blasts inflict 2D6 M.D. maximum for both weapons. When not energized the weapons inflict 2D6 S.D.C. damage.

Rate of Fire: Equal to the number of melee attacks of the user.

Maximum Effective Range: Hand to hand combat or 100 feet (30.5 m) for the plasma blast.

Payload: 60 minutes per E-Clip. Each blast drains 10 minutes from the power supply.

Market Price: 35,000 credits.

Plasma Arrowheads and Shurikens

These high-tech arrowheads are actually micro-plasma grenades with the arming pin (about the size of a needle) located at the point (or points). Upon impact, the arrowhead or throwing star explodes in a ball of fiery plasma in a three foot (.9 m) radius. The arrows may be constructed to be used with any bow or crossbow.

Weight: The arrows are 1 pound (0.45 kg) each, the shurikens are about a half pound (0.22 kg).

Mega-Damage: 3D6 M.D. per arrow strike. 2D6 M.D. per shuriken strike. Both the arrow and the shuriken are destroyed in the blast.

Rate of Fire: Equal to the archery skill of the user.

Maximum Effective Range: Equal to the user's number of attacks per melee round.

Payload: Each arrow or shuriken is good for one blast and is destroyed upon impact.

Market Price: 9,000 credits each.

Energy Tiger Lance

Inspired by the Chinese Rocket Spear, this three-pronged lance is a modified energy lance commonly used by the Equestrian Power Armor. The middle prong is a long-range laser weapon while the flanking prongs are actually mini-missiles. Any missile can be used but the most popular are a simple pair of Vibro-Blades that can be launched at incredible rates of speed with deadly results. These blades make only a whishing noise as they slice through the air and can slay an opponent without the explosion or fireworks that accompanies regular ordnance. Another benefit of the blades is that it makes the lance a more effective weapon in melee combat.

Weight: 10 pounds (4.5 kg).

Mega-Damage: Laser: 2D6 per shot at long ranges. The weapon can be adjusted to half the range for twice the damage (4D6 M.D.).

Mini-missiles: by missile type. Vibro-Blade missiles inflict 4D6 M.D. or 1D4x10+10 for a dual strike.

Melee Weapon: 4D6 M.D. with the attached blades or 2D4 as an energized lance without the blades.

Rate of Fire: Equal to the number of melee attacks of the user.

Maximum Effective Range: Laser: 2000 feet (610 m) or 4000 feet (1220 m).

Mini-Missiles: 1 mile. Vibro-Blade missiles: 500 feet (152.4 m).

Payload: 40 shots for the laser, 2 missiles maximum for the missile launcher. The laser recharges after four hours.

Market Price: 95,000 credits.

Law Enforcement

Police Officer O.C.C.

Police departments worldwide rely on their uniformed police officers to man the front lines of the urban jungles. These men and women wear the same badge and uniform on a daily basis, but they wear many hats in the course of their duties. From giving simple directions to being the first responding authority of every major crime scene, the patrol officer does it all... at least initially.

About half of the duties a patrol officer is responsible for are handled without much fanfare, but occasionally they are required to call in the specialists to ensure proper police action is completed to the best of the law enforcement agency's capability. Investigators often assume control of the crime scene, working closely with forensic scientists to recreate the criminal act as completely as possible. Units trained in special tactics are called in to handle those situations where suspects are considered well armed and/or extremely dangerous. K-9 handlers using both live animals and robot equivalents are used for tracking suspects, searching for victims, evidence, contraband or explosive devices, and finally, many modern departments have anti-supernatural personnel to assist in crimes that may have been com-

mitted by sorcerers, psychics or supernatural creatures. Most departments are considered a large team where many of its members have special skills to cover all the bases.

In most cases, members of a police force start out as a patrol officer, but after being seasoned on the street and with the right motivation, many officers move on to different fields either to follow a set of goals, try something different, or just change the scenery. The more experience an officer has, the better chance he or she may have for promotions. Whatever the reason, the department is always looking to fill openings in special units and they often look to the patrol officers to do so.

It should be noted that the Japanese Police Officer O.C.C. is a perfect example of law enforcement in any high-tech Mega-Damage setting and the Game Master and players are encouraged to use it in other game settings as a model to create police O.C.C.s where none are presented. Other modern police O.C.C.s can be found in *Rifts® Coalition War Campaign*, *Warlords of Russia* and *Australia*.

Rising Through the Ranks: Like the ashigaru who strives to become samurai, some police officers work hard to become a part of one of the many special units. Often this means interesting duties, higher rank, a larger paycheck and the prestige of calling oneself by a different title. As mentioned before, all members of the police force begin their careers as a patrol officer, often working with experienced officers for a time until they are ready for larger responsibilities. In time, however, they turn to other, more specialized fields where they receive intensive training with hands-on experience, usually in the shadow of a veteran.

For game purposes, this simply means that the Police Officer O.C.C. is switched to one of the following specialized units. These officers already have the advantage of some experience, and their O.C.C. Related skills should reflect what they later hope to become. This is not a case where one O.C.C. is switched for another, but rather the officer gets bonus skills and abilities due to the intensive training he or she receives later in their career. Some skills are still required as the best applicants are the ones most qualified.

1. Inspector/Detective: Duties include crime scene analysis, recognizing and gathering evidence, interviewing witnesses, victims and suspects and preparing a case for criminal court proceedings. Skills required before becoming an inspector include writing, interrogation and criminal forensics (taken twice). Other handy skills include intelligence, detect concealment, photography, T.V./video, disguise, impersonate voices, research, language and lore skills. Some investigators have a specialty like drugs, gangs, the occult and other specialized interests that might require appropriate skills. **Bonuses:** An additional +10% bonus is added to any of the above mentioned skills if taken, even at later levels. +1 to I.Q., +1 to M.E. and +3 to Perception Rolls.

2. Crime Scene Detective: Very similar to the detective above, but with more emphasis on identifying, gathering and processing evidence. Skills required before becoming a crime scene detective are criminal forensics (taken twice), photography, writing, advanced mathematics, chemistry and chemistry (analytical). Other useful skills include any from the science category, research, any language and lore skill and possibly, further medical training. **Bonuses:** +15% to any of the aforementioned

skills even if taken at later levels. +3 to I.Q., +2 to M.E. and +5 to Perception Rolls.

3. Special Weapons and Tactics: Ironically, those members of the S.W.A.T. units within the old American Empire were often referred to as "ninjas" since they were often dressed from head to foot in black and carried a myriad of equipment to assist in their duties. Such duties include responding to "active" shooters, serving "no-knock" warrants upon targets that are considered dangerous, hostage rescue and any other task that requires a lot of firepower, superior tactics and overwhelming force. S.W.A.T. members, like all law enforcement, try very hard to bring their targets in alive, using deadly force only if necessary. Live prisoners are a source of good intelligence and can lead to more arrests in the future and therefore, an entire third of S.W.A.T. team members in Japan are armed with the AT-23 stun rifle on any given mission.

