

Palladium Books® Presents:

THE RIFTER®

Your Guide to the Megaverse®

Inside this Issue...

BTS: The Skin Thief

Fantasy: Troglodytes

Fantasy: The Star of Horus

Rifts® Arzno: Official Source Material

Rifts® Phase World® The Maqui Knouldum

Rifts® Phase World® Starship Creation Rules

The Hammer of the Forge™

News, Product Info & More

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Violence and the Supernatural

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

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

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



The Rifter® Number 34

Your guide to the Palladium Megaverse®!

First Printing – April, 2006

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The Rifter® #34 RPG sourcebook series is published by Palladium Books Inc., 12455 Universal Drive, Taylor, MI 48180. Printed in the USA.

Palladium Books® Presents:



#34

Sourcebook and Guide to the Palladium Megaverse®

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

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

Contents – The Rifter® #34 – April, 2006

Page 6 – From the Desk of Kevin Siembieda

According to Kevin, these are “strange times” we’re living in (and here, the rest of us thought it was just the new Millennium).

The boss man talks about some of the ups and downs of the last year or two, and how, despite some of the lows, energy among other creators and himself remains high. Not only that, but ideas are flying around like hornets and we have all kinds of exciting books and projects planned for the future.

He also talks about *The Rifter*® #35 being our first (annual?) swimsuit issue with pin-up pages of artwork by Palladium artists, staff, and friends (like John Zeleznik, Larry Elmore, David Martin, Jeff Easley, and something like two dozen other artists who have jumped at the chance to draw bikini-clad bathing beauties). So next issue is really going to be something different. And a first in the role-playing game hobby. The Summer issue of *The Rifter*® is a great example of the fun and ideas all of us here at Palladium are trying to put back into gaming.

Page 8 – Palladium News & Coming Attractions

According to Kevin (the Guy Who Should Know), Palladium’s 2006 products are the news. One dynamic new product after another.

Rifts® *Arzno*™ just shipped and so did the *Rifts*® *Coloring Book*, and both are fantastic additions to any collection.

Get more info on *Rifts*® *Madhaven*™ (coming out later this month) and *Powers Unlimited*™ *Three* (130 new powers! Hoo boy!). A complete release schedule through August. And get all the latest news, commentary and info from our web site at www.palladiumbooks.com.

Page 13 – Are YOU coming to the biggest Palladium gaming event ever?

Inquiring minds want to know.

The Palladium Open House is shaping up to be a truly special event. Even we can scarcely believe that 40+ Palladium creators (artists, writers, creators, staff) are going to be gathered under one roof. It’s unprecedented! They’ll all be available the entire event to chat and sign autographs, talk about upcoming projects, game and have fun.

As if the guests, 40-60 gaming events, 14 panel talks and meeting fellow gamers from around the world weren’t enough – Kevin Siembieda is putting up his toy collection and bits of artwork for sale from his personal archives.

There’s still time to get YOUR ticket to the most fun and unique gaming event of the year (maybe the decade) – May 6 & 7, 2006. Go to page 13 now!!!

Page 14 – The Skin Thief™

Optional fiend for Beyond the Supernatural™, 2nd Ed.

The Skin Thief is a new monster for BTS-2 that has crawled out of the festering, but fertile imagination of *Steven Daves*.

If you’re looking for something sick and disgusting or which can be played with a macabre sense of wicked humor, look no further.

Art by newcomer, *Nick “I’m Coming to the Open House” Bradshaw*. More of his powerful artwork appears elsewhere in this issue and in the pages of *Rifts*® *Madhaven* and other upcoming titles.

Page 19 – Troglodytes

Optional Source Material for the Palladium Fantasy RPG®

Mark Hall presents a detailed look at the often misunderstood race known as Troglodytes, their appearance, society, weapons, warrens, technology, crops, digging speed, and more.

Art by Kevin “see ya at the Open House” Siembieda.

Page 27 – The Star of Horus, Part One

A short story for the Palladium Fantasy RPG®

Aaron Corley and *Allen Gardner* whisk you away on an exciting and wonderful tale of adventure, magic and wonderment in the Fantasy setting. Tentacled monsters, flying ships and islands floating in the air are all aspects of this riveting tale. It’s all part of the quest for the *Star of Horus*, an ancient work of Dwarven jewelry lost for many thousands of years.

Art by Brian and Allen “Coming from Nevada to the Open House” Manning.

Page 40 – The Maqui Knouldum™

A New Race and R.C.C.s for Rifts® Phase World®

A new, weird race of aliens from the Three Galaxies known as the Maqui Knouldum. They call themselves the Travelers because they are a dimension-spanning race who love to explore the Megaverse and the very fringe of reality itself. History, motives and R.C.C.s from the mind of *Samson Blackwell*.

Artwork by Nick “the New Guy” Bradshaw.

Page 47 – Galactic Tracer™ Starship Creation

Optional Rules for Rifts® Phase World®

Eric Fackler presents a point based creation system for making personal spacecraft for the Galactic Tracer O.C.C. from the pages of Phase World. Galactic Tracers are professional bounty hunters who scour Phase World® and the Three Galaxies to find fugitives with a price on their head. The Tracers’ greatest asset is their spaceship, and these rules let you whip one up in no time flat. Categories for creation include Ship Type, Origin, Age, Manufacturer, Weapons, Sensors and more.

Artwork by Nick “I’m Coming from Minnesota” Bradshaw.

Page 57 - CS Operation Holy House™

Official source material for Rifts® Arzno™

Kevin Siembieda and *Jason Richards* had so many ideas for Arzno that they couldn’t squeeze it all into World Book 28, so here it is for your enjoyment.

While everyone's attention has been focused on the war in Tolkeen, the Coalition Army has been sending secret operatives and Special Forces into the New West™. Their mission, to assess the real level of danger represented by the undead under the auspices of *Operation Holy House*. General Loni Kashbrook has been put in charge to study the situation and develop counter-measures to the vampire threat.

This official source material includes background on the Operation, the CS Vampire Hunter M.O.S., and Coalition vampire hunting teams of note.

Artwork by Apollo "I'll be drawing sketches at the Open House" Okamura and Chuck "I expect to be there too" Walton.

Page 73 – Mad Machiavelli™

Official source material for *Rifts*® *Arzno*™

Jason Richards, author of *Rifts*® *World Book 28: Arzno*, wrote this adventure source material for *The Rifter*® as special bonus material for *Arzno*.

Discover the secrets of *Arzno*'s legendary Techno-Wizard genius, Eman Machiavelli. Too bad he's be believed to have been driven mad by his own brilliant mind and the forces of magic. Includes stats on Mad Machiavelli and his incredible "Think Tank," adventure notes, and a handful of other TW devices.

Artwork by Kent "I'm coming to the Open House by way of Mississauga" Burles.

Page 82 – On Patrol

Optional source material for *Rifts*®

Paul Carr offers up a handful of Hook, Line & Sinker™ adventures involving Coalition soldiers and other menaces for action in *Rifts*® North America.

Page 85 – *Rifts*® Phase World®

The Hammer of the Forge™

Chapter 34 of James M.G. Cannon's popular, ongoing saga finds our hero discovering just how dangerous home can be. Read and enjoy.

Artwork by Apollo "Autobot" Okamura.

Page 91 – Tabletop Terrain

For ALL game settings & systems

Leslie Furness generously offers tips, diagrams and instructions on how to make tabletop terrain settings to bring your role-playing adventures to 3-D life. Something different, interesting and fun.

The Theme for Issue 34

New ideas and weirdness. A new BTS-2 demon, new Phase World® R.C.C.s, new Coalition secret operations, new starship creation rules, the weird and wonderful TW creations of a mad man, new official source material for *Rifts*® *Arzno*, a new work of fiction in the Star of Horus, and how to make 3D terrain.

This issue is another fun filled book that should inspire and motivate players and Game Masters alike to try new ideas and expand their game Megaverse®. We hope you enjoy it.

The Cover

The cover is the spectacular debut of legendary artist, David Martin. This is a treat for Kevin Siembieda, because he's admired the work of David Martin since his early work for Steve Jackson Games in the 1980's, including the evocative cover to the Illuminati card game, among many others. Turns out, David's been a fan of Palladium's RPGs and other artists, so this seems like a match made in heaven. You can count on seeing more from Mr. Martin in the future.

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

The Rifter® #35 – Swimsuit Spectacular!

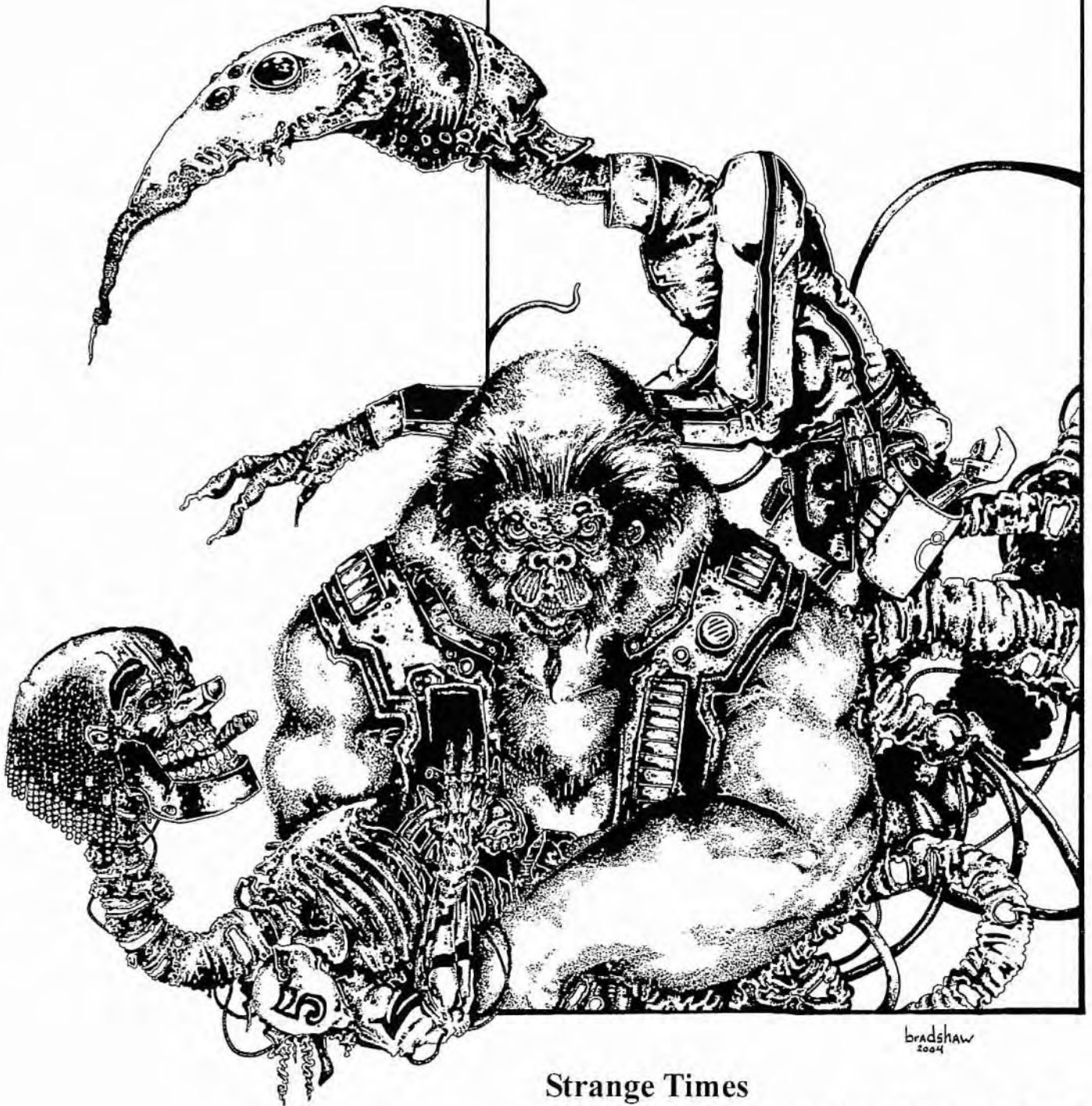
We can't say enough for this RPG industry first – an issue of source material for various Palladium game lines plus a couple dozen tasteful, pin-up girl illustrations from across the Palladium Megaverse. You can count on this issue being something special. Including:

- 20-30 swimsuit images by dozens of great artists.
- More for *Palladium Fantasy*®.
- Material for *Heroes Unlimited*™.
- Material for *Rifts*®.
- News and other developments.
- The next, epic chapter of *The Hammer of the Forge*™.
- Source material for the entire Palladium Megaverse®.
- New contributors and fun. So please join us.

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

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

From the Desk of Kevin Siembieda



bradshaw
2004

Strange Times

Life can be funny sometimes. Strange funny . . . as well as ha, ha funny.

This year, and the last few, have had their laughs, but they've mostly been *strange times*. A series of unexpected events (crises really) have made life difficult at times, even painful.

Yet through it all, there has been an outpouring of friendship and support from friends, freelancers and industry buddies that has been generous, touching and inspiring.

The industry is in a slump. People are talking crazy. Some say the RPG industry is dead or dying, yet Palladium's fan following is as strong as ever, and we seem to keep seeing new faces wherever we go.

Distributor sales are down, yet (for Palladium at least) online sales are skyrocketing and there's the promise of getting into the book trade (Barnes & Noble, Borders, Hastings, Books a Million, etc.).

Some folks say there's nothing new or interesting coming out of role-playing, yet all of us at Palladium Books have a gazillion great ideas for new, dynamic, different and exciting RPGs and sourcebooks, and even new types of games and other merchandise.

The Nokia videogame, **Rifts® Promise of Power**, was absolutely fantastic, but fizzled because the N-Gage game platform flopped in North America. The one continent filled with people who actually know and play **Rifts®!!!** Yet there are other possibilities boiling for Palladium Books in the videogame/electronic game market. Furthermore, while the Nokia venture was a huge disappointment, the game is great (destined to be a lost gem in Palladium's history), and the experience was awesome! I met and became friends with a host of cool creative types like Shane, Wini, Scott, Trent, Derek, Chris, Kierston, James, Susanna, and Mark, among others. Some of whom I'm certain I will remain friends with for life. So how cool is that? And the European PR trip was awesome.

The **Rifts®** movie seems stalled, yet who knows what that might still bring?

As for Palladium itself, I can tell you that we have built one of the greatest teams of artists and writers we have ever had. You're only seeing the start of great things to come from writers like *Carl Gleba*, *Todd Yoho* and *Carmen Bellaire*. Newcomer Jason Richards' **Rifts® Arzno – Vampire Incursion™** kicks butt his first time right out of the gate. And so does Brandon Aten and Taylor White's **Madhaven™**. And all of them are busy working on future products even as you read this. (Learn all about them at the Palladium Open House this May.) Plus, there are some other folks like Josh Sinsapaugh, John Philpott and Jeff Hansen taking to writing for Palladium.

The growing creative energy doesn't stop there either, as Palladium adds new artists to the team – some like *Jeff Russell* and *Nick Bradshaw* are completely new to the gaming scene, others like the great *David Martin*, *Chris Arneson*, *E.M. Gist*, and *Jeff Easley* are long-time contributors to the RPG industry, but starting to work with Palladium Books for the very first time. And our regular crew, they just know no bounds and are doing some of their most powerful and inventive work ever.

I'm full of it too! Um, I mean, I'm full of ideas and creative energy, too. I have a million ideas bubbling up inside my head. Some of which I think will blow you away. Others are just fun. And all of us writers, artists and creators are feeding off each other, inspiring one another, challenging each other to try new things, explore new concepts and push the envelope!

Like I said, strange times. Tremendous highs and lows. Good and bad. Explosive energy and unchained imagination.

Here's looking to a bright future for us all.

Where's the Spring Catalog?

So much has been going on behind the scenes that we just didn't have time to do our usual Spring Catalog. Sorry. Maybe we'll get it done as a Summer Catalog in our first ever *Swimsuit Issue of The Rifter®*.

Swimsuit Issue of The Rifter®

You heard right, the July 2006 issue of **The Rifter®** will be our *swimsuit* issue with 20-30 pages of pin-up style drawings of Palladium characters and cute girls in various Palladium RPG settings, tastefully illustrated by Palladium artists, friends and associates.

I can't take credit for the idea. *Wayne Breaux Jr.* has been bugging me to do this for years. I resisted, thinking it was kinda silly and trite. I mean gamers want source material, right? They want text, and monsters, and magic, and big guns, and adventure, not pretty girls and silliness, right?

I don't know what, exactly, changed my mind. One was Wayne Breaux sending me a pin-up picture he drew. It was cool and that got me thinking about the idea with renewed interest.

Another part of what changed my mind is the rough times in the RPG industry and world at large (war overseas, poor economy, struggling American auto industry – especially here in Michigan, etc.). So many people are struggling to make ends meet, and Palladium has had its own share of problems this past year or so. Well, that got me thinking and suddenly the idea of a swimsuit issue just sounded *fun*. Something to make the reader chuckle and forget his worries for a few minutes. Something that would be fun for the contributing artists, too. I also believe Palladium Books will be the *first* to publish a swimsuit issue of any publication in the role-playing game industry, and I like trying new things. Please, let us know what you think and whether or not this should be the first in a tradition of annual swimsuit pin-up art.

Boy oh boy, I can tell you the artists went crazy over the idea. And not just Palladium's regular crew! As word spread, artists like *Larry Elmore*, *Jeff Easley*, *Chris Arneson*, *David Martin* (the gent who did this issue's cover), and others also pledged to contribute.

Of course, Palladium illuminators, *John Zeleznik*, *Ramon Perez*, *Apollo Okamura*, *Wayne Breaux Jr.*, *Mike Wilson*, *Freddie Williams*, *Kent Burles*, *Mike Dubisch*, *Mark Dudley*, *Chuck Walton*, *me*, and a host of others are all whipping up pin-up art, along with newcomers *Nick Bradshaw*, *Jeff Russell*, *Todd Hebenstreit*, *Chris Bourassa*, and others.

The art will all be tasteful, no frontal nudity or sex acts, just sexy, cute, silly and fun illustrations of hot girls across the Palladium Megaverse! Yeah, Baby!

Oh, and some funny surprises. (Hmm, at least we hope you'll find 'em funny. "Hey, Alex, you'd better wax your back, buddy.")

– Kevin Siembieda, Spring 2006

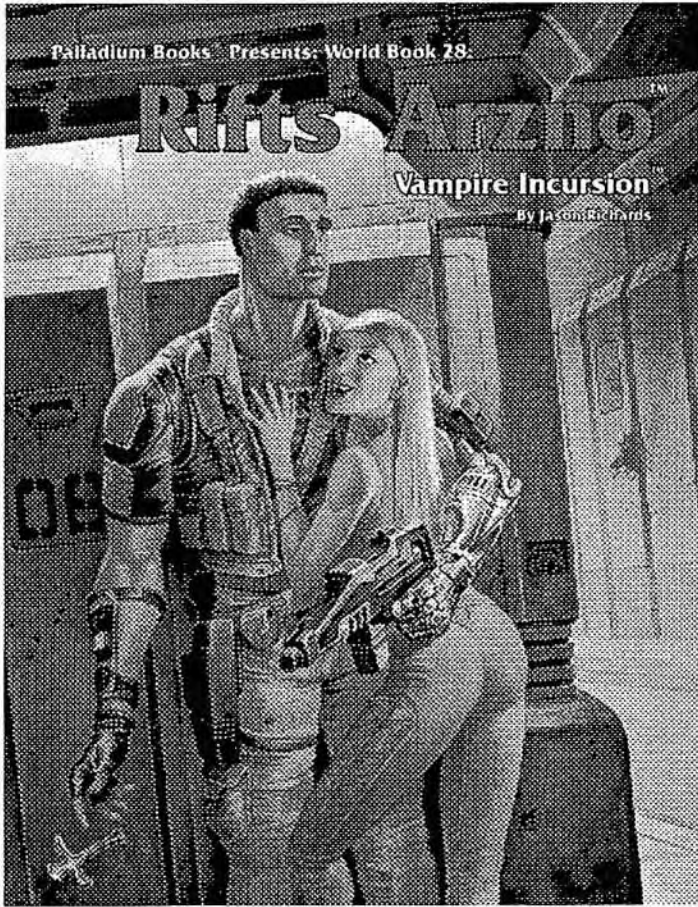
Palladium News

By Kevin Siembieda (the guy who oughtta know)

These are strange times and Palladium has a number of things boiling behind the scenes, but nothing we can talk about just yet.

Consequently, the **Palladium Open House** (two days of non-stop gaming with 40 Palladium creators, May 6 & 7 – get your tickets NOW!) and our host of dynamic **upcoming products** are the news!

Coming Attractions



Rifts® World Book 28:

Arzno™ – Vampire Incursion™

This is an awesome adventure sourcebook with TW power armor, TW weapons and gizmos, the city of Arzno mapped and described, weird places around Arizona, Waste Ghosts, secret invasion conspiracies, mercs and vampires.

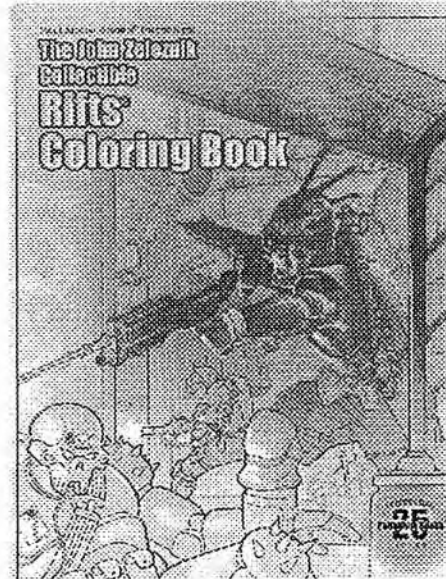
In short, it has it all.

Vampires vs mercenaries and Techno-Wizards in the *Rifts® New West™* setting. The undead are bent on conquering North

America, and the famed city of Arzno is the first major obstacle in their path. If Arzno falls, all of Arizona falls to the vampires, but if Arzno can learn about the vampire invasion soon enough and destroy the monsters, Arizona is saved.

The fans are going to love this book.

- Arzno – fortress city, home of high-tech mercenaries, Techno-Wizards, Sky Knights and heroes.
- The City of Arzno mapped and described.
- New Techno-Wizard weapons and equipment.
- TW power armor and TW vehicles.
- The vampire conspiracy, its leaders and henchmen.
- The Blood Cult, Blood Priest and vampire worship.
- Overview, new monsters and adventure ideas.
- Fallen Cyber-Knight villains and more!
- Cover painting by John Zeleznik.
- Written by Jason Richards.
- 160 pages – Cat. No. 868.
- \$18.95 retail. In stores now!



John Zeleznik Collectible Rifts® Coloring Book™

A Palladium Books® 25th Anniversary Special

At only \$5.95, this book is a little gem that belongs in the collection of every *Rifts®* and *John Zeleznik* fan.

Buy two – one to color and one to keep.

Completely designed by John Zeleznik, this 48 page beauty presents reproductions of John's *original pencil drawings* for two dozen different Palladium book covers.

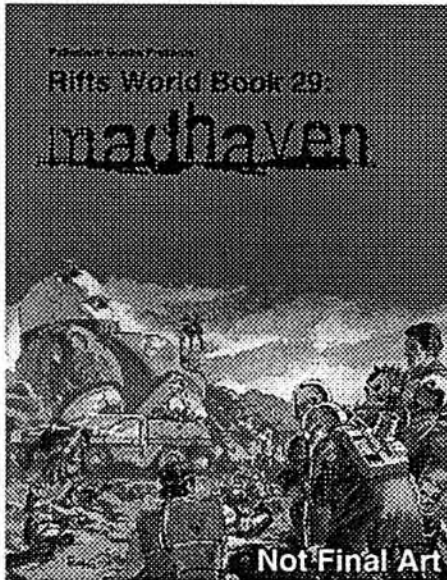
Predominantly *Rifts* art but includes some Fantasy, HU2, Nightbane, and BTS too.

Plus, there are dozens of small, never-before-seen, alternative versions of the various covers, concept drawings and sketches that offer a unique insight into the artist's thought processes.

Rifts® and Palladium fans will go wild over this, as will anybody who loves *John Zeleznik's* art and enjoys coloring or painting.

Note: This is Palladium's March Anniversary item.

- Suitable for coloring with crayons, markers, watercolor or colored pencils.
- Reproduced on quality, 60 lb paper stock.
- All artwork by John Zeleznik.
- \$5.95 retail – 48 pages – Cat. No. 870.
- Available now!



Rifts® World Book 29:

Madhaven™

“Madhaven” is the name given to the haunted ruins of Manhattan. A dark, foreboding land of toppled buildings overgrown with vegetation, mountains of debris, and subterranean tunnels.

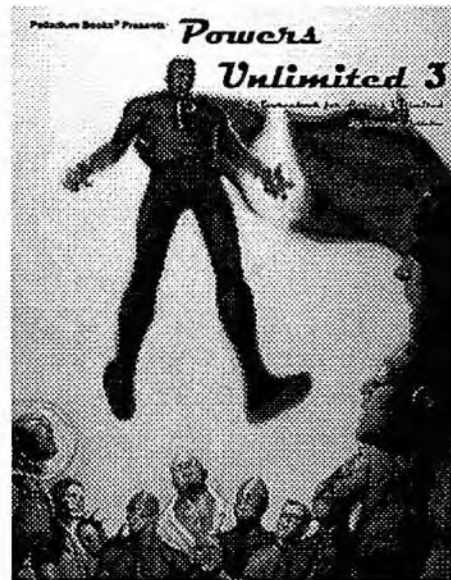
As for being a haven, it is only a haven to weird ghosts, mutants, monsters, D-Bees and adventurers bold enough to dare explore its shattered streets.

If you think Madhaven is a dark, mysterious place filled with dark secrets and sinister inhabitants, you'd be mostly right. But wait till you see exactly what they are, and what they are up to.

Madhaven is just the first of three Rifts® titles written by Brandon Aten & Taylor White, contributors to **The Rifter®** who have earned the chance to write official source material. Now see what this pair have cooked up for the ruins of New York City.

- Weird ghosts and Entities.
- Strange monsters not found elsewhere.
- Mutants and D-Bees that boggle the mind.
- Mutant gangs and turf wars.
- The Secret Order of the White Rose Mystic Knights.
- Underground tunnel networks and their inhabitants.
- World information and adventure ideas.
- Random encounter tables and more.
- Cover by Mark Evans.

- Art by Nick Bradshaw and other Palladium stalwarts.
- Written by Brandon Aten & Taylor White.
- Additional monsters and weirdness by Kevin Siembieda.
- 128 pages – Cat. No. 869.
- \$14.95 retail – ships April 27, 2006.



Powers Unlimited™ Three

For Heroes Unlimited™

In the world of **Heroes Unlimited™** there is no such thing as too many super abilities. Carmen Bellaire's newest book in the *Powers Unlimited™* series presents more powers, tables and ideas for **Heroes Unlimited™**. Fans of any super-hero role-playing game will have a keen interest in this sourcebook.

- 130 new super abilities.
- 83 Major Super Abilities and 43 Minor Super Abilities.
- Many sub-powers and unique abilities.
- Random Power Tables.
- Artwork by Mark Dudley and others.
- Cover painting by E.M. Gist.
- Written by Carmen Bellaire.
- 96 pages – Cat. No. 523.
- \$13.95 U.S. retail – ships early May.

Rifts® Dimension Book 10:

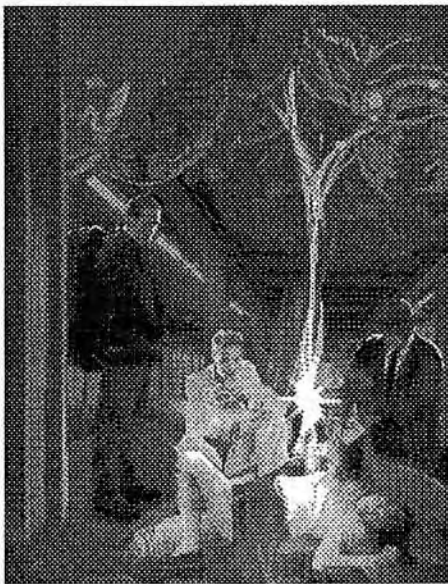
Hades – Pits of Hell™

The demons and monsters of Hades have been part of Palladium role-playing games for 25 years. Now, for the first time ever, we go to the fiery pits of Hell to explore the demons' home dimension, the evil denizens who populate it, and their plans for conquest and war across the Megaverse.

This is a *stand-alone* sourcebook designed for use in **Rifts®**, **Rifts® Chaos Earth™**, **Phase World®**, and **Heroes Unlimited™**, but is easily adapted to the **Palladium Fantasy RPG®**, **Beyond the Supernatural™** and all other Palladium games.

Rifts® Hades also sets the stage for an epic, five book cross-over adventure theme called the *Minion War*.

- The mystical and cursed realms of Hades mapped and described.
- The legion of demons and monsters that inhabit Hades.
- New horrors such as the Hades Netherbeast, Black Vultures, Ant Lions, and Pit Vipers, along with old favorites.
- Journey through places like the Fire Bog, the Island of the Dead and Forest of Stone, and learn the secrets of infernal life.
- Faerie Weapons, Blood Rifles and other magical and terrible weapons of war.
- The Minion War: a plan by the demons of Hades to invade and conquer their arch-rivals, the Deevils of Dyval. But the demonic battles will spill into the worlds of man and wreak havoc across the Megaverse!
- A stand-alone Dimension Book that is also the first step in an epic, five book adventure.
- Artwork by Russell, Bradshaw, Dubisch and others.
- Cover painting by John Zeleznik.
- Written by Carl Gleba.
- 160 pages – Cat. No. 872.
- \$18.95 retail. Ships Mid-June.



Tome Grotesque™

For the *Beyond the Supernatural*™ RPG

I'm sorry to disappoint BTS-2 fans with further delays (just as they had feared), but I'm afraid I must. I want to get this book (and Beyond Arcanum) right. Meanwhile, a number of other pressing matters have stolen away my time and energy on this title. My sincere apologies. If you must hate me, I do understand. Sorry.

– Kevin Siembieda, March, 2006

Tome Grotesque™ is a core sourcebook for the *Beyond the Supernatural*™ Role-Playing Game, set in our modern world.

Our heroes are psychics and ordinary people who have survived close encounters with the supernatural. Now, they investigate the unexplained and protect innocent people tormented by ghosts, demons and supernatural evil.

Tome Grotesque™ is filled with page after page of hideous fiends, predatory monsters, and creatures of darkness. However, this is more than a monster book, as we examine the gruesome and malevolent *nature* of supernatural beings, their motivations and how they manipulate and corrupt mankind. A frightening look into the psychology, nature and power of monsters that lurk in the shadows of our modern cities.

- A book of monsters and villains that includes horrific Supernatural Predators, Pranksters, Ghostly Entities, Demonic Servants, Ancient Evil and more.
- Demonic magic and psionic abilities.
- The powers and abilities of supernatural beings.
- How these creatures think, and why they do what they do.
- A journey into darkness that will keep you awake at night!
- Spectacular artwork by Russell, Dubisch and others.
- Cover painting by Mark Evans.
- Written by Kevin Siembieda.
- 160 pages – Cat. No. 702.
- \$18.95 retail. Ships June, 2006.

The Rifter® #35

Summer Swimsuit Special

This issue is going to be so much fun, we had to start talking about it already.

The July issue of **The Rifter®** will be our first **Swimsuit issue!** It was Wayne Breaux Jr.'s idea and all of Palladium's artists (and some friends, like Larry Elmore, Chris Arneson, and Jeff Easley) jumped at the opportunity. We're pulling out all the stops for our 25 Year Anniversary Celebration, but think of this as a bonus or a gift from all of Palladium's artists to you.

Issue #35 is our special Summer Swimsuit Issue.

- Girls, girls, girls! 20+ full page, pin-up style illustrations of scantily clad female characters from Palladium RPGs or world settings tastefully illustrated by a score of Palladium artists.
- Pin-Up Artists include: *Larry Elmore, Jeff Easley, John Zeleznik, David Martin, Ramon Perez, Wayne Breaux Jr., Mike Wilson, Freddie Williams, Chris Arneson, Apollo Okamura, Mark Dudley, Nick Bradshaw, Brian Manning, Kevin Siembieda* and many, many others. Plus five or six surprises for this special "swimsuit" issue.
- Articles for various Palladium RPG series.
- Adventures and source material.
- Stories and fiction.
- News and coming attractions.
- Great artwork and fun.
- Cover painting by Kevin Siembieda.
- Written by various contributors.
- 96 pages – Cat. No. 135.
- \$9.95 retail. Artists are already drawing away.

Warpath: Urban Jungle™ RPG

Warpath: Urban Jungle™ will be a hard-edged RPG based on the novel, *Warpath*, by author, *Jeffrey Scott Hansen*.

It will take a no-holds-barred look at street crime, gangs, terrorism, cops and special forces in a modern world setting. Author, Jeff Hansen is the co-writer and co-developer of this game working directly with me, Kevin Siembieda.

Mr. Hansen brings his years of experience as a police officer and his imagination as a writer to create a high-powered and brutal portrayal of the battle going on in the streets of our urban centers.

The setting and premise go beyond a war on crime to include the FBI, CIA, NSA and secret organizations that are good and evil. Inspired by the real world, the **Warpath: Urban Jungle™ RPG** will take front page newspaper headlines into a gritty, fictional setting of the underworld, espionage and a secret war to control our streets and minds.

Warpath: Urban Jungle™ will not be a kids' game and may surprise and even shock some people with the level of violence and hard edge depictions. Palladium is experimenting with new approaches and presentations in game design.