A typical mission for members of S.W.A.T. will begin with gathering intelligence on the target such as the layout of the building, how many suspects are inside, how they are armed, if there are other dangerous elements inside such as drug labs, bomb materials, magic elements or any other potential hazard. Teams are then set up in an inner and outer perimeter along with a command post and medical and/or fire personnel on standby. If available, air cover (such as helicopters or power armor units) is also used. If surprise is not a factor, negotiators will attempt to talk the suspects out via phone or P.A. systems, engaging only as a final option. If surprise is required, then all preparations are done incognito in areas unseen by the suspects. Entry is made by either knocking down or destroying the door with explosive charges (targeting the hinges and locks), lobbing in a few flash/stun grenades for distraction, then overwhelming everybody inside with six to twelve S.W.A.T. members. Those societies that are not opposed to magic use spells such as Mystic Portal to make entry, Blinding Flash for distraction, and spells like Agony, Wisps of Confusion, Magic Net and other non-lethal spells to subdue criminals.

Police 'Borgs are very common in S.W.A.T. teams as they are super strong and resistant to damage. These officers are usually the ones selected to kick in doors and make initial entry as they can withstand surprise attacks and pave the way for their teammates. Few mortal beings stand a chance against one of these powerhouses and often surrender before receiving a little street justice from one of them. These officers usually have the same sound suppression system found in the Ninja 'Borg O.C.C. to remain in sync with their fellow teammates.

Required skills before being accepted into S.W.A.T. and similar units are climb/rappel, intelligence and prowl. Other useful skills are not required but at least one member in every team should have demolitions, sniper, lock picking, locksmith, detect ambush, detect concealment, pilot tanks and APCs, trap detection and camouflage. Any physical skill is also useful. **Bonuses:** +10% to any of those skills mentioned above, even if taken at later levels. +1D6 to P.S., +1D4 to P.E., +3D6 S.D.C. and +1D4 Hit Points. (These guys are nuts about physical fitness.)

4. K-9 Handler: Often a member of S.W.A.T., these officers are proficient in the use of specially trained dogs to track criminals, locate contraband or act as an alternative to engage certain suspects to ensure the safety of other officers. Required skills in-

clude breed dogs and track humanoids. Those handlers that use their dogs to sniff out bombs automatically get the demolitions skill to recognize explosive devices only, but the demolitions or demolitions disposal skill may be acquired at any time. Those that sniff out drugs will require the streetwise: drug skill. **Bonuses:** +10% to the aforementioned skills even if taken at higher levels. +15% to track humanoids when using their dog (use the handler's or the dog's tracking ability, whichever is higher). +1D4 to P.S., +2 to P.E., +2D6 S.D.C.

Typical dogs are large breeds with keen olfactory senses. See *Palladium's Monsters and Animals*, page 212, for examples. Robot dogs equal to those found in *Rifts® New West*, page 200, are also used, as well as some bionic breeds. All K-9s are adept at body block or body flip attacks (as in grabbing the arm with their teeth and dragging the suspect to the ground) and automatically pin/incapacitate (i.e. keeping the suspect occupied until apprehended) an opponent on a Natural 18 or higher. Robot and bionic dogs are never issued lethal weapon systems but chemical sprays are very common. Barding for mortal K-9s is always used for protection (usually with 40 M.D.C. per suit).

5. Anti-Magic Specialist: These detectives are assigned to the investigation sections of various police departments and are experts in the occult, magic, psionics and other areas especially as they pertain to criminal elements. They know all about the dragon tattoos used by the Yakuza, which gangs rely on magic or have supernatural members and can identify various magical practices, magic weapons, ninja Techno-Wizardry and other talents. About 30% of these detectives are minor psychic sensitives, 20% are major psychic sensitives (all O.C.C. Related Skills are available if the below required skills are chosen), and about 2% are Master Psychics (use the psychic R.C.C. but police related skills are available). Required skills are Lore: Magic, Lore: Psychic, Lore: Religion and Mythology. Other useful skills include Astronomy, Astrology, Anthropology, Archaeology, Lore: D-Bee and Photography. **Bonuses:** +10% to any of the aforementioned skills, +2 to I.Q. and M.A. attributes, and +3 to save vs Horror Factor.

6. Detective: Undercover: One of the toughest jobs for any member of law enforcement is to embrace the criminal elements and assume a position within its dark folds to gather intelligence and evidence to be used against them. Such work is dangerous since it could mean certain death if the agent's cover is blown, as they operate with little or no backup. It is difficult because criminals are naturally suspicious of strangers and often require others to prove themselves by committing criminal acts unless they come with a heavy reputation (whether staged or not). It is frustrating since such officers are required to turn a blind eye to many an injustice or risk blowing their cover and they are always considered "on duty" since they are at the beck and call of the very people they are trying to stop. Undercover detectives must be very good actors, resourceful, courageous and willing to eventually arrest those people that have given them their trust. Whether they like it or not, undercover detectives do make some friends on the other side and must eventually betray them. Required skills include disguise, impersonate voices, and at least two skills taken from the Rogue category. Other skills may include any from the Rogue or Espionage categories or any skill that can promote their "cover." **Bonuses:** +10% to any of the aforementioned skills even if taken at a later time (+20% to the

streetwise skill). 45% chance to trust or intimidate or +15% to existing abilities from a high M.A. attribute, whichever is higher. Use this percentage whenever attempting to lie, make a quick excuse or other fast-talking. Automatically speaks the Yakuza language equal to his native language skill and can recognize gang colors, tactics and members equal to the current streetwise skill with an additional +10%. +1D4 to M.A. and +4 to save vs Horror Factor.

Other Skills: *Rifts®* has expanded since *Rifts® Japan* and it is only fair that a minor revision be given to the O.C.C. Skill package for the police officer. All police officers should add the following skills to their skill package: Investigations (+5%, see *Rifts® World Book 11, Coalition War Campaign™*, page 183, for this specialized skill. Base skill is 25% +5% per level of experience), Law (+15%), Lore: Cities (+10%), Pilot Hovercraft or Hovercycle (+10%) and W.P. Energy Pistol (W.P. Auto Pistol or Revolver may be substituted). All police officers need to be familiar with the local laws if they are to enforce them and all should be expected to safely navigate the city streets in an issued police vehicle. Personal sidearms are preferred because they tend to show a force by themselves, are easily concealed, and tend not to raise concern from citizens as opposed to carrying around a rifle.