Our goal is to push the envelope on settings, characters, design, storytelling and everything to create dynamic product. We want Palladium to exist on the cutting edge and to try new approaches to restore a sense of wonder and excitement to pen and paper role-playing games. **Warpath** is just one avenue of adventure that will stir the pot of convention.

The release date for **Warpath: Urban Jungle™** has yet to be set, but we're looking hard at Fall 2006. Final size and price not yet determined.

Rifts® & Other Worlds™

The Art of John Zeleznik

This is another book we're so excited about, that we wanted to start getting the word out now.

Rifts® & Other Worlds™ will feature a fabulous collection of artwork created by John Zeleznik specifically for **Rifts®** and other Palladium role-playing game lines.

It will include never-before-seen concept sketches, pencil drawings, color concept sketches/studies and, of course, page after page packed with finished artwork that will make fans of John Zeleznik and/or **Rifts®** drool.

- Hardcover.
- Full color throughout.
- The artistry of painter John Zeleznik.
- Never-before-seen concept art and color sketches.
- Created, designed and illustrated by John Zeleznik.
- 128 pages of full color throughout – Cat. No. 2510.
- \$26.95 retail – ships in October. Perfect for Christmas.

Note: A special, signed and numbered, collector's limited edition will also be available for \$55.00 – limited to 400 copies – directly from Palladium Books.

Palladium's Revised Summer 2006 Schedule

All release dates are "ship dates" from Palladium to distributors and advance mail order. The book will appear in stores 1-2 weeks after that date.

Recent Releases

Rifts® WB 27: Adventures in Dinosaur Swamp™

Rifts® WB 2: Atlantis – back in print.

The Rifter® #33

The Best of the Rifter®

Rifts® WB 28: Arzno™ – Vampire Incursion™

The John Zeleznik Collector's Rifts® Coloring Book™

The Rifter® #34 (you're holding it in your hands).

April 2006

Rifts® WB 29: Madhaven™ – new by Brandon Aten & Taylor White – 128 pages – \$14.95 retail – April 27.

May 2006

Palladium Open House – May (5) 6 & 7 – Don't miss it!

Powers Unlimited™ 3 – new by Carmen Bellaire – 96 pages – \$13.95 retail – May 5 – tentatively moved up from its original scheduled release date.

June 2006

Tome Grotesque™ for Beyond the Supernatural™ – new by Kevin Siembieda – 160 pages – \$18.95 retail – June 16.

An additional title or reprint *may* be added to this month's release.

July 2006

Rifts® Dimension Book 10: Hades – Pits of Hell™ – new by Carl Gleba – a stand-alone sourcebook and Part One in the Minion War Crossover series! 160 pages – \$18.95 retail – July 13.

The Rifter® #35 – new, our first Swimsuit Spectacular! – 96 pages – \$9.95 retail – July 20.

An additional title or reprint *may* be added to this month's releases.

August 2006

Our annual **Gen Con Indy** appearance. If you missed the Palladium Open House, drop by our booth at Gen Con Indy, August 10-13, 2006.

Rifts® Sourcebook One Updated & Expanded – Updated to the current time-line plus an additional 48 pages of new material. Should be available at Gen Con, hot off the presses.

An additional title or reprint *may* be added to this month's release.

Coming Later in 2006

Rifts® Dimension Book 11: Dyval – Hell Unleashed™ – The Minion War series Part Two (of 5) – by Carl Gleba – 160 pages – \$18.95 retail.

Beyond Arcanum™ for Beyond the Supernatural™ – new by Kevin Siembieda and Todd Yoho – 192 pages – \$22.95 retail.

Rifts® & Other Worlds – The Art of John Zeleznik – full color, 128 pages – \$27.95 retail.

The Rifter® #36 – horror special – \$9.95 retail.

Heroes Unlimited™ The Atorian Sourcebook™ – Written by Wayne Breaux Jr.

Rifts® Dimension Book 12: Three Galaxies Dimensional Outbreak™ – The Minion War series Part Three (of 5) – 160 pages – \$18.95 retail.

Warpath: Urban Jungle™ RPG – new; tentative. Final size and price not yet determined.

Armageddon Unlimited™, a Heroes Unlimited Sourcebook – The Minion War series Part Four (of 5) – 160 pages – \$18.95 retail.

Other Titles in the Works:

Any of the following “may” be slotted into the schedule, above.

Rifts® Triax 2 – Aten & White

Rifts® Sovietski Sourcebook – Aten & White

Rifts® Delta Blues – Sinsapaugh & Philpott

Rifts® Voodoo – Sinsapaugh & Philpott

2-3 new **Fantasy RPG®** titles and the return of **Western Empire™**.

1-2 additional new **HU2** books.

Chaos Earth™: NEMA™ Mission Book One – Siembieda

Chaos Earth™: Psychic Storm™ – Siembieda

BTS-2™ Adventure Book – Siembieda

Splicers™ Sourcebook

Rifts® Megaverse® in Flames, a **Rifts® Adventure Sourcebook**; The Minion War series Part Five (of 5); 160 pages, \$18.95 retail.

Rifts® Shemarrian Sourcebook – Sinsapaugh



Are you coming to the biggest Palladium gaming event ever?!

- 40 gaming guests.
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- Open gaming.
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- Convention specials and giveaways.
- and more . . .

Palladium Books® Open House

– May 6 & 7, 2006 –

– \$30 for the weekend – \$15 for a single day

Held at the Palladium Office/Warehouse Building

At 40 guests, there has *NEVER* been a larger gathering of Palladium artists, writers, and creators. Nothing has ever even come close (we had 15-18 at one Origins and a Gen Con one year). Even I, Kevin Siembieda, have never met, face to face, with one third of these people!

Intimate venue. With an estimated 400-500 people attending, you will have unprecedented access and time to chat with and get autographs from each and every guest in attendance.

YOU get the inside track. As part of the Open House excitement, each guest will reveal, for the first time, details about the projects he is working on. Many of which are *Top Secret*, so YOU will be the first to know!!!

The giant toy sale is because I – *Kevin Siembieda* – have decided to sell my toy collection. And YOU get first crack at it!

I've been collecting various lines of toys for more than 25 years. I have so many toys (thousands of items) that I don't have space for them all and decided it's time to get rid of everything but my favorites. The guys at the office refer to my collection as "the wall of toys," and that's a wall that runs 60 feet! There are *Star Wars*, *Spawn*, *Movie Maniacs*, *Collector's Club*, *DC Heroes*, *Marvel Legends*, *Spider-Man* and many, many, many more.

The Ultimate Gaming Experience

I want the Open House to be the *most* fun, amazing, non-stop gaming event of your life, so please, don't miss out.

Based on a number of fans' reactions, it's worth it just to see the Palladium offices – "where the magic happens."

We already have people coming from coast to coast and from as far away as *Australia*.

We're going all out for the Open House, and this is an event that will NOT be repeated. It is a "one time" event.

Join the fun and come on down!

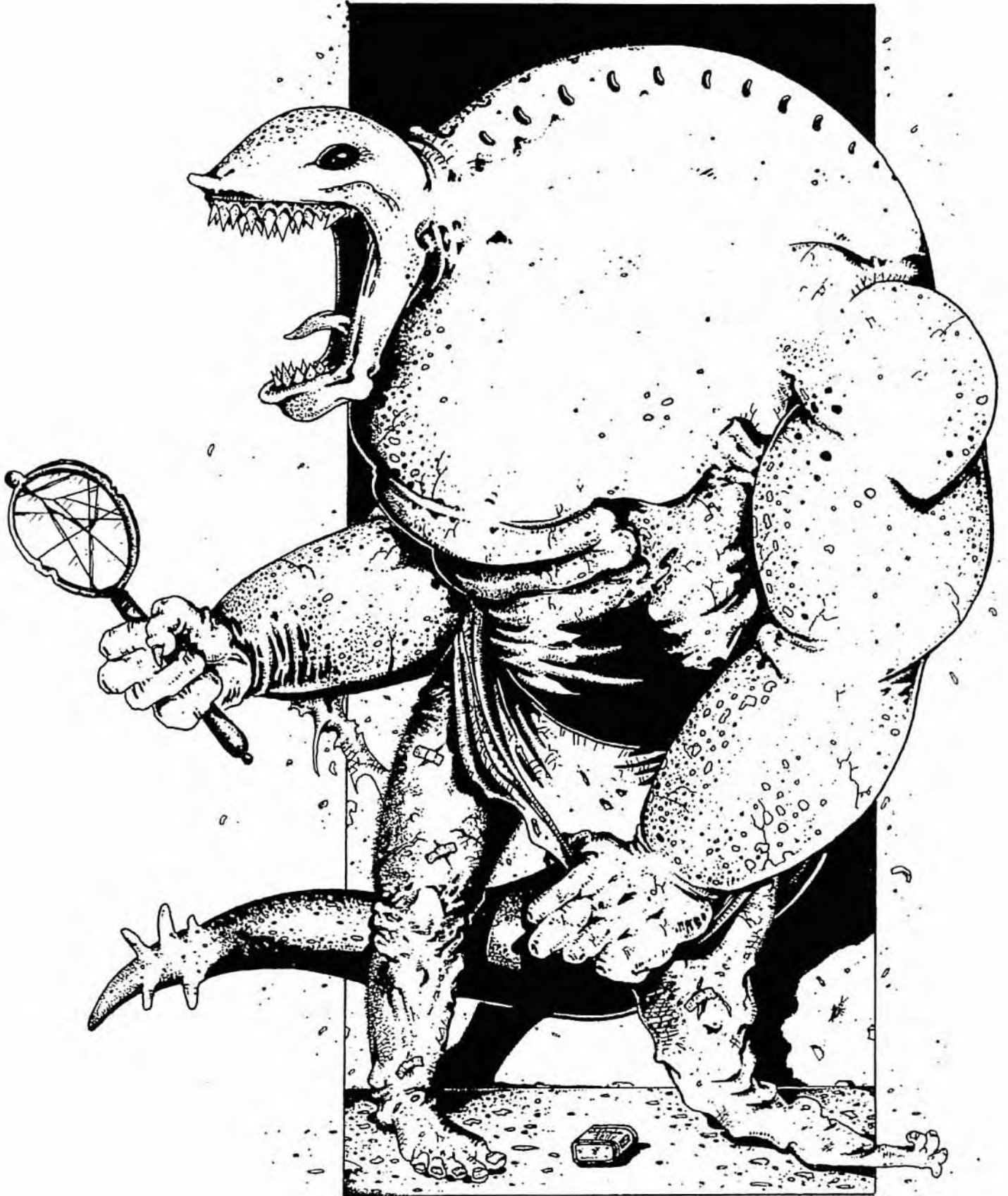
You'll regret it if you don't. I know all the cool stuff we have planned and you don't want to miss it. Trust me.

– *Kevin Siembieda*

• For complete information, hotel & ticket purchase:
www.palladiumbooks.com

• Or call the Palladium office: (734) 946-1156 info
All major credit cards accepted.

**Palladium Open House –
May 6 & 7 – Taylor, Michigan**



bradshaw
2006

The Skin Thief

A New Monster for Beyond the Supernatural™

By Steven Dawes

The Skin Thief is a demon that strives to live among humans and build itself a coven of servants to cater to its whims and pleasures. In its natural form, the Skin Thief is easily identifiable as a supernatural monster/demon, and resembles a hunched over, brutish and scaled reptilian biped. It stands almost eight feet tall, very broad shouldered and its head exhibits an oversized maw with crooked teeth that seem to fight for their own individual place to jut out from its mouth. Its image is completed with beady black eyes and nostril slits for facial features.

The backside of the creature almost resembles that of a Stegosaurus, straight down to the short tail it drags behind it (with sharp spikes protruding from it, no less). However, along both sides of the creature's spine there are no bony plates to be seen; instead there are what resemble several blowholes. The arms, legs and the rest of the body are exaggeratedly large and powerful which contributes to the incredible brute strength of the Skin Thief. Its tan colored, scaly hide looks incredibly dry, cracked and dusty and as the creature moves about its scales are constantly flaking off of it, crumbling into dust as they fall to the ground.

Ironically, the best description that explains the mindset of the Skin Thief is to use the phrase, "*A gargoyle that lives in hell but dreams of heaven.*" However, this demon's dream of heaven is a very different picture and much more simplistic than what we as humans might imagine. Once this creature has entered our dimension it goes to work immediately on its "grand design" to live amongst the people and acquire as many of them as possible into catering to its needs, allowing it to live its life like a king, tyrant, leader or lord, whatever term it prefers to go by.

But first, the creature needs to impersonate the humans to be among them. To that end, the Skin Thief is required to collect seven "sacrifices" to perform what is called the "Metamorphosis Ritual." It hides in the shadows of the night and the dark places of the world and gathers up anyone it can ambush and capture, stowing them away in its chosen lair or hideaway. Once the Skin Thief has seven captives, it has everything it needs for the ritual. It's important to note that all seven of the captives are still alive during the Metamorphosis Ritual, for the Skin Thief needs both their collective P.P.E. and their skins, requiring the captives to be slowly, meticulously and painfully skinned alive to dress the demon in a human guise shell!

At the end of the ritual, the creature now resembles a human being (stealing the physical features from the most attractive sacrifice it caught) and can walk among humans freely and begins phase two of its plans. The Skin Thief is an intelligent being and it knows human beings quite literally inside and out. Helping its cause all too well is its innate ability to charm and impress the socks off most of whom it meets. In this fashion the Skin Thief has been known to impersonate all walks of life for its acquiring process, from traditional positions of power like religious or military figures to more prominent members of to-

day's society, which could range anywhere from upstart drug lords to business owners, talent scouts, casting directors, anything that will bring people to it for help of some kind.

As it builds its little slice of heaven, the Skin Thief selectively begins seducing its choice candidates with promises of anything they may desire, including possessions they've always wanted, protection from someone or something, or power and stature in exchange for its services. These demons would make gifted psychologists, in the sense that they are naturals at understanding human nature and they personally admire how so many people will go to such extreme measures to attain their wants and desires, especially when they feel their goal is truly in reach (they can and do impersonate mental health specialists when looking for their servants).

The Skin Thief will lie, cheat and steal its way into people's hearts (with both its natural charisma and psionic influences), and once they are hooked they are put to work immediately as its newest servants, handling the daily duties for the Skin Thief. They make excellent judges of character and can analyze a chosen subject's talents with amazing precision and delegate them to various tasks they would serve best. This will include menial labor like cooking and cleaning, to more engaging tasks like scouting for trouble from "outsiders," to the more prestigious positions in the eyes of the Skin Thief like handling the more despicable acts, including the acquisition of new sacrifices for its "Renewal Ritual."

The servants who gather more sacrifices for the Skin Thief are especially valued and important, for it must constantly plan for its next ritual. The human shell it hides in only lasts about 30-40 days before it will suddenly shrivel up and fall off like a dusty husk, revealing the true monster underneath again. The Skin Thief instinctively senses how long its shell will last, and typically a few days before its due date the creature casts its Renewal Ritual, and again uses the collective P.P.E. and skins of seven living sacrifices (who by this point should have already been collected by its servants if all is going accordingly to plan) for replenishing its shell. By the end of the first Renewal Ritual, the Skin Thief is at full magical power and ability.

An even more frightening notion is that the demon can steal the face and body of a specific person and claim it for itself, therefore impersonating that person with incredible skill! Fortunately, this is rarely anyone of "public interest" like movie stars, public officials and others who are constantly in the spotlight (its impersonation skills can only go so far). Instead it would seek out an individual who has influence and power "behind the scenes" that the demon would find beneficial to it.

Their choice candidates can range from wealthy people with lots of figurative weight to throw around, to influential leaders (religious, military, business, etc.), or physically beautiful looking humans (strangely, this demon admires human physical beauty as much as humans do and strives to become attractive and beautiful itself), or anyone whose influence or talents can help it achieve its goals. This has even led to the Skin Thief posing as a servant or other lowly worker for awhile as it sizes up a potential candidate to replace, and therefore studies him/her until it feels secure that this candidate is who it wants and can impersonate them adequately. From this point it's only a matter of collecting this person with six other sacrifices and completing a Renewal Ritual, changing its face and features to look and sound identical to its chosen sacrifice.

However the individual Skin Thief chooses its victims (either randomly or specifically), once it has achieved its "grand scheme" the demon lives out its personal paradise happily. It enjoys all the fruits of its labors while its servants are doing all the work and desires it asks of them. Once this Demon has completed its first Renewal Ritual, it can enjoy all the sensations and carnal desires we human beings enjoy (and so take for granted in the demon's eyes). They enjoy all the food and drink and delicacies they can, engage in sexual experiences with as many beautiful people as possible, simply anything and everything it can enjoy while living in its personal lap of luxury.

Surprisingly enough, the Skin Thief has to do very little to impress and keep its chosen subjects working for it. It will perform acts like simply casting a spell occasionally to show off its "powerful magical abilities," or ironically through its servants it amasses treasures and goods that are given (promised) to other various servants over time to appease them. Those servants who require a need for stature and elevation will be given ranks or seniority, and given warm thanks and appreciation and notes of their importance. In some cases, they'll truly "employ" their servants, elevating their status to hired thugs and the like. These actions result in loyal subjects who are happy to serve their master, who has provided something they've never had before or what they feel they could never attain on their own. Of course, there is the occasional servant who grows unsatisfied, bored, or becomes guilty and remorseful for what all he has done in the name of his master, but these servants are dealt with accordingly and usually find themselves a captive sacrifice for the demon's next Renewal Ritual.

But to the sadness and resentment of the Skin Thief, it will never be able to achieve the full human guise it so yearns for. For all its "*simple wishes to be human*" and how much this creature despises the ugliness of its true being wrapped in a beautiful human shell, it leaves behind constant reminders of its nature. Besides the annoyance of always sensing the frailty of its precious human shell and planning for its next Renewal Ritual to keep it alive, it also leaves a telltale sign of its nature wherever it goes. For this reason the Skin Thief is also known by another name, the "Dust Demon."

Wherever the demon goes, whatever it does, or however long it lingers in a given place, it is constantly exuding dust. While no one is entirely sure why they possess this trait, parapsychologists have speculated that this dust spilling trait either comes from the creature as a byproduct of the skin shell being renewed, or that the creature's natural scaly hide that constantly flakes off and dissipates to dust still lingers underneath the skin and continues to flake. For whatever reason, the Dust Demon/Skin Thief has to live with the ugly fact that it affects the area around it by constantly shedding dust. It's not enough that one can see dust spewing and misting out of its pores unless examined long and hard enough, but by the end of a given day, it can coat a standard sized living room in a thin layer of dust everywhere (sometimes a couple of layers' worth as it gets closer to its next Renewal Ritual).

Another strange magical trait is that the Dust Demon affects the areas around it by prematurely aging and decaying dead skin, flesh and sinew. This aging effect takes place during the end of a Renewal Ritual, when the demon exhausts a large dust cloud that travels and settles throughout the room. By the time

the dust has settled and the ritual is completed, all the remains of its sacrifices are suddenly decayed to little more than leathery and mummified looking, dusty, skeletal corpses, as though they have been dead and decaying for at least several months!

As a result, if left unattended, the dwelling place of a Dust Demon, in a week's time, will see massive amounts of thick cobwebs and several layers of dust, and it will seem like the place has been uninhabited for months! The demon is ironically anchored to our plane of existence by collecting dust particles together to form itself, and that nature will always be a part of it, no matter how often it renews its skin or tries in vain to use human beautification products to keep its stolen skin moisturized and smooth (although it will keep trying, to almost comical effect).

While this demon shares many horrid traits with its supernatural kin, one aspect that's unique is that it actually feels akin to the human populace in general. They especially tend to become so attached to their loyal servants that they have been known to fight for and defend them when threatened! While self-preservation is top priority, the Skin Thief does care for its servants like a master would its favorite pets, and if deemed necessary it will fight on its servants' behalf. This demon loves phrases and statements like, "*You mess with one of us, you mess with ALL of us,*" or, "*One for all and all for one.*" This only strengthens the camaraderie of its servants.

It does take something serious to get a Dust Demon to combat anyone, however, as its precious human shell is fragile and breaks easily. The demon does all it can to avoid a confrontation and will try to settle any threatening issues at hand through negotiations, calling in favors from whatever contacts and allies it has, or just plain hiring outsiders to handle its problems. This is not an act of cowardice on the demon's side, however, merely a defense mechanism for its human shell.

While the demon can shed its shell at will, if it takes too much injury the mystical skin shell is broken, and will fall off in a dusty heap on the floor. For the next melee round the creature can't do much more than groan, growl and roar as the metamorphosis is ruined and it reverts back to its natural, brutish and ugly form. After that melee the demon will be ready to combat its enemies, and will lash out in a vengeful fury with all its might and ability at those who dared to cause it to revert back to its self-loathed form.

Of course, the demon is not stupid and can judge if it's in a fight it can't win, and it will attempt to flee. As much as it loves its servants and the life it has built for itself as a "human being," if the servants can't be saved or his way of life can't be salvaged safely, it will flee and move on to a new location and start from scratch again. Of course, it may stick around long enough to exact revenge on those who ruined its life, and if possible, use them as captive sacrifices in its next ritual, maybe even to the extent of impersonating one of them to wreak personal havoc on all those who knew that person.

Note: It must be mentioned that these surprisingly sensitive beings can (and do) fall in love with particularly charming people; they're especially susceptible to those who show genuine compassion and tenderness to their human guise (which helps them to forget even for brief moments that they are truly monsters). They generally have no preference to either sex, but they can only imitate the sex of their chosen victim that they meta-

morphosis into. The recipient of a Dust Demon's love will be showered in gifts, affection and appreciation, and will be treated like royalty. The Skin Thief would also defend its loved one with its life if need be.

On the other side of that coin, the broken heart of a Skin Thief is a terrible thing to behold. Understanding that it's still a demon that's prone to have demon-sized rages, nothing will upset it more than to realize its love and affections won't/can't be returned. Those who tell the demon that they don't love it (its human guise, obviously) or somehow learn or see the demon's true guise and can't love its true being even if they had loved its human guise (and most likely would suddenly be terrified of the Dust Demon visage) are just too much for the Skin Thief to bear.

In its demonic mind it makes perfect sense that if it can't have the one it loves, it can still be close to them by stealing their guise, living out their beauty in the eye of the demon beholder. And very sadly, but determined, it will cast the Renewal Ritual and take their beloved's skin to impersonate them and live as they did in twisted flattery and admiration. Such is the fate of beasts that desire beauty.

The sacred ability to love is a very unique trait amongst the supernatural. Some speculate the Skin Thief is the muse to the "Beauty and the Beast" stories and its many variations all over the world. However, its uniqueness has forced the Dust Demon into a position of being an outcast from the supernatural realm. For the same reasons the supernatural are jealous of humankind and therefore enjoy tormenting them, the Skin Thief's ability to truly feel love also earns it the animosity and spite from its "colleagues." The Skin Thief is truly alone; it can never be the human being it so badly wants to imitate, and it will never be accepted among its supernatural brethren.

Skin Thief – Lesser Demon

Also known as the *Dust Demon* or *Depressed Demon*.

Alignment: Most will be Aberrant (they have a unique sense of honor, respect and admiration for humankind), but the more savage, cruel and self serving ones will be considered Miscreant.

Attributes: I.Q. 1D6+11, M.E. 2D6+10, M.A. 3D4+15!, P.S. 3D6+12 (Supernatural), P.P. 1D6+6 in natural form, P.E. 1D6+13, P.B. 1D4, Spd 1D6+7 in natural form (all human guise physical stats receive the standard 3D6 plus attribute bonuses).

Armor Rating (A.R.): 11 in natural form; any attack less than eleven does no damage even if it hits.

Hit Points: P.E. number +30.

S.D.C.: 1D4x10+100 S.D.C. Its human shell is fragile and can only withstand a mere 55 S.D.C. before it's destroyed beyond what its regenerative abilities can repair.

Discorporation: When slain, its body immediately crumbles into an outline of a thick layer of dust on the ground. Examination of the dust will only reveal that it's composed of common dust particles.

Threat Level: x4; a Lesser Demon.

Horror Factor: 12 in its natural form, otherwise it carries the physical beauty of whatever human guise it takes from a chosen victim (which is usually very attractive).

Size: 7½ to 8 feet (2.3-2.4 m) tall in natural form; matches the same height of its stolen human guise.

Weight: 450-600 pounds (203-270 kg) in natural form; matches the same weight of its stolen human guise.

Average Life Span: Uncertain, probably immortal.

P.P.E.: P.E. attribute plus 3D6.

Natural Abilities: In its natural form it can track by smell at 75%, Leap 10 feet (3 m) high and 15 feet (4.6 m) across (increase by 25% with a running start), Nightvision 500 feet (152 m), excellent normal vision, bio-regenerates at 1D8 per melee round, fire attacks do half damage (magical and psionic fire does full damage), and it can hold its breath for up to twenty minutes at a time.

Knows All Languages: Magically understands and speaks all languages at 90% in human guise. Speaks in a hoarse and hissing voice in its natural form that gives no hint of the charming personality it portrays in human guise. In fact, it's downright chilling and repulsive sounding; its maw lacks any real vocal articulation and speaks in broken and mumbled words.

Tail (special): The tail can be used like a club and does 2D6 + Supernatural P.S. damage from the spikes that protrude from it. However, it is not prehensile or articulate enough to grab or entangle anything.

Infrared and Thermal-Imaging Vision: Can see perfectly in smoke (or in the dust clouds it creates), as well as see and follow the heat signatures of warm-blooded animals and hot running machines (car engines, etc.). Range: 1000 feet (305 m). Track via heat signatures at 70% (-50% in temperatures of 90+ degrees Fahrenheit/32+ Celsius).

Dust Cloud (special): When necessary, the Dust Demon can create a 20x20 foot (6.1x6.1 m) cloud of dust via the blowholes that run adjacently down both sides of its spine. The cloud is a thick dust that effectively blinds opponents (blinding rules apply), requiring protective goggles, infrared or some other type of vision to see inside the cloud. Breathing inside the cloud will require a save vs non-lethal toxins each melee round to avoid choking and coughing (which won't stop, once the coughing starts, until 1D4 rounds after they have left the cloud); all actions and bonuses are halved while uncontrollably choking and coughing. Wearing a gas mask will provide adequate protection. The Dust Demon can hold its breath and has a natural infrared ability and is therefore unhindered by the cloud. The cloud will last for about 1D8+2 minutes indoors (unless a wind tunnel or gust is created to blow it away, which could clear it in about a minute or two). Outdoors, the dust cloud will only last 1D4 minutes before thinning out or settling on the ground.

Limited Invulnerability (special): The demon is impervious to spoiled food, poison and disease. Man-made weapons inflict full damage, as do magic, psionics and physical blows.

Also see Psionics.

Vulnerabilities: 1. Vulnerable to all weapons, but weapons or objects made of glass will bypass its Armor Rating and inflict double damage (but will most likely shatter on impact after striking, 92% chance), and vinegar stings its natural body (no significant damage taken from the vinegar, but it will flee or at least be put on the defensive from its attacker).

2. Impervious to psionics and magic affecting the mind, but all physical types will have full effect.

3. For the first 30-45 days after the Metamorphosis Ritual is completed, the human guise will only have half its usual combat bonuses and stats. The Skin Thief needs time to adjust and its shell needs to "harden" completely, but by the time its first Renewal Ritual takes place, it has full stats and bonuses.

4. They loathe being what they are and tend to be depressive and defensive about their despised true nature in private. Ridiculing or taunting a Dust Demon by calling it "ugly" or "hideous looking" and the like will cause it go into a ravaged frenzy on the verbal abuser! While in this state, the creature is +2 to strike, but is -3 to parry and dodge while it's lost to its depression-fueled rage. When upset, it can be tricked or fooled into running into traps or areas that are harmful to it to chase the ones who ridiculed it.

R.C.C. Skills or Equivalents: Basic Math 90%, Climb 80%/75%, Impersonation 90%/85%, Land Navigation 90%, Seduction 80% (in human form only), Streetwise 90%, Swim 96%, Prowl 45%, and Track Humans 60%. In addition, the Skin Thief gets two skill selections for each level of its experience. Make selections from the categories of Communication, Domestic, Horsemanship, Paranormal Studies, Rogue, Technical and Wilderness only. Also see Natural Abilities.

Equivalent Level of Experience: 1D6+2

Attacks per Melee: Six in natural form or human guise.

Damage: Bite: 2D6+5 damage. Claws: 1D8+2 plus Supernatural Strength damage (claws are razor sharp and designed to carve the skin off of its sacrifices). Tail: 2D6 plus Supernatural Strength damage. They only possess normal attributes in human guise (loses its Supernatural Strength in human guise).

R.C.C. Bonuses (in addition to attribute bonuses): +3 to strike, including the use of the tail, +3 to parry, +1 to dodge, +5 to pull punch/bite, +5 to roll with impact, +2 to disarm, +1 on Perception Rolls, +4 to save vs Horror Factor, and +3 to save vs magic (immune to mind-affecting magic).

Magic: The Skin Thief only knows a few minor magic spells and can only select 5 spells from magic levels 1-4. However, it instinctively knows four unique magic abilities that create impressive results.

Metamorphosis Ritual (Special): This ritual takes about an hour and a half to two hours to complete, and it requires seven human sacrifices for their P.P.E. and their skin. During the ritual, the demon skins its victims alive one at a time, during which time it presses the patches & strips of flesh onto its body. The skin then takes on a life of its own, and crawls and morphs around the demon to various areas on its body. The sacrifice who the Skin Thief has decided to imitate is called its "chosen" sacrifice, and will be the last one to be stripped of their flesh and their P.P.E. exhausted.

The nature of the spell changes the look of the human shell to be identical to the chosen sacrifice after the facial skin is stripped away and placed on the face of the changing demon. Once this last piece of the puzzle is placed, the demon's physique shrinks and the patches and strips of skin all morph together into the shell. The sacrifices can be either

gender, any race and any age over eleven; the ritual changes the pigmentations of the various skin pieces to match the look of the chosen. All freckles, scars, tattoos, and even skin diseases of the sacrifices will disappear, and any noticeable traits of the "chosen" like tattoos, scars, and any imperfections will be imitated perfectly. The Skin Thief's eyes and voice will also change to match the chosen's (they can even fool eye scanning devices!).

This is a very disgusting and horrifying ritual to take part in, and the Skin Thief would prefer to do this ritual without witnesses. The sacrifices are usually bound or shackled in some method to prevent their escape. The sacrifices are aware during the ritual, and suffer excruciating pain as their skin is carved off their bodies, but all they can do is scream, wriggle and hopelessly struggle until they either die from shock or blood loss or are killed at the right moment for their P.P.E. If the ritual is interrupted/halted for more than four melee rounds (such as a rescue, an unexpected commotion or disturbance), the ritual will fail and another seven human sacrifices will be needed to start another one.

Renewal Ritual (Special): This spell is designed to replenish the metamorphosis spell, requiring another seven sacrifices to be robbed of their skins and P.P.E. to keep the Skin Thief's human guise from expiring. If the Skin Thief wants, it may change the appearance of its shell by stripping the facial skin of its new chosen and placing it over the old. The shell will then change its pigmentation, gender and other details accordingly.

Supernatural Masking (Special): Once the shell has been created, it creates a shield to protect its supernatural nature. The human guise has normal attributes, and at best a psychic or magic user would only read the Skin Thief as someone with minor psychic ability. However, if the Skin Thief casts a spell or uses a psychic power, it lowers its defenses for that instant, and if being watched or its energies felt by a psychic, it could be caught red-handed as a "Lesser Demon" threat level.

Psionics: Considered a Master Psychic requiring a 10 or higher to save vs psionic attack. **I.S.P.:** M.E. attribute number x2, +1D8 points per level of experience. **Powers:** Empathy (4), Hypnotic Suggestion (6), Levitation (Varies), Mind Block (4), Psychic Invisibility (7), Telekinetic Push (4), Mind Bond (10; usually done before a ritual to learn more about their chosen sacrifice, they remember and retain about 50% of their victim's memories), and Bio-Manipulation (6).

Enemies: Basically anyone who gets in the way of its personal goals. Most Skin Thieves will be extremely reluctant to serve any other demonic beings, as they despise their demonic nature as much as they do their own. This is not say they can't be bullied or talked in servitude, but they won't go willingly (the Miscreant alignment beings, however, would be more apt and of more interest to said demonic forces, see Allies info below).

Allies: Interestingly enough, the Skin Thief is considered a laughingstock to most supernatural beings. Their "sensitivity issues" are a source of ridicule, and the fact that they openly despise demons (including themselves) earns them the animosity of demons that don't see the humor in the Skin Thief's twisted ironies. The fact that they possess the ability

to feel love is salt in the wound, which only makes matters worse.

This animosity has been known to go as far as to step in and hinder a Skin Thief's personal quest, or subtly point them out to those heroic warriors who constantly badger their own efforts. This even works in the other demons' favor, since those pesky "do gooders" will leave them alone (at least temporarily) to deal with their sudden "surprise" supernatural monster find. Devil Ghosts would especially enjoy doing this.

Again, it's important to note that in many regards, the Skin Thief is a loner amongst supernatural kind. They usually don't want anything to do with supernatural beings anymore than most would want to do with them. Of course, other supernatural beings can be included in the Skin Thief's schemes and plans if they can contribute a use in some way, and if the demon was willing to associate itself with a Skin Thief to begin with.

Habitat: Can be found almost anywhere throughout the world, but they prefer places with lots of people to mingle with, talk into servitude or use for their rituals.