Attribute Requirements: To become a detective, applicants are required to have an I.Q. attribute of 12 or higher (13 for crime scene detectives). S.W.A.T. and K-9 officers are required to have a P.S. and a P.E. of 12 or higher

Standard Equipment and Money: An additional 600 credits a month is paid to any specialized member of the force. Additional raises are earned through promotions to sergeant, lieutenant, captain and chief positions (or their equivalent).

All equipment necessary is provided by the department, including laboratory equipment, computers, special programs, vehicles, weapons, explosives and even K-9s. Budget issues may restrict the quality of such equipment (-5% to -15% on related skills) at the Game Master's discretion for role-playing purposes.

Police Equipment

AT-357 Police Cruiser

Patrolling the streets 24 hours a day, the AT-357 (and some variants) is the most widely used police vehicle in all of the tech-cities of Japan. It is a sleek, fast moving, lightly armored cruiser that can maneuver through most streets and alley ways or simply fly over them if they are too narrow. Each cruiser has a number of built-in systems that allow officers to perform all of their tasks with speed and efficiency. The vehicle looks like a hover station wagon with lots of space for equipment, passengers and prisoners.

Model Type: AT-357

Class: Multi-Purpose Police Vehicle

Crew: Usually two officers but the back seat can fit another two to three passengers, and the mobile holding cell can fit four human-sized prisoners (comes with M.D.C. shackles). The cargo bay can fit a variety of gear, extra reports, tactical weapons and other items.

M.D.C. by Location:

Main Body – 220

* Main Hover Jets (4; undercarriage) – 25 each

Ram (front) – 150

Crew Compartment (reinforced) – 150

* Light Bar – 10

* Turret Shield – 110

* A single asterisk indicates a small or difficult target to hit. An attacker must make a called shot to hit and is -3 to strike.

Speed

Flying: 180 mph (288 km), but cruising speed is usually between 40 and 60 mph (64-96 km), sometimes slower. Greater speeds are used only for chases and emergency calls. Maximum ceiling is about 600 feet (183 m). The cruiser is also Vertical Take-Off & Landing (VTOL) capable and can hover stationary.

Statistical Data

Height: 5 feet (1.5 m).

Width: 8 feet (2.4 m).

Length: 10 feet (3 m).

Weight: 2 tons.

Cargo: A 5 foot by 5 foot (1.5 by 1.5 m) area that contains two riot shields, two riot stun sticks, one stun rifle, one other energy rifle (either the AT-84 or the AT-88), fire extinguisher, crime scene tape, a box of 24 flares, and other personal equipment.

Power System: Nuclear with an average life of ten years.

Market Cost: 1.6 million credits for a fully loaded police cruiser. Not available on the open market.

Special Features

1. EMP Cannon: Above the ram is a double-barreled energy weapon designed to fire short electro-magnetic pulses to temporarily disable suspect vehicles.

Primary Purpose: Anti-Vehicle.

Damage: None. The electro-magnetic pulse disrupts the electrical system of any vehicle, causing all kinds of temporary problems and possibly rendering the vehicle inoperable. Upon a successful strike, there is an 01-80% chance of killing another vehicle's engine, sensors, weapon systems, life support – everything. The vehicle is temporarily shut down and slows to a complete stop. This weapon is used with care since fast moving or flying vehicles can become unguided missiles if they were to suddenly lose power.

Rate of Fire: One shot per melee round (takes about fifteen seconds to recharge).

Effective Range: 200 feet (61 m).

Payload: Effectively unlimited.

2. On-Board Mobile Computer Terminal (MCT): Every AT-357 is equipped with an on-board computer system that allows officers to access information without ever leaving the vehicle. Officers can access up-to-the-minute maps of the city and find the most direct route to a destination, avoid construction areas and closed roads, and research police history to particular addresses (such as known gang houses, repeat calls for service, etc.). They can also run suspect information to check for arrest warrants, confirm identification, criminal

history and known associates. They can also access their own department procedures, current laws and ordinances, phone numbers and many other useful bits of information. This gives the officers the equivalent skills of Lore: Demon & Monster, Lore: Gangs, Land Navigation and Law at 88%.

- 3. Police Radio:** A secure communications device with scramblers to keep the pesky media and cagey criminals from listening in to police transmissions. The system can accommodate 500 different secure channels and has a range of 100 miles (160 km). Two handsets can be detached when the officers exit the vehicle and can be attached to their belts. Their batteries continuously recharge while in the cruiser and can function for 24 hours before needing a complete recharge.
- 4. Prisoner Bay:** The prisoner bay can hold up to four human-sized prisoners and comes complete with seatbelts and leg shackles for violent offenders. This bay is sealed off from the passenger compartment but the officer can communicate with his prisoner via intercom.
- 5. Turret and Weapon Mount:** Although not often used, the AT-357 has a turret over the front passenger's seat that can be used in times of emergency. The passenger officer can use it to fire a weapon from a position of cover and in extreme emergencies, a rail gun or other heavy weapon (usually the AT-600 rail gun or the AT-230 particle beam rifle) can be attached. The turret and weapon mount can rotate 360 degrees with a 45 degree angle of fire. Such tactics are used only in extreme emergencies.

AT-38 Police Hovercycle

A state of the art hovercycle used by police forces throughout Japan. It is fast, maneuverable, silent and can be controlled by the pilot via remote control. It is used for rapid response, traffic enforcement and other duties.

Model Type: AT-38

Class: Multi-Purpose Police Hovercycle

Crew: One. It can accommodate another rider but this is against department procedures. The "saddlebag" style containers flanking the rear of the hovercycle can fit a variety of small gear like a clip board, mini-computer, extra reports, E-Clips and other items.

M.D.C. by Location:

Main Body – 130

* Main Jets (2) – 40 each

* Main Hover Jets (4; undercarriage) – 25 each

* A single asterisk indicates a small or difficult target to hit. An attacker must make a called shot to hit and is -3 to strike.

Speed

Flying: 240 mph (384 km), but cruising speed is usually between 40 and 60 mph (64-96 km), sometimes slower. Greater speeds are used only for chases and emergency calls. Maximum ceiling is about 600 feet (183 m).

Vertical Take-Off & Landing: (VTOL) capable and can hover stationary.

Statistical Data

Height: 3 feet (0.9 m).

Width: 2 feet (0.6 m).

Length: 6 feet (1.8 m).

Weight: 1000 pounds (450 kg).

Cargo: Described in the vehicle description.

Power System: Nuclear with an average life of ten years.

Market Cost: 900,000 credits for a fully loaded police hovercycle. Not available on the open market.

Special Features

1. **EMP Cannon:** Located on the hovercycle's nose is a double-barreled energy weapon designed to fire short electro-magnetic pulses to temporarily disable suspect vehicles.

Primary Purpose: Anti-Vehicle.