G.M. Notes

The Skin Thief can be considered a wild card at times in the course of a game. Depending on their needs, the player characters may be involved with a Skin Thief and not even know it. They could be disguised as anybody, including contacts who may provide weapons and equipment or may facilitate other services for the player characters. If the player characters ever found out their contact was indeed a supernatural being, how would they react? If they were to realize that it was a Skin Thief and therefore, a killer just for the horrible sake of stealing flesh for itself, but it still provides a much needed service to the group, what do they do?

Think about the twisted ironies these demons can represent directly and indirectly to the player characters. Perhaps the player character have a friend who's just started working for a Skin Thief (or has for awhile), or the Skin Thief wants one of the player characters or an NPC as its next chosen guise? Perhaps the Skin Thief has fallen in love with one of the player characters? Perhaps an NPC is a Skin Thief and is hiding in plain sight amongst the group? Use your imagination and have fun with it.

Palladium Fantasy RPG[®]



Optional Source Material for the Palladium Fantasy RPG[®]

By Mark Hall

She became awake, the cool stone beneath her cheek having stolen most of her heat while she slept. In the soft phosphorescence of the cavern, she could see others going about their lives; the relentless grind of the mortar and pestle cracking the shells of beetles, spiders, and mollusks, the scuffle of youth as they tussled over some choice scrap of food or the attention of another, and the brief squeal of pain as something became yet another piece of the endless meal which was life in the caverns. The stream bubbled nearby, and the splashes she heard told her that some had again taken to fishing for the blindfish. The males fished infrequently, and more for something to do than out of need; the blindfish were small, and while tasty, it was too far to reach the hot places where they could be cooked, whereas beetles could be eaten raw.

Standing, she looked to the walls, seeing the dark patches where someone had grown hungry and feasted upon the phosphorescent lichen which provided the light for the caverns. More would have to be encouraged, and the males would have to be spoken to; if they took more, it would be hard to see to reach the farming cave, her destination. Though the tunnel she followed was barely three feet high, she scrambled along it faster than a human could run; though it turned more than a bird in flight, and she passed half a score of side tunnels, she never once was lost. The tunnels were not just her home, they were her birthright, and no Troglodyte would be lost, even in a maze such as this.

Reaching the farming cave, she examined the field of fungus and mold that she and her sisters, aunts and cousins, mothers and daughters, so carefully tended. It smelled of generations of Troglodyte waste and rotted carcasses, and she looked for a new place in which to void herself, left full from a long sleep. As she relieved herself, she planned out her harvesting, knowing that she would soon need to prepare to lay her eggs, as her mates had been very attentive recently, and her young were well past weaned. A few more sleeps, a few more meals, and she would be ready to lay again. Two of her sisters were ready, as

well, as were some of their sisters, and some of their sisters; in several sleeps, there may be a large clutch here, in the caverns. It was good here.

* * *

Sub-Chief Imp-Thak Modech tried to wipe the beast's blood off his sword blade, but found that its hide made a poor cleaning cloth. "SOMEONE FIND ME A RAG! I DON'T WANT THIS STINK GETTING INTO THE METAL!" The raid had gone great... this was sure to get him some notice back in Mog'dak. Ten Trogs, with twice as many Sprogs, and a whole nest of eggs. EGGS! Ready-made Troglodyte slaves, in a couple of years. If they weren't so damn valuable, he'd be tempted to cook one of those eggs up as a victory meal, once his boys finished putting the chains on the big ones... chain a big one's arms to the necks of two little ones, and they get real quiet... not even a Trog can break Kobold slave-chains, and they're not going to go flinging around their little Sproglodytes.

Imp-Thak watched as the eggs were loaded into the carts, savagely beating one peon who wasn't careful enough with his cargo. Some people counseled him to make money by raiding the humans or the Gnomes, or even the Goblins... a bit harder, since they had magic, but you got to make free with the women on the way back, and it didn't bring their value down too much, so long as all you broke was their spirit. But looking at all those beautiful eggs, their leathery shells looking bronze in the fire-light, Imp-Thak knew he preferred easy money... you could always buy women, and Trogs were easy money.

* * *

Troglodytes are often forgotten by the other inhabitants of the Palladium World, and with good reason. They are few and far between, and have little impact upon the world at large. Looking at history, Troglodytes are not even a footnote. There are no great Troglodyte empires, no forgotten period of Troglodyte glory, no Troglodyte hero whose might challenged the gods and whose power shook the heavens. Instead, there is a simple people, never gathering in groups larger than ten thousand, who have lived for millennia a life unchanged by what goes on around them. Even the Elf-Dwarf War, which raged above their heads, and sometimes through their tunnels, simply caused the Troglodytes to move on, to keep away from the fighting, and to defend themselves as best they could whenever necessary. While Troglodytes have made no great mark on history, they are an integral part of daily life in many Kobold cities, where they serve as slaves. In Western arenas, Troglodyte gladiators are an exotic treat, their violence and cunning encouraged with the threat of harm to a young Troglodyte, or through ruthless conditioning.

In their own warrens, Troglodytes live in what scholars like to call a "horticultural, pre-pastoral society, based on non-linear, non-focal family groups, using a Neolithic tool kit unchanged since the middle period of the Age of Light." In plain Elven, that means that they raise their own plants for food, but have to hunt animals. They do not trace family lineage, largely because their eggs are laid communally, and the tools that Troglodytes

use today have remained unchanged for the better part of suspected history.

Physical Description

Physically, Troglodytes resemble smooth skinned, humanoid toads, or chubby lizards, with tails that reach from mid-thigh to mid-calf, depending on the individual. Visually, the only difference between males and females is that females do have breasts, and tend to be more slimly built. With experience, however, non-Troglodytes will notice that male Troglodytes have blunter features, a coarser skin texture, and are more prone to scarring, both intentional and unintentional. Close examination will show more differences, but those are not a way to casually tell males from females.

Most humans and Elves immediately notice a Troglodyte's chubbiness (Goblins and Kobolds do, too, but for more culinary reasons). That chubbiness, however, is for a good reason. Troglodytes are incredibly strong; although a Troglodyte is half its size and a quarter of its weight, a Troglodyte has a strength equal to an Ogre's. While they are mammals (actually egg-laying monotremes, like the Earth platypus), a Troglodyte's muscles are more like a reptile's; very dense, making them much heavier than water. However, overlaying that muscle is a layer of fat, built up because of their relatively low-stress, high-intake lifestyles, and because of biological necessity. This fat not only provides them with insulation in their chilly subterranean homes, but also provides them with a neutral buoyancy. While Troglodytes do not precisely float, they do not have to work very hard to keep their heads above water, or to sink lower if they wish, a handy trait in underground streams.

The skin of a Troglodyte is pale; most will be white or pale pink, though some will be yellowish, slightly red, or a translucent purple. In the phosphorescent light they favor, they resemble ghosts, their bodies glistening with moisture from the air and walls, reflecting back the greens and pinks from the fungi, and their own hides looking like bone or ectoplasm. At least, this is the perception of others who invade their homes; to themselves, they are blending in well with the gentle light, because of the peculiar deficiencies in their sight.

Their eyes are invariably black and nearly featureless, and are far more attuned to movement than to color. Troglodytes who have little contact with the civilized races of Palladium seldom have more than a few color words in their vocabulary, and use them haphazardly, tending to describe anything which is yellow, green, or blue as "green," red, orange, or purple as "red," and more or less ignoring other colors as being unimportant. Most Troglodytes will never see the sun, and will never see what a human thinks of as "natural light," instead seeing everything through nightvision and the glow of fungi. Their nightvision allows them to see up to 600 feet (183 m) in absolute darkness, and twice that far if they have the slight glow of fungi to provide some luminance. It's fairly rare that a Troglodyte will actually be able to see that far unobstructed, however; their tunnels rarely continue more than thirty feet (9.1 m) in a single direction, though some caverns will allow for clear vision further than a Troglodyte can see.

Troglodyte legs are slightly shorter, and their arms slightly longer, in proportion to each other when compared to a human's



limbs. While Troglodytes usually walk upright, their comparative disproportion makes moving on all fours through a small tunnel a natural, comfortable stance for them to adopt. Each arm ends with a three-fingered hand; each leg with a three-toed foot, splayed wide and callous-covered for traction. These fingers and toes are thick and blunt, and are capped with claws that are nearly as hard as diamond, and tougher than granite; while not

incredibly sharp, Troglodyte claws can take incredible abuse as they tear through rock. Their claws are also useful for climbing rock and softer materials, a fact which many Troglodyte warrens take advantage of (see the section on Troglodyte warrens for more information on their construction).

While some Troglodytes have rounded tails, most are flat, rather like the tail of a crocodile. Troglodytes spend a fair amount of time in the water; they're not natural swimmers by any means, but underground streams, lakes, and even seas are not unknown, so most Troglodytes learn how to swim in their youth. They use their tail to help them maneuver in the water, though it's of less use for thrust, given its small size compared to their bodies. Because of the positioning of the tail upon the body, it is effectively useless as a weapon; the Troglodyte would have to be squatting over an opponent to hit them with their tail in most cases, and it does not have the dexterity to wrap around someone's legs if the Troglodyte is grabbed from behind, nor can it raise more than about thirty degrees from a straight-down position.

Troglodyte females lay up to four leathery-shelled eggs at a time, but they will be laid together with all other females in the group who are ready to lay, forming a rather sizable clutch, as about one female in ten will reproduce in any given year. This splits the duties of watching and tending the eggs considerably, and increases the bond between females who clutch together, and thus between clutch-mates (young hatched from eggs in the same clutch). These eggs are kept at slightly above the normal cave temperatures; slight drops or temporary increases of a few degrees won't harm the embryos, but variations of more than ten degrees can kill them. The hatchlings claw their way free after about six weeks in the egg; at that point they are little more than eight inches (20 cm) long. They quickly lose the "egg tips" of their claws, and are relatively helpless for the first six months. Females nurse the very young, but begin to supplement with solid foods after about nine weeks; Troglodytes are fully weaned after ten months.

Troglodyte infants crawl at approximately four months of age, but lack the ability to climb, so nurseries are typically submerged at least three feet from the surrounding floor. Walking, however, takes them much longer; they often do not begin to walk until nearly a year and a half of age, and a toddler who does not walk at two is late, but not concerned about, so long as he can scamper normally on all fours. Troglodyte children also do not speak readily; while they begin to understand language at about the same rate as humans, and begin responding to verbal instructions at about a year, most Troglodyte young do not actually speak. Their vocal cords do not fully develop until about five years of age, limiting their ability to make more than a few words, and Troglodytes generally speak much less than humans, Elves, or Dwarves, in any case.

At approximately ten years of age, the young male Troglodytes begin to physically mature. While they never lose "baby fat," as humans think of it, they do bulk up considerably, and grow several inches in height. Female Troglodytes mature about two years later, but their changes are, for the most part, more subtle than those of males. Troglodytes do not mentally mature until they reach about twenty years of age. Immature Troglodytes are discouraged, but not prevented, from mating; it is thought that parents pass on a degree of their own personalities

to their young, and too many young Troglodytes mating will result in a clutch full of perpetually immature Troglodytes. Troglodytes do not have any strong incest taboos, and their societal structure would make it difficult to determine whether one is mating with a relative or not. However, they do tend to avoid mating with clutch-mates, and with those who laid eggs in their clutch, though it is not strictly forbidden, and Troglodyte genetics are generally stable enough that most of the dangerous recessive traits were bred from the species generations ago.

Troglodyte Society

Troglodyte society is based on loose-knit associations of clutch-mates and breeding partners. As the first five years of a Troglodyte's life is spent with his clutch-mates, those bonds tend to be the closest and most irreplaceable in his life. Though clutches will separate as tribes grow larger and need to seek new places to live, clutch-mates will remain close, should they meet again.

After about five years of age, Troglodytes are taken from the nursery pits more or less full time, and into the primary farming caverns of the village. At that point, they have the ability to care for themselves enough that they will not wander off alone, though sometimes they will be taken by an adult who wishes to show them something. These jaunts away don't last long, but it is in this way that Troglodytes begin training for their futures as male and female adult Troglodytes. When they return to the farming cavern, the Troglodyte takes part in the activities there; young males hunt each other and any bugs they may find, digging small tunnels, and creating simple tools from the rocks, while the young females help the women tend the fungi and lichen which provide the Troglodytes with their food. The clutch relationships continue to grow in these times; just because the young females are helping grow lichen does not mean they are never playing with the young males, or that neither group will ever stop to have a fight of rocks and dirt and bones, or even of claws and teeth, but Troglodyte life is very pacific. Even the occasional bits of excitement that the men have when hunting are brief, rarely lasting more than a few minutes before it's all over but the bleeding. As such, Troglodytes tend to build very stable relationships with their clutch-mates, based on cooperation and interconnected roles.

More fluid are the relationships between breeding partners. Troglodytes do not practice sexual fidelity; it is not part of their society nor their survival strategy. Instead, each Troglodyte male will have one to five females he visits regularly, from whom he gets "women's things," which are foods like mushrooms and lichens, as well as medicines, and trading them for "men's things," which includes insects, meats, and tools he makes. If she has no need for men's things, he goes to another woman; if he has no need of women's things, she has several other males who visit her. To many humans or Elves, this seems unnatural, or immoral, but it is the way of life for Troglodytes. When a female feels that it is time for her to lay eggs, she will choose how she wishes to go about it; most choose to see a variety of their breeding partners, hoping to get the best aspects of each of them to be passed on to the next generation.

An injured Troglodyte draws upon these breeding and clutch relationships to help them. If a male is injured and cannot hunt,

his female clutch-mates and his breeding partners will bring him medicines and plant foods, while his male clutch-mates will provide him with the meat and insects he needs to rebuild his strength; likewise, if a female is injured, she is doctored and fed by her female clutch-mates, while her male clutch-mates and breeding partners bring her food. This is not done in the expectation of payment, or because it is owed, in the traditional sense, but rather from a sense of, "If I were hurt, he/she would do the same for me." Troglodytes who don't feel this way are rare; they are usually abandoned by others in the future, and have fewer breeding opportunities, and, so, have had little enough impact on today's Troglodytes. Troglodytes who are for some reason without same-sex clutch-mates are also not abandoned; they simply draw upon their "extended family"; either the clutch-mates of breeding partners, the breeding partners of opposite-sexed clutch-mates, or the breeding partners of breeding partners (or, in the case of females, others she has laid eggs with). Troglodytes do not frequently help strangers, but are willing to work within the web of relationships that they are comfortable with.

Troglodytes do not have a racial religion, nor is there a widespread belief in deities or elemental power amongst them. The concepts of worship and prayer are not native to Troglodytes, and when they appear, they have been introduced from the outside. This is not to say that Troglodytes have no belief in the supernatural, but they have no talent for it, little experience with it, and do not think in terms of a divine or supernatural explanation as readily as an Elf, Dwarf, or human might.

As Troglodytes grow older, they seldom have many of the problems that other races do with their advancing age. Because of their extremely low technical level, most Troglodytes are, to some degree or another, trained in all of the various Troglodyte skills for their gender, and so age's infirmities simply mean they start to do more of what they are still able to do. An older male Troglodyte, no longer able to keep up with the hunts, may stay to train younger Troglodytes in hunting and fighting, or begin to devote more time to crafting tools that others can use. An older female Troglodyte will move from actively farming and gathering the crops to preparing them, or creating medicines from them. Their lack of healing magic or psionics means that Troglodytes do not age as gracefully as those who have frequent access to it, but Troglodytes view death as an inevitability, and as a returning to the beginning. Burial traditions vary, though most simply bury the departed in the soil of the farming caverns, to go to feed the tribe further. Some take "feeding the tribe" slightly more literally, and consume their dead, with any living clutch-mates sharing in the eating of the brain, the heart, and the liver, while others will place the bodies of the revered dead into the egg-laying caverns, hoping that their good qualities will pass on to the young.

Troglodyte Technology and Warrens

Troglodyte technology is Neolithic; they are "stuck" there, and have been for all of recorded history, and have little inclination, as a people, to go beyond it. In their view, they have little reason to; their "simple" technology gives them a life in which their waking hours are more than 75% leisure, they can live

comfortably with little effort, and it is only the encroachment of other races which causes them difficulties.

The most basic technology of a Troglodyte warren is the Troglodytes themselves. Much of their body is well-suited to their needs; they use claws and raw strength to dig through rock, their speed and reflexes to catch prey, and their teeth as grinders for some of the softer foods. Even their waste serves as fertilizer in the fungus gardens. Troglodytes don't regard their bodies as tools, of course, simply as the most efficient way of getting the job done.

Almost all adult Troglodytes are also capable of manufacturing simple tools from stone or bone. These tools are often simply rocks broken to form a sharp edge, or used as blunt strikers. More advanced tools will use a piece of bone as a handle, and a striking surface lashed in place with sinew, or simply embedded into the bone itself. Rare Troglodytes will find or trade for metal tools that other races prize, but these are not things Troglodytes regularly use, or really know how to take care of; unless it's a highly unusual Troglodyte, the metal tool (often a pick) will be treated like its stone counterpart, and left to rust. See the section on stone tools for more information.

Although it's hardly beyond them, most Troglodytes are not frequent users of fire. There is little available for fuel in their tunnels, and they do not require fire for their daily lives. As a result, some Troglodytes are slightly pyrophobic, but most will have seen it a few times in their life and regard it with due caution.

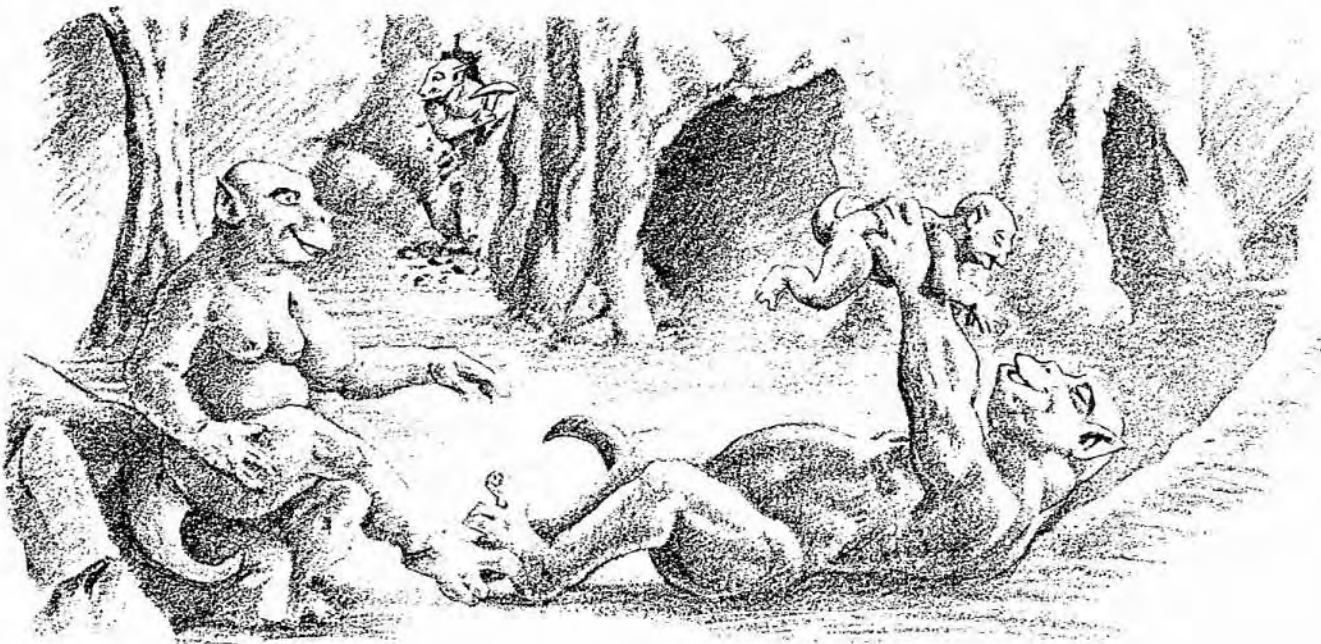
The true pinnacle of Troglodyte technologies are their tunnel galleries. Troglodytes burrow quite naturally; to them, it is not unusual to spend a few days enlarging a tunnel or cavern because it is needed, or because the rock is needed elsewhere. Troglodyte warrens are complicated affairs, twisting in on themselves, often containing vertical shafts (normally no more than 10 feet/3 m) and switchbacks which seem quite natural to them, but are very confusing to an intruder, and almost impossible to traverse if your claws cannot cut through bedrock like cheese and your arms cannot easily lift your body weight. A good rule of thumb is that for every member of the community, there is at

least half a mile of tunnel in a Troglodyte tunnel system; in the smallest villages, this may be as few as ten miles (16 km) of twisting corridors; in the largest, this may be more than four thousand (6400 km).

Unlike Dwarves and Kobolds, Troglodytes do not commonly trap the corridors of their settlements (though an unexpected, unmarked vertical shaft can certainly seem like a trap, as can a sudden low-hanging lip where the local Troglodytes know to go on all fours). This is partially due to the relative crudity of Troglodyte engineering, but also because of their lifestyle; they do not intend to fight others for their tunnels, so inflicting losses upon enemies they don't have isn't a consideration. Thus, invading a Troglodyte warren is almost deceptively easy; if Dwarves or Kobolds want to claim a cave, then Troglodytes are perfectly content to let them, reasoning that there are other caverns that they can go to, and this one seems to be special to the Kobolds for some reason. The Troglodytes may return once whatever mineral wealth which lured the Kobolds or Dwarves has played out, or the cavern may sit empty until another Troglodyte clan (or another subterranean creature) comes to take it.

The difficulty comes if the Troglodytes are unable to escape. While most Troglodyte caverns are constructed to allow several means of escape from any room, not every room will have such escape routes, and it's not always possible to build these escape routes; underground lakes might block escape in one direction, or a magma flow, or a section of extremely dense rock or exceptionally pure metals. It is in these situations, where the Troglodytes become cornered, that the full fury of the usually placid Troglodyte is exhibited.

An enraged Troglodyte undergoes a profound metabolic shift; its fat reserves are quickly made available to it as energy and giving it a shot of endorphins and adrenaline, erasing fatigue and dulling pain. When in a frenzy, the Troglodyte only registers wounds to himself that actually physically impair him; unless a wound breaks a limb or severs a muscle, the Troglodyte will not register that you have hurt him. On the other hand, damage to clutch-mates, breeding partners, and young Troglodytes will only drive them further into a rage. The only thing that will



avert a Troglodyte rage (aside from not placing them in a situation where it might happen) is to threaten, but not cause, harm to other Troglodytes before the frenzy begins. The threat has to be real and immediate; a knife or spear held to a throat will make them think twice; arrows or the threat of magical destruction simply do not seem a great enough threat in the limited experience of most Troglodytes to warrant risking everyone. The result is often that the adults will be killed, and the young will be taken into slavery.

Troglodytes in Slavery

Troglodytes are commonly taken as slaves by Kobolds, and less commonly by Orcs, Goblins, and Trolls. Kobolds are small enough that they can navigate a Troglodyte warren with relative ease, yet strong enough that any two of them is likely to be a match for even a strong Troglodyte. Additionally, they make exceptional slave chains of forged iron, which even a Troglodyte's strength cannot shatter. Humans, especially from the Western Empire, will also take Troglodyte slaves, though they are more likely to steal eggs and kidnap young through magic, rather than use brute force to capture adults, due to the difficulty of staging a subterranean raid.

Troglodyte slaves are something of a rarity on the open market. A healthy adult will often fetch about as much as a good horse; about 1500 gold is an average price, though bidding can drive that up two or three times higher. Youths (any Troglodyte up to about ten years of age) will usually fetch 500 gold, but higher prices aren't unreasonable at auction. The young are seen as being easier to train, but taking a few years to see a real return on the investment. The truly decadent will spend 100 gold for an undamaged egg, either hoping to raise the hatchling within as their own personal guardian, or to deliver it to their cook.

The majority of Troglodytes who are purchased as adults are destined to be mine slaves. Careful direction, usually from a Kobold or Dwarven overseer, will see a Troglodyte work crew working at three times the rate of a Dwarven crew, and five times a human crew, with less chance that valuables or equipment will go missing, less stringent requirements for food, and a smaller chance of uprising. With the savings, many will hire an Earth Warlock to ensure that the work goes even faster. In Kobold communities, Troglodytes are more likely to work amongst the Kobolds, working at the forefront of the mining operation, moving mining carts, and doing most of the difficult work while the Kobolds themselves make sure that none of them slacks off or causes trouble.

Youths are sometimes trained as gladiators, sappers, or personal guards for rich individuals. As gladiators, they're an exotic touch; beast-men who fight unarmed against more conventional opponents, often early in the day, when the shadows will let a Troglodyte see further, and let its pale hide stand out more clearly on the arena floor. Few Troglodyte gladiators last long in the arena; armorers don't adapt well to their shape, meaning protection is often haphazard, but their ferocity means that, for all of their brevity, their fires of fame burn brightly. As sappers, Troglodyte slave-soldiers attack fortifications from beneath, digging their crude-yet-rapid tunnels near the walls, opening them to easy attack, or even opening tunnels inside the

walls to allow soldiers to invade. In this case, the Troglodytes will be under careful control; they will almost always be chained, and often be under magical or psychic coercion (and, when possible, threats to other Troglodytes will be used to enforce good behavior).

Troglodytes who are used as personal guards are ruthlessly conditioned for years; often, only those who were taken very young (less than two years old) will be used in this capacity. Soon after they are taken, they will begin to be bombarded with hypnotic suggestions of loyalty to the family to which they belong; several times a day, for years, they will be reminded of how much they owe to the family, and that they owe it, in return, absolute loyalty. This creates a psychotic, obsessive loyalty within the Troglodyte, who is, at the same time, often trained in the martial arts and the ways of defending his charges from harm, and in his other duties in the house. These Troglodytes are the equivalent of Warrior Monks or Assassins, and are almost invariably Aberrant.

An Explanation of Digging Speed

Troglodytes have a truly phenomenal digging ability compared to other subterranean races. The average Troglodyte has a digging speed of 12, which is three times the average digging speed of a Dwarf. However, what does digging speed actually mean?

First of all, the listed digging speed assumes that the character has access to the proper tools. Proper tools for Troglodytes are hands and claws. Their claws are harder than steel (though not very sharp or long, making them useless for parrying). Proper tools for most other races include hammers, picks and shovels. Each point of digging speed refers to cubic feet per unit of time. For dirt (hard or soft; the difficulty of hard earth is offset by the lesser need to support it), it is cubic feet per minute. Soft stone (sandstone, etc.) is traversed in cubic feet per 5 minutes, and hard stone is cubic feet per 15 minutes. This can be continued at full speed for the P.E. attribute number, in minutes, per every 40 minutes (so a P.E. of 40 allows you to dig non-stop; a P.E. of 30 requires 10 minutes of rest every 40 minutes). At quarter speed, they can dig for their P.E. attribute number in *hours* before needing rest.

Any tunnels built with this method are very fragile. Every ten minutes, or for every five individuals who pass through, there should be a test of the creator's Underground Architecture skill, with a -5% for every such check that has been made for that tunnel before, with failure indicating that a section of tunnel will collapse. Slowing down to half the normal speed, on top of any slowdown in order to work longer, and making a concentrated effort to reinforce the tunnel (using rock, wooden timbers, bones, or anything else to support the roof, and taking special care about where and how they dig), will make tunnels sturdier; with a successful Underground Architecture check, the tunnel can last more or less indefinitely.

Of course, multiple diggers can combine efforts, or a few faster diggers can create the tunnel, while others follow behind, reinforcing the tunnels they make. That is the way that most tunneling races will usually operate, with the fastest or steadiest diggers leading, while better architects will follow. With at least three workers on a single tunnel, the team can proceed at full speed, but still construct a solid tunnel.

Stone Technology

Troglodytes are, as noted above, limited users of what most of the world considers “technology,” using only basic stone tools and no animal husbandry. However, they do find uses for stone tools of various types. Almost all adult Troglodytes know how to make these tools, which supplement their own abilities.

Stone Tool Making (Technical, Wilderness): The craft of making simple tools from wood, bone, sinew, several varieties of stone, and other natural materials. The simplest tools, such as choppers, knives, and hand axes, can be completed in as little as 15 minutes, while more complex tools, such as a stone axe or a knife with a handle, might require several days, and other tools may need to be created to finish the work. Stone tools are wonderfully sharp, but they’re very heavy and brittle, compared to their steel counterparts.

Base Skill: 25% +4% per level. Add +4% to this skill if the Sculpting skill is known, and add +3% to the Sculpting skill.

Sample Stone Tools:

- **Knife, Simple:** This is little more than a sharp cutting edge with a blunt end and back, allowing for substantial fine control. They make very poor weapons, however, because they lack a handle (they are -2 to strike). These tools take only a few minutes to create, provided the materials are readily available. Simple knives do 1D4 damage, but have a -2 penalty to strike (-4 total) against any A.R. higher than 6.
- **Knife, Complex:** This is a two-edged blade with a blunt end, and two projections at that end. The blunt end is attached to a wooden or bone handle with wet sinew. The sinew will shrink as it dries, tightly binding the blade to the handle. These can be used as a weapon (1D6 damage), but they fare poorly against armor; they are -2 to strike any A.R. higher than 12. Complex knives take only an hour to construct, but usually require several days to complete, as the sinews must dry before the knife can be used.
- **Hand Axe:** A hand axe is a teardrop-shaped piece of stone, with a blunt wide end and two sharpened edges. This is the most common and versatile tool that is commonly made by Troglodytes; it can be used to cut like a knife, chop like an adze, or scrape meat from a bone or exoskeleton. These can be made in only 15 minutes, though most Troglodytes will spend 30 minutes to an hour on a tool they intend to use in a serious fashion. These tools can be used as weapons, inflicting 1D6+1 damage, but with a -2 to strike any A.R. higher than 12.
- **Stone Axe:** A stone axe is not common for Troglodytes; it is more a weapon than a tool, and one that is not very convenient for hunting. It is created much like a complex knife, but using a club (often a long bone of a tunnel creature) as the handle, and a hand axe as the blade, tied together with shrunken sinew. The weight and sharpness of the stone blade make it the most damaging weapon a “wild” Troglodyte is likely to carry, but they are still very limited; they suffer a -1 against any A.R. higher than 12, and inflict 2D6 damage.
- **Stone Spear:** When possible, Troglodytes far prefer stone spears to stone axes; their additional reach means that the

wielder is less likely to be injured, and while they are less damaging, they are very effective. However, Troglodytes seldom have the materials to make them; their world is not rich in long, straight pieces of wood or bone suitable for use as a spear handle. Stone spears inflict 2D4 damage, and suffer a -1 to strike any A.R. higher than 12.

Troglodyte “Herbology”

Troglodytes have very little in the way of true herbs in their pharmacopoeia. However, they do have a variety of lichen, fungi, and molds which they use in their medicine. Because of this, Troglodytes have a slightly different version of the Holistic Medicine skill; they are at -20% to treat problems when they must make due with surface plants. Spending an additional skill on Holistic Medicine means that the Troglodyte is familiar with both surface and subterranean medicines, and does not have this penalty.

Troglodyte herblore varies between colonies; in different parts of the Palladium Underworld, certain fungi are not available, and in others, the local Troglodytes have not yet harnessed plants which are common cures elsewhere. While Troglodytes are capable of reproducing most of the effects of surface medicine, there are also a wide variety of special preparations which give Troglodyte herbalists a variety of options in treating disease and injury. Below are some of the special options available to Troglodyte herbalists (those with Holistic Medicine) who have access to fresh lichen and fungi from the Underworld.

Healing Salve: This paste is made from chewed lichen and Troglodyte saliva. When applied directly to a wound, it mimics the effects of the Increased Healing power so long as it is kept fresh and moist with Troglodyte saliva. In the Underworld, where Troglodytes live, this means that a single preparation will last for about a day. In moderate weather (autumn, spring, or a northern summer), it will last for about six hours. In the heat of a Baalgor summer, it will last less than half an hour. Once the paste goes bad, a new paste must be made (with a new roll of Holistic Medicine). In the Underworld outside of Troglodyte warrens, the necessary lichen is very rare (-12% to find it); within Troglodyte warrens, it is more common (no penalty).

Sleeping Potion: A fairly common potion, this is made from a mold which has been dissolved in water; it takes about a pint of water to make a single dose. The taste of the potion is horrid, but it will induce a deep, natural sleep in any who fail a save vs nonlethal poison (16 or better). Each dose is good for about an hour’s worth of sleep, but those who were tired are likely to continue sleeping after their nap. Multiple doses can cause problems; more than three doses in a day will cause vomiting and nausea, as the effect of the Minor Curse spell, for about 15 minutes, until all of the drug has been purged from the system. However, feeding multiple doses to a resisting person is very difficult, as you have to feed them 3 pints in a relatively short period of time. Troglodyte herbalists are at +3% to create this potion.

Antitoxin: Troglodyte antitoxins are very difficult to create, but very potent. By combining Troglodyte blood, water that has flowed through iron deposits, and the juice from several different Underworld fungi, a few ounces of antitoxin can be created. Half a cup of antitoxin taken within ten minutes of ingesting

poison will completely neutralize it and heal 1D6 points of damage caused by the poison. If poured onto a wound where poison was injected, it allows the recipient to make a second save vs poison with a +2 bonus to negate any further effect of the poison, but it must be applied in less than one minute (four melees) to have full effect; otherwise, it simply halves the effects. Holistic Medicine is at -10% to make Troglodyte antitoxin.