Damage: None. The electro-magnetic pulse disrupts the electrical system of any vehicle, causing all kinds of temporary problems and possibly rendering the vehicle inoperable. Upon a successful strike, there is an 01-80% chance of killing another vehicle's engine, sensors, weapon systems, life support – everything. The vehicle is temporarily shut down and slows to a complete stop. This weapon is used with care since fast moving or flying vehicles can become unguided missiles if they were to suddenly lose power.

Rate of Fire: One shot per melee round (takes about fifteen seconds to recharge).

Effective Range: 200 feet (61 m).

Payload: Effectively unlimited.

2. **On-Board Mobile Computer Terminal (MCT):** Same as the one located in the AT-357.

3. **Police Radio:** Same as the one located in the AT-357.

Robot Police Drone (RPDs)

The geniuses at ArmaTech have been perfecting the science of artificial intelligence for the past two decades and have finally produced a working model that satisfies their needs. Unlike the robot drones of the NGR, ArmaTech is not interested in creating warrior drones or hunter-killers to fight their battles for them as the Japanese warrior class (police and military) are very proud to fulfill such an honorable role. Thus, the Robot Police Drones are usually used for some very menial tasks that hardly warrant the cost of their creation. The men and women of the police department love them, however, since they fulfill certain roles that all "real" cops loathe to perform. Such tasks include traffic control, community services, collecting dead animals, removing road hazards from busy streets, giving directions, sewer patrol, house to house surveys and locating evidence in large areas. They are capable of doing so much more, but the living police officers believe to let a "grown-up's toy" do their work for them is dishonorable. Some even fear that to give these robots too much responsibility could mean losing their job to them eventually. In reality, this would never happen as governments see the value of human civil servants, but the rumors continue to fly.

One of the unique features of the Robot Police Drone is its dual personality. During normal contacts with citizens, the synthetic face appears calm, compassionate and eager to assist in any way. However, once hostile action is taken against it, a human officer or an innocent civilian, a blast shield slides over the



face as the head spins 180 degrees. The opposite side of the head opens to reveal a monstrous looking robot face and the

decibel level of the drone increases from 30 decibels to 70 decibels! Such a transformation is often enough to startle the offender long enough for the robot to take action, usually a shot of tear gas or a quick take down. The face resembles an angry, metallic, samurai menpo mask with glowing red eyes and tiny bolts of electricity crackling within the mouth. The concealed blasters in the forearm also appear, and a foreboding hum resounds from the body as if the entire drone is about to explode. This effect gives the drone a Horror Factor of 14 for that melee round, however initiative is always rolled first. The act of changing faces does not use one of the robot's attacks per melee.

Robot Police Drone

Model Type: AT-R44

Class: Fully Automated, Self-Sufficient Police Drone.

Crew: None. Artificial Intelligence.

M.D.C. by Location:

Hands (2) – 10 each

Arms (2) – 40 each

Legs (2) – 50 each

*Head – 50

**Main Body – 120

* A single asterisk indicates a small or difficult target to hit. An attacker must make a called shot to hit and is -3 to strike. Destroying the head only destroys its ability to speak and certain weapon systems, as all optics and sensors are located in the main body. Very few people know this, however and those looking for a quick kill will be in for a shock after wasting their time taking out the head.

**Depleting the main body destroys the robot entirely, making it useless.

Speed

Running: 110 mph (176 km) maximum.

Leaping: 16 feet (4.8 m) high or lengthwise. A running start gives an additional 10 feet (3 m) of distance.

Flying: Not possible without a jet pack.

Range: The nuclear power pack gives the drone ten years of continual use.

Statistical Data

Height: 6 feet (1.8 m).

Width: 3 feet (0.9 m).

Length: 3 feet (0.9 m).

Weight: 500 pounds (225 kg).

Physical Strength: Equal to a P.S. of 30.

Cargo: None.

Power System: Nuclear with an average life of ten years.

Market Cost: 1.2 million credits for a fully loaded police drone. Not available on the open market.

Special Features

1. Concealed Laser Blaster: Located on the drone's right forearm is a light laser blaster.

Primary Purpose: Assault.

Secondary Purpose: Defense.

Damage: Two settings: 2D4 M.D. or 4D6 M.D. with a three shot

burst. Setting Two: 4D6 S.D.C. damage or 1D6x10 with a three shot burst.

Rate of Fire: One shot or three shot burst. Either counts as one melee attack.

Effective Range: 2000 feet (610 m).

Payload: Effectively unlimited.

2. Concealed Stun Blaster: Effectively the same as the AT-23 stun rifle. It is located on the left forearm.

3. Chemical Spray: Same as the one listed in the **Rifts® RPG**, page 240. The unit holds 40 doses and is located alongside each cheek while in combat mode.

4. Hand to Hand Combat: Rather than use a weapon, the robot drone can engage in hand to hand combat. The combat program is designed to incapacitate a suspect with minimal damage. 5 attacks per melee. Equal to Hand to Hand: Aikido.

Damage:

Restrained Punch, Body Block or Body Flip – 2D6+15 S.D.C.

Full Strength Punch or kick – 1D6 M.D.

Power Punch – 2D6 M.D.

Head Butt – 1D4 M.D.

Body Block/Tackle or Body Flip – 1D4 M.D.

All Holds & Joint Locks.

Critical Strike on a Natural 19-20.

Combat Bonuses: Includes all bonuses from combat programming, abilities and sensors. +3 on initiative, +4 to strike with an aimed shot, +2 to strike with a burst, +6 to strike, parry and dodge (even from behind due to sensors), +5 to roll with impact or fall, +6 to pull punch.

5. Skill Programs: W.P. Energy Pistol, W.P. Energy Rifle, Pilot Hovercraft, Pilot Hovercycle, Pilot Jet Pack, Lore: Demon and Monster, Lore: Cities, Basic Radio, First Aid, Basic Math, Automotive Mechanics, Law, Prowl and Climb/Rappel. All skills are at 86% (failed rolls means the computer is stuck in search mode and may need a reboot that takes 2 melee rounds to complete). Languages include Japanese, American, Chinese, Dragonese, Gobblely, Demongogian and Technocan, all at 98%. The manufacturer is still trying to create a Yakuza language program but they are finding it a near impossible task.

6. Sensors and Optics

Optics: Full optics with a 3000 foot (914 m) range, including the visible light spectrum, infrared, ultraviolet, passive night vision, advanced thermo-imaging (can see through all S.D.C. walls and M.D.C. walls up to four inches (10 cm) thick) and telescopic (out to 2 miles/3.2 km). The optics are concealed in the upper chest region behind opaque M.D.C. glass.

Amplified Hearing: Same as the cybernetic amplified hearing but at triple the range.

Motion Detector: 200 foot (61 m) radius.

Radio Communication: The same system as found in the police vehicles.

Speech: Synthesized voice made to sound calm, polite and humanlike until it reverts to "combat" mode. Then the voice is loud, intense and commanding.