Oort-Juice: This drug is very rare, even more so than antitoxin, because it requires fire and fairly complex methods to create. First, large, green and yellow fungus called Oort is crushed, squeezing the juice out, then strained to remove the pulp. The juice is then slowly boiled to remove most of the water, until the entire concoction has the consistency of thin oatmeal. This is then let to sit for a few hours, before several drops of fresh Oort juice is added and mixed thoroughly. The completed potion will give the effects of the psychic power Summon Inner Strength for about fifteen minutes per dose. It must be used in moderation, however, as more than one continuous hour under Oort-juice, or two hours total in a 24 hour period, will cause wracking pains (same as Bio-Manipulation: Pain) for a full minute per dose, followed by complete paralysis for three times the amount of time spent on Oort-juice in the last day! These penalties are halved with a successful save vs poison (14 or better), but Oort-juice is also addictive. With each dose taken, the character must pass a saving throw vs poison (12 or better) to avoid addiction; furthermore, for every dose the character has taken in the past thirty days, they are at -1 to save! Fortunately (?) for Oort-addicts, Oort-juice is very difficult to make (-20% to Holistic Medicine; -40% for Brewing), and Troglodyte herbalists seldom make very much at once, especially since more than a pound (5-10 large fungi) of Oort fungus is required for each dose, and making the juice means that no more Oort fungi will spore from the consumed plants.

Optional R.C.C.s

Troglodyte Male R.C.C.

The Troglodyte Male R.C.C. represents the average male Troglodyte, raised in the traditional fashion. They are hunters and tool-builders, with little experience with the outside world.

Alignment: Any, but are usually good or Unprincipled, like most Troglodytes.

Attribute Requirements: None.

Special Bonus: +10% to Underground Tunneling, Underground Architecture, and Underground Sense of Direction (but no bonus to determine the location of surface structures).

R.C.C. Skills:

Language: Gobblely (98%)

Stone Tool Making (+15%)

Climb/Scale Walls (+10%)

Prowl (+10%)

Skin and Prepare Animal Hides (+5%)

Wilderness Survival (+10%)

W.P.: One of Choice from R.C.C. Related Skill list.

Hand to Hand: Basic (can be upgraded to Hand to Hand: Expert for two R.C.C. Related Skills, or Martial Arts for four).

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

Communications: Sign Language only.

Domestic: Fishing only (+10%).

Espionage: Detect Ambush, Detect Concealment & Traps, and Track Humanoids only (+5% to each).

Horsemanship: None.

Medical: First Aid or Holistic Medicine only.

Military: Camouflage only.

Physical: Athletics, Body Building, Forced March (useful for digging), Running, Swimming, and Wrestling only (+10% to Swimming).

Rogue: Use/Recognize Poison only.

Science: Mathematics: Basic only.

Technical: Language, Lore: Demons and Monsters, Lore: Faeries, Masonry, and Sculpting only (+5% to all except Languages).

W.P.: Battle Axe, Blunt, Knife, Spear and Throwing Weapons only.

Wilderness: Dowsing, Identify Plants and Fruits, Land Navigation, Preserve Food, and Track and Trap Animals only (+5%).

Secondary Skills: The character may also select four Secondary Skills from the previous list at level one, and two additional skills at levels two, five and ten. All of the usual restrictions upon Secondary Skills apply.

Starting Equipment: Three stone tools of choice, 1D4+1 days of preserved food.

Armor: None.

Weapons: A stone weapon to match the W.P. selected for the R.C.C. Skill.

Money: None.

Experience: Uses the Vagabond/Peasant experience table.

Troglodyte Female R.C.C.

The Troglodyte Female R.C.C. represents the average female Troglodyte, raised in the traditional fashion. They are gatherers, with some learning holistic medicine and more esoteric skills.

Alignment: Any, but are usually good or Unprincipled, like most Troglodytes.

Attribute Requirements: None.

Special Bonus: +10% to Underground Tunneling, Underground Architecture, and Underground Sense of Direction (but no bonus to determine the location of surface structures).

R.C.C. Skills:

Language: Gobblely (98%)

Stone Tool Making (+15%)

Climb/Scale Walls (+10%)

Preserve Food (+10%)

Cook (+5%)

Identify Plants/Fruits (+10%)

W.P. Knife

Hand to Hand: Basic (can be upgraded to Expert at the cost of four R.C.C. Related Skills).

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

Communications: Sign Language only.

Domestic: Fishing only.

Espionage: None.

Horsemanship: None.

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

Military: None.

Physical: Athletics, Body Building, Forced March (useful for digging), Prowl, Running, Swimming, and Wrestling only (+10% to Swimming).

Rogue: Use/Recognize Poison only.

Science: Mathematics: Basic only.

Technical: Language, Lore: Demons and Monsters, Lore: Faeries, Masonry, and Sculpting only (+5% to all but Languages).

W.P.: Battle Axe, Blunt, Spear and Throwing Weapons only.

Wilderness: Dowsing, Land Navigation, Skin and Prepare Animal Hides and Wilderness Survival only (+5%).

Secondary Skills: The character may also select four Secondary Skills from the previous list at level one, and two additional skills at levels two, five and ten. All of the usual restrictions upon Secondary Skills apply.

Starting Equipment: Three stone tools of choice, 1D4+1 days of preserved food.

Armor: None.

Weapons: A complex stone knife.

Money: None.

Experience: Uses the Vagabond/Peasant experience table.

The Star of Horus

A short story by Aaron Corley with Allen Gardner

Part One Prologue

Ender Smith pulled his cloak farther over his head and turned off the road onto the little path leading to Mathias Whitehand's estate. He had been told by the wizard's nephew that Whitehand routinely traveled from his home in Smia to other dimensions outside the Palladium world.

The wizard's tower stood several stories taller than the surrounding trees and, as he approached, Ender could see the estate hiding behind them. Quietly, he mounted the front porch and tapped the knocker against the polished wood. A moment later, an elderly human servant answered the door.

"Master Whitehand," Ender stated. His command of the Eastern language left much to be desired, but he had memorized this phrase in anticipation that the wizard would be able to understand him anyway.

The servant said something, but when Ender made no reply, motioned for the traveler to enter. He stepped into the anteroom and followed the man to a parlor. The servant said something else, presumably offering Ender a seat, which he took. The room housed numerous books, more than he had seen in this world, as well as several inviting chairs and a fireplace.

A tall Elf entered the room from an entrance Ender had noticed before. He spoke a few words the traveler did not understand. Seeing this, the wizard waved his hand in the air and greeted him again, this time in words which sounded to him like Ender's native English. "Welcome to my home. My name is Master Mathias. I hear you have news for me." The wizard ex-

uded a calm, friendly manner and Ender could sense he possessed great knowledge and power.

"Yes," Ender began, "I am an acquaintance of your nephew. We parted ways a few weeks ago, but he had told me you were looking for a bodyguard during your next excursion."

Mathias smiled slightly. "My nephew told me about you as well. You are a transdimensional traveler?" He stood nearly six feet tall, though slight of build. His skin was pale, probably from too much time spent indoors, and his manner educated and confident. His voice invited discussion as well.

"I have visited several worlds," Ender said. "I left the one previous to this by choice, but did not know that the portal would bring me here."

"I see." Whitehand moved closer, narrowing the gap between them. Ender noticed the gleam in his gray eyes. "Might I ask where you are from?"

Ender removed his hood, revealing his feline head and face. Pale fur covered his features. He had blue eyes and large ears that would have reminded those from his home world of a creature called a Siamese cat. Although he had never seen one in this world, the Elven wizard seemed unaffected by his unusual features. "My home is called Earth, although not everyone there looks like I do. The rest are humans."

"I see. And my nephew told you about me?"

"That is why I came. What kind of work do you have in mind?"

Whitehand moved to the bookshelf and drew a thick leather volume resting at eye level. He thumbed through it for a moment and then showed Ender a picture of a medallion shaped like a seven-pointed star. It appeared to be a beautiful piece of work, with a blue sapphire eye embedded in the center and ornate carving on each of the star's arms. Strange characters that



08 2006

BRIAN MARINE

Ender could not decipher covered the other page. “This is the Star of Horus. It is an ancient work of Dwarven jewelry that has been lost for many thousands of years. I mean to find it. I would like to take a companion with me suitable to the precarious task of retrieving it.”

“Obviously, this medallion is not in this world,” Ender ventured.

“Yes. I have located the right dimension, but not the Star’s exact location. Cerulea, it is called. I don’t know if you have heard of it before. It is a wild and dangerous world. You have resources that will assist me greatly. I promise half of all other treasure we find, plus a portal here —”

“What resources of mine do you refer to?” Ender asked, suddenly suspicious.

“Your magic sword for one, Sir.” Mathias’ tone remained friendly, open. Ender had said nothing about the weapon, but obviously the wizard had sensed its power. “My nephew also tells me you have been practicing unarmed combat arts at his parents’ ranch. Such things are virtually unknown here in our world.”

“Yes, I have noticed.”

“I would like to leave as soon as possible. I don’t mean to rush you, but there is much I have to do before I can leave. If you decline my offer, I will need to find another companion.”

“What kind of compensation are you offering?”

“Four thousand up front and again when we return.”

Ender pondered this a moment, “I am ready today, if you want to leave that soon.”

“So soon? You travel light. If you care to stay for dinner, I will have my servants arrange an extra setting. I will also have them prepare a room for you for the night.”

“Sounds good. Thank you.”

“Absolutely,” Mathias said. “Before I have my butler set the table, may I ask your name?”

“Ender Smith.”

The Monastery

The next morning, after a good night’s sleep and a warm breakfast, Mathias met Ender in the foyer, motioning him to follow. He led the feline warrior down into the basement, through a locked, iron-strapped door with a small workshop behind it. A table took up the center of the room and bottle-filled shelves lined the walls. Without saying anything, the wizard handed Ender a backpack containing a few loaves of bread, dried fruit and water. He threw a similar bag over his shoulder.

He handed Ender a ring. “Wear this. It will help you understand any foreign languages you hear. It might come in handy, too, if we ever get separated.”

Ender thanked him and slid the ring onto one of his fingers.

Going through another door, Mathias stopped in a bare stone room with only a large circle painted on the floor. “This is the

portal room," he stated. "Once I have the spell components in place, a dimensional door will appear. Wait here."

Mathias set his things down and returned to the workshop. Before long, the wizard returned with a small clay jar in his hands. He poured some of its contents — plain-old dirt, by the look of it — at the head of the circle and then knelt in the center. After a minute of chanting, Ender felt a breeze in the room. Suddenly, a human-sized, circular field of energy appeared. He recognized it instantly as a dimensional portal.

Standing, the wizard gathered up his backpack and a staff. "Ready?"

Stepping through the portal, Ender felt the familiar pull of being in two places at once. After a moment of intense light, he found himself in a darkened room. On his left were six large barrels stacked in two rows of three. On his right were shelves stocked with bags, bottles and wooden boxes. The room measured ten feet wide and fifteen feet long. Ahead of him, he saw a door, though no light crawled from under it.

"Still in one piece?" the Elf asked.

After Ender's positive nod, he led them to the door. Mathias pushed it open, revealing another darkened room, this time a medieval kitchen. Coals in one of the ovens illuminated part of the room, casting eerie orange shadows on cupboards, shelves, pots and pans.

Ender saw an inert child-sized body slumped against the door, ten feet past the oven.

The wizard tapped the body on the shoulder to wake it and, instead, it slumped forward. Taken aback, he and Ender were shocked to find an adult Kobold male with a stab wound in his gut. In the ember light, Ender thought its usually grey skin looked even more morbid than normal for his species. Its black-colored eyes stared lifelessly up at him. The Kobold wore a dark robe of coarse fabric with a softer, lighter tunic underneath. He had no visible armor, but a sword lay on the floor below its dangling right hand.

Mathias checked for a pulse at the left wrist and shook his head negatively. "This is not the welcoming committee I expected. Something has gone dreadfully wrong here."

Ender could hear clanging and shouting outside the room. He found the wooden door leading out of the kitchen bolted with a chair propped against it, as if the Kobold fled here from an attacker, then died moments later.

"This door opens into a corridor. There is a large meeting hall on the right. That is where I met Shaolin, my contact in this world. I have never been to any other rooms, but this monastery seemed quite extensive last time I was here," Mathias stated.

Mathias opened the door. Both he and Ender looked out into the darkened hallway. Like the kitchen, its ceiling catered to beings less than six feet tall. The meeting hall was only ten feet away, on the other side of some double doors. One of them stood open, allowing light from a fire and the sound of armed combat to fill the hallway.

The corridor also continued to the right. Sconces placed every six feet on the walls contained unlit torches. Ender saw another door twenty feet down on the same side as the kitchen. Afterwards, there were two doors on the opposite side ten feet apart from each other. The hallway continued a total of forty feet to the left before terminating in a pair of stairways, one going up and the other going down.

"Sorry about the low clearance. The ceiling in the meeting hall will be more to our liking," the Elf whispered. "From here, I suggest we continue invisibly — if you don't mind, of course."

"Invisibility is our friend," Ender commented.

"Mind that it will only last until one of us attacks." Mathias closed his eyes, his lips moving slightly. A moment later, he opened them. "Let's go," he declared. He led Ender along the opposite side of the hallway down to the door. He approached in such a way that anyone inside was unlikely to see them.

Judging by the noise, Ender guessed there were a couple dozen combatants, armed with swords, attacking one another. He smelled something burning, but there was not enough smoke to obscure vision or cause the fight to move out of the hall. Suddenly, however, they heard a shout. Something came crashing down inside, blocking out all the other noise momentarily. As Ender and the wizard reached the door, the din resumed with the conspicuous lack of metal-on-metal clanging.

The wizard gripped his staff tightly, "Ready when you are." Using its tip, he pushed the door wide open while Ender drew his magic sword, *Ender's Light*. He had discovered the weapon years before in an abandoned temple. He and three friends, Jammer Permillon, Ted Smythe and Ken Jones, had somehow been misdirected through a dimensional portal that took them to a jungle world overrun by froglike humanoids with a predisposition for violence and hatred. Since then, the telepathic sword had saved his life many times. They became fast friends, and the sword now called itself after Ender.

Peering through the door, Ender saw a solitary Kobold only three feet in front of the door struggling vainly to stand up. It was dressed identically to the one they found dead in the kitchen, but appeared unarmed.

Behind that Kobold, Ender saw a large meeting hall shrouded in smoke, like a small cathedral nave, but without pews. In the center, six Kobolds in robes stumbled toward the opposite wall while two more in armor and carrying swords chased after them across the top of a large table in the center of the room.

Meanwhile, on Ender's left, four more Kobolds fought on and around another table. They carried swords, axes and clubs; two dressed in robes, two dressed in armor. A pair of dead Kobolds lay at their feet, one with a spear still protruding from his chest.

The right side of the hall used to be dominated by a large fireplace, which now lay scattered in pieces across the floor. Tables, chairs — including a large wooden throne too heavy for a lone Kobold to have thrown — and scattered Kobold bodies burned brightly, flames obscuring anything else on that side of the room.

Ender counted three more bodies lying about, as well as scattered weapons, chairs and bits of wood. Two tables had already been tipped over to be used as cover. A body dressed in black hung over one of them.

"Which group of Kobolds do you recognize?" he whispered, "robes or armor?"

"The robed monks are the order of Shaolin. They run this monastery," his companion said. "I do not recognize the others."

Ender's blade caught the closest armored Kobold in the room between the plates in his chest, leaving a long gash. The other Kobolds turned. Apparently, Ender's action removed the veil of

invisibility shrouding them from the eyes of the attacking Kobolds, because one now stepped over his wounded comrade and swung with his mace. The blow glanced off *Ender's Light*. Ender sliced back, but the Kobold parried. His attacker landed a blow on Ender's thigh while the wounded Kobold yelled for help. Two of his fellows saw Ender and ran to their aid.

Ender placed himself between the monks and their attackers. He had just taken out another Kobold, when a sudden explosion rocked the room. Bits of wood flew all over and knocked him to his knees. As he picked himself up, Ender saw more of the invaders pour into the room.

"Quickly," one of the monks yelled. "We must get to the boats." He and his companion waved for Ender and Mathias to follow as they charged toward the exit near the shattered fireplace.

Crossbow bolts sprayed across the room. One struck Mathias in the thigh. He paused to pull the bolt free and limped after the Kobolds, not waiting for Ender. "I had not anticipated this," he yelled over his shoulder. "It is a good thing I brought you along."

Another bolt suddenly tore into Ender's shoulder. He turned to see the mercenaries racing to intercept them before they could leave.

The first mercenary fired his crossbow past Ender into the boats. Ender moved in front of him, cutting one of his arms off with the first swipe of his sword and taking him down with the second.

A second mercenary hurled a spear past Ender that took down one of the fleeing monks. Ender could not tell if he lived or not. Instead, his attention focused on the melee ahead. Two of the mercenaries drew in on Ender. The first lunged at him with his short sword, but Ender parried. The second got in a good swipe with his club, hammering Ender's thigh. By this time, the spear-thrower had also drawn his sword.