The Hammer of the Forge

By James M.G. Cannon

Chapter Twenty-Nine Void Running

"The K!ozn Continuum is one of those hyper-developed civilizations that pops up here and there across the Three Galaxies. The kind that leaves incredibly powerful artifacts lying around within cyclopean ruins scattered across a dozen dead worlds, the very sort that keeps men and women like you and me so busy. Unlike the Freecheesians of Galoppa or the Todamma peoples of the long dead Burschian Dominion, the K!ozn Continuum is a going concern. They are one of a half-dozen civilizations existing within the core of the Anvil Galaxy, every one of them considerably more advanced than galactic norm, and a great deal more mysterious as well.

"In point of fact, other than the name, there's not a whole lot we know about the Continuum. They're not carbon-based life forms, but what kind of environment they favor is still up for grabs. And rumor is that they're preparing for some kind of 'ascension' that's supposed to let them evolve into some new transcendental existence which may or may not precipitate their abandonment of the Three Galaxies entirely.

"Which is what brings us here today. This supposed 'Forge War' building in the Anvil has the K!ozn getting nervous. They don't want their precious 'ascension' delayed by any undue violence, and we believe they'll be signaling their displeasure soon. To date, no recorded incidents with the K!ozn have taken place, but as events in the Anvil escalate, it will only be a matter of time before they make a move. And no one knows what will happen next."

— Captain Jonas Orestes, Consortium Armed Forces Fleet Command, preface to a seminar entitled "Tactics for Dealing with God-like Aliens"

Sammadar Orak's ship knifed through space at a phenomenal speed.

"Grav drive?" Caleb asked the pilot, the aforementioned Orak. Orak was a Galactic Tracer, a bounty hunter and gun for hire, a rough sort of character who, by all accounts, had stolen his ship from the K!ozn Continuum. The exterior of the ship looked like ordinary rock, pitted and scored by a thousand impacts, indistinguishable for the infinite number of asteroids spiraling endlessly through the vacuum of space. Inside was a different story.

The bridge, where Caleb and Orak now stood, lay at or near the core of the asteroid. An oblong room of blued megasteel, brightly lit yet lacking any clear lighting source, it possessed one wall made up of a bank of monitors and consoles and a central dais upon which stood a pilot's frame. Orak lay in the frame currently, connected to the ship through a number of tendrils snaking out of the power armor Orak always wore, allowing him to interface directly with the ship.

"Nope," Orak said. The voice was dry and mechanical, emanating from the faintly insect-like helm that balanced atop the armor's shoulders. Orak's armor was light and delicately constructed, built for speed more than power. Orak or the designer had splashed the surface of the armor with a dozen different clashing day-glo colors, but here and there the glint of the original metal peaked through a scrape. "Don't know what it runs on, exactly. But it's quicker than a phase drive and less problematic than grav. Repression fields don't mean a thing to this rock."

"Must be nice," Caleb muttered. Louder, he added, "You've really never taken a look at what makes this thing tick?"

Orak's armored shoulders rolled in what might have been a shrug. "Only important thing is that it works. I went down to the engine room once, after I first, uh, 'borrowed' the ship, and I didn't see a single grunning thing I understood. Couldn't fix it anyway if it went south, so why worry?"

Caleb looked at the bounty hunter for a moment. "That's quite a philosophy," he finally said.

Orak's head shifted, and he may have been looking at Caleb directly for the first time since the Cosmo-Knight entered the room. It was hard to tell with that visor. "Not all of us have the might of the Cosmic Forge sluicing through our veins, Caleb Vulcan. A little fatalism and a good deal of pragmatism is the only sane way of looking at things out here in the black. I don't have the six lobes you need to grok the math used to fly this ship. Only know that it flies anyway. That's good enough for me."

"Fair enough. I didn't mean to offend. I'm just... surprised, really. You've got one of the wonders of the Three Galaxies at your disposal here. If I were you, I'd have taken this ship apart piece by piece by now."

Something that might have been a chuckle sounded from the depths of Orak's helm. "Good thing you're not me, then. Otherwise the CCW wouldn't have this miracle ship to send us all into the depths of the Transgalactic Empire on this suicide mission."

Caleb frowned. He wasn't entirely happy about their current situation either, but since it was his friend Vyking's plan, he felt compelled to defend it. "Suicide? Hardly. We've got three Cosmo-Knights aboard, a TGE advanced weapons specialist, a squad of CAFFCO marines, and yourself, as well as your super cool ship. This should be a cake walk."

"You skipped the part where we have to stop the Kreeghor from unleashing their superweapon on any innocents. Y'know, the one that makes black holes? This isn't a mission all of us will be walking away from."

"If you're so certain of that, then why did you agree to come along?"

The bounty hunter was silent for a moment. "I have my reasons," he finally said. A moment later, he disengaged himself from the pilot's frame and stepped lightly down. "We're set for now. In another eight hours we'll be crossing neutral space and entering the TGE. Things'll get interesting after that. I'll be in my quarters if anyone has need of me."

The armored bounty hunter brushed past Caleb and out of the bridge. Caleb took a long, slow look at the viewscreens against the far wall. He saw nothing but empty space out there, though the ship's computer was tracking the two hundred closest celestial bodies and auto-correcting to avoid any possible collisions. Caleb sighed, scratched at his mane of blood red hair, and followed Orak out of the room.

He wandered along the brightly lit corridors for a while, whistling a Beatles tune, looking around, getting a feel for the craft. He felt the thrum of the engines even through the thick-soled grav boots he wore, and the air had an electric quality to it. There was a great deal of power held within the ship's innocuous looking package. Its full capabilities were a mystery, but Orak had assured them that its weapon systems and shields were just as impressive as its speed. The cloaking system that Orak had burned out rescuing Vodal Kee from Thelag-Vohann had supposedly regenerated itself. There were undoubtedly other surprises, waiting to be revealed. Caleb only hoped that Orak knew what those surprises might be.

Caleb stumbled across Vodal Kee on deck three. The Sinestrian scientist had a datapad in his waldoes and he appeared to be deep in thought, contemplating some problem. Probably something to do with

the singularity projector the Kreeghor had developed. Until Orak had rescued him, Vodal Kee had slaved away in their employ, developing weapons for them to use against their enemies. He was the closest thing to an expert their team had concerning the doomsday weapon.

"What's up, Doc?" Caleb asked.

The Sinestrian looked up and slithered to a halt. His waldoes whirred as he set the datapad aside. "I'm sorry?"

Caleb shook his head. No point in trying to explain. "Just asking how you were doing. You look pretty serious there, Doctor."

"How else would you expect me to be, Sir Knight? We're rushing headlong into certain doom, and your compatriot expects me to discover some element that will keep us all alive. I feel as though I've the weight of the Three Galaxies pressing down on me."

"Jeez, Doc, it's not all that bad." Caleb frowned. When did he join the crew of the S.S. Pessimist? "And please, call me Caleb. Vyking may appreciate the formalities, but I've never been much for them."

Vodal sighed. "Caleb, then. Yes, Sir Vyking is very proper and professional, isn't he? But you're a different sort. A little rougher around the edges. You're not at all what I'd always envisioned when I thought of Cosmo-Knights."

"I, uh, I'll take that as a compliment."

Vodal somehow managed to smile, even though he didn't have lips. "I meant it as one. My apologies. Trade Three isn't my native tongue, and I can mangle it sometimes."

"We're talking in Trade Four, Doc," Caleb said.

"Nine Hells and Seven Devils," Vodal muttered under his breath. "Brilliant. I'm making a great impression aren't I? You must think me a complete idiot."

"Not at all, Doc. You said it yourself: you're under a lot of pressure. But you really shouldn't let it get to you. Not yet, anyway. It'll be another eight hours or so before we even reach TGE space. Then we have to find our megaweapon. Could take a few days to do that." Caleb patted one of Vodal's waldoes awkwardly. "And even if you don't find anything in those specs, we'll do okay. We're the good guys, right?"

Vodal grimaced. "Right. If only the universe worked that way." He hefted the datapad. "Well, I'm going to get some stim from the galley and get back to work. I'll talk to you later, Caleb."

Caleb watched the scientist's coils disappear down the corridor, then walked away himself. He shook his head, wondering if Buck, Flash, or Captain Z-ro ever had days like this. Probably not. Caleb couldn't recall any of those heroes ever having to play cheerleader to an anxious crew. He decided to go looking for someone to cheer himself up.

He found her in the cargo bay. It was one of the few areas of the ship designed to handle a being her size; at nearly twice the height of a full grown human, Ariel couldn't quite fit inside the smaller corridors. It didn't seem to bother her much, though.

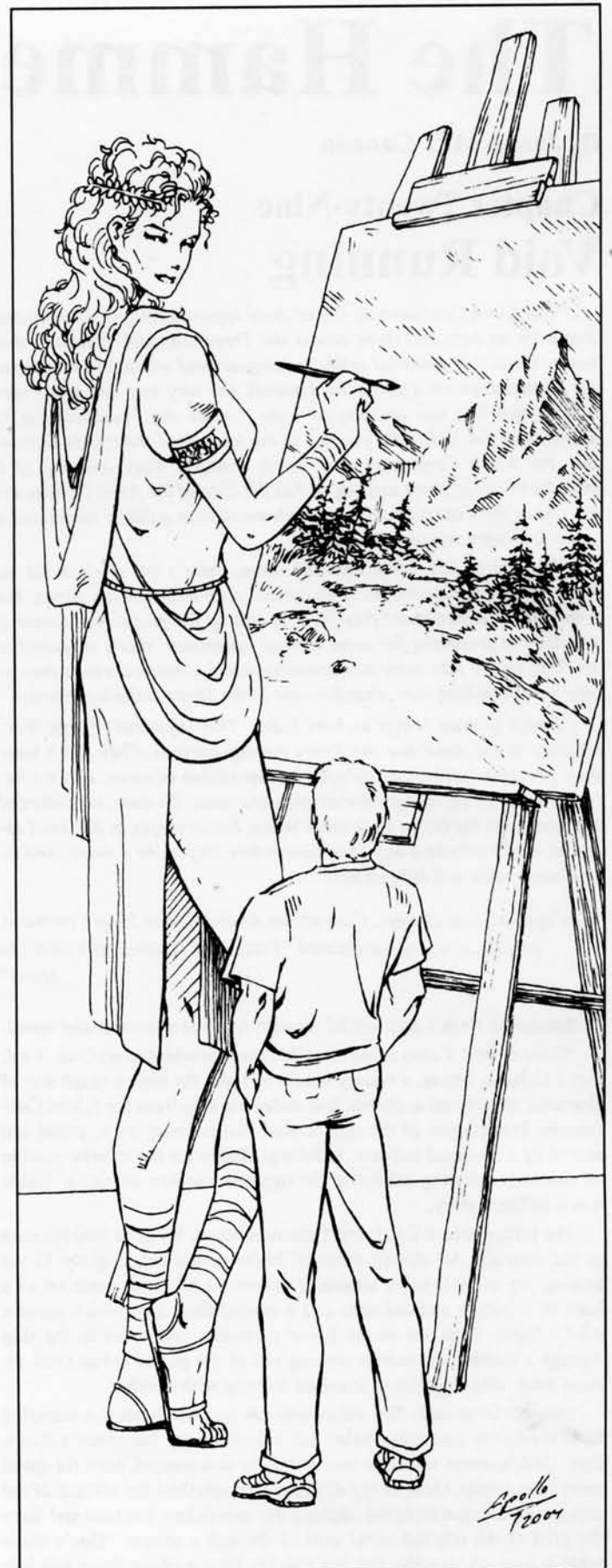
Ariel looked up from the painting she was working on as Caleb came down the stairs into the main chamber. "Hey, Caleb. What brings you down here?" Ariel was a Cosmo-Knight, like Caleb and Vyking, but while they came from human stock, Ariel was a Titan. That made her smart and brave and too beautiful by far, especially for someone so tall. "Have we reached TGE space already?"

"No, not yet. Still a few hours out." Caleb stepped off the stairs and onto the cargo bay floor. It was largely empty, save for a few crates of supplies, but it was large and spacious enough for a considerable amount of materiel. It suggested that the K!ozn used craft like this for trade, which was slightly unsettling to think about. What would a K!ozn warship look like, Caleb wondered.

"Ah. Then you're bored."

Caleb shrugged. "I didn't think to bring a book. What are you up to?"

"I try to keep myself busy on these long space flights. I try to do little art projects to keep brain and hands occupied. Started with sculp-



tures, gave up on those after a decade or two, then I tried doing some poetry, and now I'm on to painting."

"That's... well, what do you do with all of that stuff? How deep are those pockets in that toga?"

She laughed. "No, I leave them behind whenever I abandon ship. Little gifts to the crew. I don't know if anyone ever keeps them or not, but that's not the point."

"Art for art's sake," Caleb quipped.

Ariel pointed her paintbrush at him. "Sarcasm is not appreciated, Mr. Vulcan."

Caleb splayed his hands in front of him in mock surrender. "Fine. I'll be good." He craned his head around the side of the easel. "So what are you working on?" Ariel adjusted the easel to give him a better look. It was built to her scale, and showed the beginnings of a landscape scene. High, snow-capped peaks overlooked a nascent valley of lush green grass, crossed by an icy cool brook. It was rough yet, but Caleb could already see that it would look amazing when she was finished. "Wow."

"You're being kind. It's not one of my better efforts, but it should look okay when I'm done."

Caleb looked at her crosswise. "It looks great, Ariel. Honest. I'm not an art critic by any means, but I'm really impressed."

A bit of color appeared on Ariel's cheeks and she smiled. "Thanks, Caleb. None of my teachers ever considered me more than a dabbler. I have been practicing, though."

"Well, it shows." He frowned. "I should probably find a hobby myself."

"It does help pass the time. What did you do before the Forge remade you? If you don't mind me asking."

"I was a snot-nosed teenager hot rodding around the Arizona desert. I spent most of my free time wasting it with my friends, or messing around with cars. I've never been much for intellectual pursuits, and none of the stuff I grew up doing really applies anymore."

Ariel placed a comforting hand on his shoulder. "I'm sure you'll find something. I have to say, you've adapted well enough to the Three Galaxies, after growing up on that primitive backwater."

Caleb's lips turned in an ironic smile. "Thanks." The comm unit Caleb always wore around his neck chimed suddenly. Caleb toggled the switch and stepped away from Ariel. "Go ahead."

Orak's mechanical voice sounded in his ear. "Caleb, I need to show you something. I'm in my quarters." A click sounded as the connection was broken.

Caleb looked at the comm for a moment. "That was odd. Ariel, I guess we'll have to continue this conversation another time. Orak wants to see me."

As Caleb turned to leave, Ariel cleared her throat and said, "Tell me, Caleb, what do you think of our mysterious 'captain'?"

"He seems an all right sort. A bit taciturn and a touch pessimistic, but he's not the only one in that regard. Why?"

"I'm not sure. There's something decidedly... off about him. I can't place it, but he's hiding something. Of that much I'm sure."

Caleb laughed. "Well, I get the impression that Sam Orak isn't exactly the most circumspect being in the Three Galaxies. I'm sure he's had more than a few run-ins with the law over the years. Somebody like that isn't going to be entirely forthcoming with a bunch of Cosmo-Knights."

Ariel nodded. "You may be right. But watch your step with him nonetheless."

Caleb promised to do so and went to find the enigmatic bounty hunter. His quarters were close to the prow, near the other end of the ship, and while he walked, he mulled over the conversation with Ariel. The last time he had taken a long journey aboard a ship, he had had friends and boon companions around him. People like Doctor Abbot and Kassiopaea Acherean, Siv Yurilak and Arwen Griffin. Well, Yurilak was more of an annoyance than a friend, but at least the Noro pilot could be trusted to offer a decent conversation about the merits of various starcraft. With Abbot and Kassy, on the other hand, Caleb

could waste away hours in the galley over cups of stim (Abbot always had tea), sharing tales of their adventures, lost bits of lore, or just a good laugh.

But on Orak's ship, Caleb was pretty much alone. Ariel was the only person on board he might refer to as a friend, but in truth he barely knew her. As for the others, they were strangers as well, with their own concerns and duties, and no need for a kid from Earth hanging around.

He really should have brought a book with him.

Just then he reached Orak's door, and quashed the morbid thoughts running through his head. He disdained the bell and rapped smartly on the door. It slid open almost as soon as his knuckles grazed the panel. With a bemused expression, Caleb crossed the threshold into the room.

He was a bit surprised by what he found there. He had expected a cold and sterile setting, with maybe a Spartan bed and desk and a place to hang some armor. Instead, Orak maintained a rather sumptuously appointed stateroom. The furniture looked comfortable and inviting, and richly colored silk sheets decorated the walls, obscuring the harshness of the Klozn design. Two doorways on either side of the room led elsewhere into Orak's quarters, which suggested the bounty hunter had set aside the largest of the living areas for himself.

There was no one in the sitting room as yet, but as Caleb picked out a comfortable looking chair to drop into, a woman stepped into the room from one of the other doorways. She was a slight, almost pixie-like woman, athletic looking despite her size, with a wild shock of bright green hair framing a narrow face with large, violet eyes and two full lips as bright and red as rose petals. She gave Caleb an appraising look and glided into the room.

"I'm sorry," Caleb said, almost stumbling over the words. "I didn't realize there was anyone else aboard the ship. I... um... your... that is, Sammadar Orak asked me to come see him. Is he about?"

She gave him a nod so brief he almost thought he imagined it. But then she spoke. "He's through there." The words were accompanied by another brief nod, in the direction of the doorway she just exited.

Caleb looked at her for a moment, uncertain. Neither Orak nor his previous passenger, Vodal Kee, had mentioned a girl with green hair. But here she was, and staring at her wasn't going to make her either disappear or offer any explanation. He forced a friendly smile he didn't quite feel and stepped around her, towards the door she had indicated.

In the next room was what he'd expected to find when Orak first called him up here. A little blue square of brightly lit megasteel, harsh angles and chrome detail, with consoles and monitors and Orak's power armor standing in the middle of the room, jacked into some generator and charging.

It was empty. The helmet thrown back, the chassis open, unattended.

Caleb leaned back out of the room and looked at the green haired girl. She grinned. Caleb forced his mouth to shut.

"I thought..." he finally managed, but her laugh cut him short.

"Everyone does. It's one of the functions of the armor. As advanced as the Three Galaxies are, there are still a lot of wealthy cultures that will only talk to a male, no matter how accomplished you might be." She laughed again. "Not that I've ever had to actually lie about my sex. Most folks are more than willing to assume."

He crossed his arms and leaned against the door jam and looked at her as she giggled. After a moment, he found himself laughing as well, though more at her obvious good humor than out of appreciation for the joke. "If it's such an advantage," he finally said, "then why tell me?"

Suddenly she was serious, and looking at him so intently, she could have burned holes in him. "For one, the fact that you're a Cosmo-Knight. If I ask you nicely, you won't be blabbing my big secret to the rest of the 'verse."

"Hmmm." Caleb was noncommittal. "And for two?"

She slid to her feet, as graceful as a cat. She moved in close to him, placed her hands on his arms and made him drop them to his side.

"Well," Sammadar Orak said, as she twined her own arms around his shoulders and moved her lips close to his. "You are cute, and I thought we might have some fun."

"Oh," Caleb was able to say, before she silenced him with a kiss.

* * *

Elsewhere, the Kreeghor dreadnought *Shadowstar* navigated her way through TGE space.

Admiral Geryon was relaxing in his quarters when the his comms chimed. He set aside the book he was reading and placed his goblet of bloodrum beside it. With a flick of his wrist, the switch on the other side of the room flipped, and he said into the darkened chamber, "What is it, Captain Dorset?"

"We've just received a sub-space communiqué from your father."

Geryon allowed himself a momentarily growl of distaste, then forced his expression to smooth. "Very well. Put it on screen."

The Royal Kreeghor pivoted on one heel to regard the far wall. His armor creaked with the movement, the only sound in the room. He waited a heartbeat and the viewscreen flicked to life. An image of the Imperial Crest formed there for a moment, but the snarling visage of Geryon's father replaced it almost immediately.

"Greetings, boy," his father growled. His voice was deep and guttural, a sound that would have ruined a human throat. Geryon could not suppress a sneer. His father hated him, and he loathed his father. This message could not possibly be good news, but it had to be endured. "Your mother sends her greetings as well."

That was the first lie, Geryon noted. There would be others.

"Your continued success with your project does the family proud. Continue in this vein, and you will bring glory to your clan." He growled again, and the pleasantries over, launched into his true reason for contacting Geryon. "But you should be made aware that the existence of your project is not unknown to our hated enemies, the Consortium of Civilized Worlds."

Almost against his will, Geryon found himself paying very close attention to his father's next words.

"Our spies within their ranks have reported that a Cosmo-Knight named Vyking has somehow learned of your toy, and convinced the soft-hearted CCW rulers to send a strike team into TGE space to destroy your weapon."

Geryon clenched his fists. "How is that possible?" he said, knowing the recording could not answer him.

"You will prepare a suitable welcome for them, obtain proof of the CCW's intentions, and preserve the integrity of your project. They want a war, and we shall give it to them." His father paused, and his pale white eyes narrowed. "Don't fail me, boy." The message ended, plunging the room once more into darkness.

Geryon felt a sudden stab of anger and frustration that took a long, painful moment to suppress. Every time he thought he was out from under the old man's boot heel, the crone found some way to reign him back. He was now beholden to his father for that precious bit of information, assuming it was true. One could never be too sure where Geryon's father was concerned.

Geryon fumed, thinking furiously. No, he decided, his father was telling the truth. The *Shadowstar* Project was too important to the Empire for his father to try his old tricks. And there were Cosmo-Knights to consider; one never knew where or when a Knight of the Cosmic Forge might appear. They were dangerous beings, for all their misguided allegiance to that relic of the First. Creatures who could fly through stars under their own power should not be underestimated.

Geryon allowed a slow smile to spread across his face. Of course, he now had the power to kill stars at his disposal. Let them come, he decided. Let them come, and let them die at his hands.

* * *

"You're looking very cheerful this morning," Vyking said as he crossed Caleb's path in the halls.

Caleb could only shrug and grin the stupid grin he'd worn for the last several hours. "I'm having a good day," he said.

Vyking arched an eyebrow. "I hate to be the one to remind you, but we crossed through neutral space and into the TGE just a little while ago. We're on borrowed time from here on in."

"Everyone on this ship is such a Gloomy Gus," he said. "Buck up there, Sol. We're off to save the universe. We have the strength of ten because our hearts are pure. How can we fail?"

Vyking stared at Caleb, his expression inscrutable. Finally, he said, "We picked up another of the *Shadowstar* energy signatures just before we left, this time in the Tindalos system. We believe the star was swallowed up by one of the artificial black holes the *Shadowstar* supposedly generates."

"And that's where we're headed," Caleb interrupted. "To pick up the trail."

Vyking nodded. "If we can. Kee is also interested in taking a look at the after-effects of the artificial black hole. We'll take some readings, do a sweep of the area, and then hopefully we'll be able to find something that we can use."

Caleb frowned. "I thought you had a plan."

"Yes, I had to convince CAFFCO of that in order to guarantee their cooperation. But the truth is, space is rather vast and the *Shadowstar* is fairly tiny. This isn't going to be done in a weekend, Caleb. We may be out here for a while."

Caleb felt his earlier good mood evaporating bit by bit as each word came out of Vyking's mouth. "So what you're saying is, we're just going to stumble around in hostile space hoping to bump into the thing."

Vyking nodded, his expression grim. "Our only option is to wait for the energy signature to spike again, and fly with best possible speed, hoping they don't finish their business before we arrive."

Caleb sighed. "Which would mean another star system dying. And everyone living inside it."

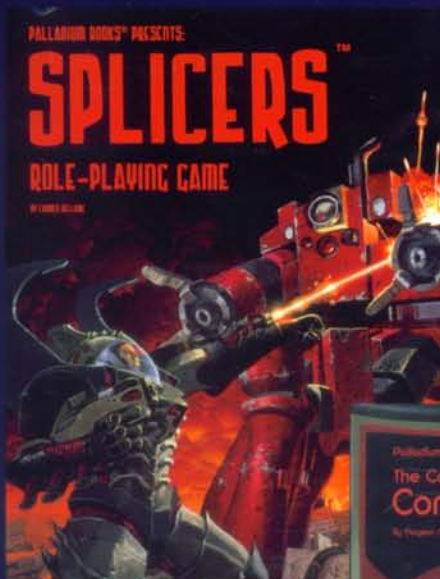
"Yes." Vyking's expression was tight.

Caleb slapped palm and forehead together. "Brilliant." He walked away, heading for the galley. "Buck Rogers would have had a better plan!" he shouted over his shoulder. It wasn't an entirely fair parting shot to offer. The comic strips of his youth were a good deal simpler than real life turned out to be. Zipping around the universe fighting evil, having two fisted adventures and saving the day, had seemed so romantic when he was a kid. Out here in the Three Galaxies, though, real men and women, real innocents, died at the hands and whims of villains who made the mustache twirling bad guys of his childhood look pathetic.

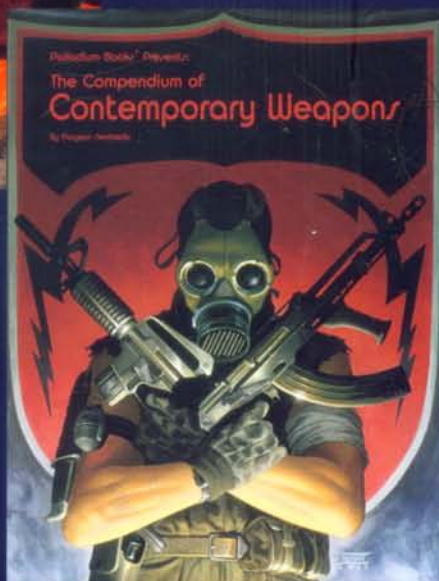
Vyking was just trying to deal with a terrible situation as best he could. It wasn't his fault that the Kreeghor weren't as easy to deal with as Martians or Venusians or space pirates. Caleb sighed. He really did miss his comic books and magazines and dime novels. The next time he stopped off at a civilized world, he was going to have to find something to read. It would help pass the time, at least.

Until then, he'd see if maybe there was someone worth talking to in the galley. And try not to think of billions dying as the screaming void took them.

It had started out such a good day.



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