The remaining two mercenaries charged past him for the boats. Ender heard the sounds of combat behind him, but first had to deal with the four Kobolds who had surrounded him. He hacked into the mercenary with the club. Blood and gore spilled out of his armor. The short humanoid clutched his chest, dropped his weapon and doubled over.

Ender parried the other three mercenaries easily, then sent another sprawling. One of his opponents scored a wicked cut across Ender's sword arm, causing him to drop *Ender's Light*, while the others' attacks fell harmlessly aside.

Unarmed, Ender fended off only one of the mercenaries' next attacks. He took a sword thrust to the thigh, then punched that assailant away. Reaching down to reclaim his magic sword, he cut down one of the mercenaries in a single fluid motion, leaving only one of the Kobolds to contend with.

"Ender, hurry!" He heard the wizard yell from the boats as another squad of mercenaries poured into the warehouse via the same door. He realized if he did not move soon, he could be stuck covering their escape long after Mathias and the monks had left.

Ender ran towards the boats, leaving the mercenary to follow. He reached the large doorway when an explosion suddenly rocked the ground. Two of the attacking Kobolds had crossbows and some sort of explosive tipped arrows. Before he could react

to them, however, a second bolt exploded against Ender's chest. The impact threw him out onto the docks.

Shaking the concussion from his head, he opened his eyes and looked over the pier. His heart nearly stopped — there was *no* water. The monastery apparently rested on an 'island' suspended in the air. He turned toward the midday sun and saw several more masses of rock suspended at various elevations, each several miles away — islands, just like this one.

Without warning, another explosion rocked the pier, lifting Ender's body up into the air and clear of the wooden slats. A moment later, gravity took hold. He watched helplessly as the docks and boats appeared to rise into the air away from him and miles of rock flew past.

Dolgram

Aching horribly, Ender awoke face down in some cold, wet sand. He raised a hand to his forehead, hoping to rub out some of the pain. His body shivered with cold and his fur felt soaked through. Long shadows stretched all around him.

Slowly, the feeling returned to his limbs — though he regretted it as soon as it happened. Pain stiffened his entire body. Water lapping at his feet made him start, but his body hurt far too much to move quickly. Giving in, he slumped back into the sand, exhausted. He closed his eyes again, wishing away the pain.

When Ender opened his eyes again, he saw a short humanoid crouched beside him. The stranger carried a staff and appeared to be a Kobold, though the bright light kept his eyes from making out any details.

Ender rolled over onto his back and sat up, cringing as his muscles resisted the movement. He pulled his feet out of the water and looked at the lake in front of him. Brushing some of the sand off, he realized he must have fallen into this lake and then, somehow, swam ashore. He remembered none of it, however. Looking around, he felt glad he struck the water and not any of the coniferous trees that grew right up to its edge or any large rocks that lay hidden under the gentle waves.

The Kobold wore a robe that covered his head and body. He did not seem the least bit surprised to see Ender, though the feline martial artist had no idea how long the Kobold had been standing over him. "Well, at least you are not dead," he said.

Dead?

"Well, obviously you don't live in the lake, so you must have fallen from one of the islands. If you had landed in the trees you'd be a cat-kabob," the Kobold continued. He put out a hand to help Ender up. "I am called Dolgram."

"Hello, Dolgram. Are there more people about?" Ender asked weakly.

"Oh, I hope not. What are you called?"

"My name is Ender. Why are you here in this place?"

"I live here. What are you doing here?"

"I wish I knew. The last thing I remember was falling, and then I woke up here. Is there a way back up to the islands in the sky?"

Ender tried to stand, then realized his right leg refused to work properly. Luckily, the Kobold steadied him. "Careful! We

can worry about that later. Let's get you home and see what we can do about your leg. You must have broken it in your fall."

They took a few steps together, but the intense pain shot through every nerve in his body. "Easy now. Let's take it nice and slow," the Kobold coaxed, helping Ender along. "Luckily, I don't live too far away."

Dolgram led Ender away from the water and into the forest. After about a hundred and fifty feet, they arrived at a dark opening in a hillside. Taking a few steps down, Ender found a small room with a bed, makeshift stove and other improvised amenities. An owl hooted at them as soon as they entered, then flew past them to get out. Ender noticed a few other small animals scurrying about too.

The Kobold, who seemed not to notice all the critters, sat Ender down in a chair next to the bed. Kneeling at his side, Dolgram examined his guest's hip, assessing the damage. He fingered through the fur on Ender's arms and chest, too, before saying, "I have some herbs that will ease the pain and speed up the healing, but I think you will need rest more than anything. Your hip is broken, so you should stay off it a while."

He kindled a fire and prepared a few herbs in a pot. "What brings you to Cerulea?" he asked.

"I have come with a man named Mathias Whitehand. We are in search of a medallion — it looks like a seven-pointed star with an eye in the middle. Unfortunately, we walked into a battle up on one of the islands above, and I eventually ended up here."

"Don't know any Mathias Whitehands, nor any seven-pointed stars," Dolgram said. He poured some leaves into an earthen cup, then waited for the water to boil. He thought a moment before asking, "When you say 'man', do you mean 'human'?"

"No, I meant an Elf. Is that a problem?"

"No, no. Not at all. Where did you say you came from again?"

"A little place called Earth. Are you the only one around here?"

"Yes. Less noise that way."

A moment later, Dolgram took the pot off the fire. He filled an earthen mug and sniffed the steam. "Here, this should stop any pain and accelerate the healing process. When you finish it, get some sleep. Be careful. It is hot." He handed the mug to Ender, who emptied it slowly. The tea inside tasted of chicory with a hint of something spicy, though he could not determine its source. Almost instantly, his eyes began to droop and he lay down on the bed.

Dolgram said something else, but Ender could not make it out as he gave in to the sudden drowsiness.

Lost Sword

When he opened his eyes again, Ender heard birds chirping outside. It felt much warmer and sunlight trailed in through the doorway on the opposite side of the room. He did not see anyone else in the room, but it hurt his neck to look around, too.

Tangled in the coarse blanket and stumbling to get up, he checked his wounds and then looked around for his belongings. To his trepidation, he found that everything was present — ei-

ther in his pockets, on his body or on the floor beside the bed — except for his magic sword, *Ender's Light*.

Deciding to look around outside, Ender hobbled over to the door and ducked through it. Every joint in his body ached, but at least the cuts had closed and begun to heal. Last night, he felt like a semi-tractor had run over him; today, it could have been just a pickup truck.

Coniferous trees surrounded the opening and he noticed ferns and similar ground cover all around. Sunlight filtered through the branches, casting shadows, but letting through enough light for him to make out the lakeshore about fifty feet away. A path led away from the opening, disappearing into the overgrowth.

Dolgram obviously chose this location for its concealment and closeness to the water, he thought, recalling the Kobold's comments hours before. He's probably out there somewhere.

A pair of squirrels chattered away on a tree branch near the door. When Ender looked at them, however, they scattered, dropping some nuts and rustling the branches. Otherwise, only a calm breeze disturbed the silence.

Ender stopped along a path at a point where he could still see both the doorway behind and the water ahead. The lake held a blue-gray color with gentle waves rolling over the light colored sand. He could now hear surf break. Far in the distance, he noticed a pair of suspended islands overlooking the water. There was no sign of Dolgram.

He moved forward a few feet to get a better look at the islands. They reminded him of pictures he had seen back on Earth of asteroids, huge chunks of rock suspended in the air. He thought he could make out a tower or two jutting up from the closest. Otherwise, the details got washed out by the distance against the gray and brown stone and the green of the forests.

With a low groan of exhaustion, he walked back into the hut to rest.

Unfortunately, rest did not come easily. After a few minutes of trying to fall asleep without any success, Ender went back outside to look around again. This time, he circled the hut, going as far as he could without losing sight of it through the foliage. The air felt warmer with a little bit of humidity on the breeze.

Ender walked around for several minutes and then decided his muscles still ached too much to wander all over the island. As he turned around to go back to the hut, he heard someone coming through the undergrowth. A moment later, Dolgram appeared, seemingly materializing out of the plants. In his hands he carried a staff and a sack that looked to be full of pine cones.

"Ho! Feeling better?" he asked.

"I am feeling a little bit better. After I rest a bit, can you show me where you found me? I would like to see where I landed."

"Sure. Let me put these things in the house first." Dolgram spent a moment putting his load away before coming back outside. They walked through the forest out to the beach, then down the water's edge several hundred feet. Their footprints were still visible above the water's reach, but the imprint of where Ender would have lain had washed away.

His sword was not there.

"It was about here that I found you," Dolgram reported. "You must have fallen in the water, though, and washed ashore later."

From where they stood, Ender saw the immensity of the lake — a couple square miles at least. The sun, almost directly overhead, shined too brightly to make out any of the other islands directly above them, but he saw several others scattered about the horizon. The closest one still looked miles away.

“You must have fallen pretty far. Only island that crosses above this one is miles up there,” Dolgram explained, shielding his eyes as he looked upward. “Besides, you’re lucky the lake monster didn’t get you.”

“Lake monster? What lake monster?”

“There’s a monster that lives in the lake. Vicious creature. Be thankful it didn’t eat you.”

“Are there any villages or towns nearby?”

“No one. Just you and me.”

“Do you travel to the other islands?”

“No. I came to this island to be alone. Although, once in a while, I trade local fruit with a merchant who brings me supplies,” Dolgram confessed.

“The merchant comes here? How? When is he scheduled next?” Ender asked.

“He sails in from another island,” the Kobold motioned toward the trees beyond his hut. “He won’t be back for another — let’s see — forty-six hours, I would guess.” The Kobold looked up at the sun as if telling time.

“Does he travel alone?”

“No. There are usually four or five others with him.”

“I think I may have to approach them about leaving when they visit. First, I need to rest up and heal until they arrive. Is there anything I can do to help you while I am here to heal faster?”

“I have a few remedies we can try. Would you want some more tea?”

“Yes, that would be nice. Also, I have lost an item that is very important to me. It is a sword. I need to search the island for it.”

“Sure. I can help if you like.”

They returned to the Kobold’s hut for the tea. After a quick lunch of fruit and flat bread, they set out to search the island. Dolgram explained that it would take several days to thoroughly search the island, but Ender felt confident they would find his sword soon because he and the sword were telepathically linked. Once they were within a certain range, Ender should be able to hear the sword mentally ‘calling’ for him.

“So,” Dolgram asked, pointing in opposite directions with each arm. “Do you want to search this way or that way?”

The lake occupied the bulk of the island and was wide enough that Ender could barely see the far shore. Trees lined the beach on both sides. The right side remained fairly flat and evenly forested and a large outcropping of rock stuck out into the water about a quarter mile from where they stood. The forest presumably continued on behind it.

“Behind the hut is mostly forest. I doubt your sword is there,” the Kobold said.

“Let’s head to the outcropping. We should get a better view there.”

They reached the promontory a little before noon. Ender estimated its height at forty-five feet. Even with its relatively short

height, it still took him a few minutes to climb to the top. From the summit, he could see most of the lake in front of him. Forest covered the rest of the island. The shape resembled a giant bean with the lake in the center. He guessed it measured a mile from the nearest edge, making the island several miles long and at least a mile wide.

Dolgram reached the top a moment later. Ender helped him with the last few feet. He pointed to a small hill off to their right. “That is where I live,” he said. “The dock is about ten minutes outward walk from there.”

They spent most of the next few hours walking around with no luck before Dolgram suggested they go home for the night.

After a long nap, they spent several more hours walking around with equally fruitless results.

After a few more hours of sleep, however, Ender and Dolgram returned to the beach at the place where Ender washed ashore. The water lapped against the sand. “If it isn’t anywhere else on the island, I’m afraid you may have to do some swimming,” the Kobold lamented, awakening his companion’s vestigial dislike for water.

Resolutely, Ender waded out to armpit level. He noticed the bottom of the lake seemed very uneven and the sand ended after a few feet in before turning into rough, often sharp, rock. Although the sun lit up the water, it felt pretty cold. The waves were relatively small, but he had trouble seeing much of anything through all the plants growing under the surface. A school of small fish swam past his leg, disappearing under a submerged outcropping nearby.

“Any boats available?” he called back to Dolgram, having second thoughts about swimming.

“No, not for another two days when the merchant arrives. I don’t think his boat is made for water though.”

That did not make any sense to Ender. “Can a raft be made?”

“I suppose so. Do you know how to do it?”

“Sure. We need some logs of equal length and width and some rope. Any of that around?”

Dolgram looked behind him at the forest. “Gee, I hope so.”

“Then let’s make a raft.”

It took them the rest of the afternoon to fell enough trees and lash them together to create a two-man raft. As clouds moved in overhead, Dolgram suggested dinner and starting again once the clouds dissipated and sunlight returned.

The Lake Monster

“Where on the lake do you want to start?” Dolgram asked over a meal of fruit and nuts. Already, Ender had begun to lose track of time. This world had no night time, only days that went on and on, requiring its inhabitants to sleep during the day and mold their schedules around its constancy.

“Let’s start where you found me.”

Together, they dragged the raft to the water’s edge. Ender pushed it in, then climbed on. Dolgram stood on the shore. “I can’t swim,” he said, sheepishly.

“That’s all right.” Ender pushed the raft out with the oar another twenty feet or so before he needed to paddle. He hoped the sword would signal to him when he got within its range. As he

paddled, he looked down at the water growing darker as he neared the center of the lake.

He had gone about a quarter mile from the shore when the raft began to come apart. Turning the raft around, Ender wondered if he would make it back to shore as one of the beams broke free and drifted away. Water started seeping over the edge where it broke off. Knowing he could not swim — and not too fond of getting wet anyway — he grabbed a log and started kicking.

Suddenly, Ender felt something brush past his legs.

Quickly, he removed his energy disk from his belt just as some underwater predator turned to attack him. Being so close to the surface of the water, he could hardly see it, but it looked like a sheet of darkness of some sort coming straight at him under the waves.

Ender tried to parry, but was unsuccessful. Immediately, he felt something — a tentacle? — wrap around his leg and begin pulling him under. He caught sight of what looked like a shark's fin approaching.

Stay calm, the feline martial artist urged himself. Using the energy disc, he slashed at the tentacle and felt it uncurl and fall away. A second tentacle reached for his other leg, but Ender kicked it aside. Water splashed in his face and mouth, obscuring his vision and choking him. He tried to swim away, but dirty water filled his mouth and nose and covered his head.

He did not make much progress before the tentacle struck at him again. He parried and continued struggling to keep his head above water.



Finally, the third time, another tentacle wrapped itself around Ender's left calf and pulled him under again. He managed to get a good gulp of air, but missed when he tried to cut off the tentacle.

This time, the lake monster dragged him toward the center of the lake while moving closer to the bottom. Ender's next attack failed due to the sudden rush of speed. Undaunted, he struggled to cut himself free. Suddenly, his head struck a rock. Ender felt the air rush from his body as a stifled cry of pain and frustration escaped his lips. As he thrashed against the creature's grasp, he suddenly sensed his magic sword nearby.

He cut the tentacle free and felt it slide off his leg. In the murky water, he had difficulty telling up from down, but the sword sent a message — something like, "Over here!" — even though Ender could not tell where it came from. Off to his right, Ender saw a sudden flare of light. He started to move toward it, pulling himself along the lake bed with the weeds and debris. As he entered the sphere of light, he saw his sword in the center, fifteen feet away.

Another tentacle grabbed his leg, jerking him backward.

He kicked the tentacle free and climbed toward the weapon. His lungs burned with the lack of air. After closing the distance, Ender reached out to take the hilt just as another tentacle closed around his left ankle, pulling him back just far enough not to reach the sword.

Ender cut the tentacle free. As the monster tried to grab him again with another appendage, his fingers made contact with the hilt of the sword. He pulled himself around it, planted both feet in the slime on the lake floor and yanked the weapon free from the muck. Then, crouching, he launched himself toward the surface as quickly as he could, knowing he would not last much longer without oxygen.

The lake monster grabbed him again. In the murk, he saw a large, dark form advancing towards him.

Using his sword, Ender fired a bolt of light at the form. In the resulting flash, he saw a huge, octopus-like creature with dark red eyes and a beak big enough to tear him in half. The light exploded against the creature just as Ender's head broke the surface. He took a breath of air just as his body sunk back under the water. He struggled to stay afloat as the monstrous shadow receded into the murk.

Over the last few minutes, the monster had pulled Ender closer to the center of the lake. The promontory he had climbed sat a little less than half a mile in front of him. Dolgram's hut lay hidden from view somewhere to his left, also about a half mile away.

Ender looked to see if the lake monster lurked anywhere nearby. Not seeing it, he tried to swim toward the promontory, but he moved slowly because he had never learned how to swim in the first place. Spying a log, Ender paddled toward it. It took a lot of effort, but he made it to the log. At least now, he could stay afloat.

After much slow and tedious work, Ender made it to the base of the promontory. It seemed to take an eternity. He saw no sign of the monster; hopefully, the light had scared it away.

The slime clinging to the rock made it too slippery to climb, so Ender maneuvered himself around to the sandy part of the shore. Exhaustion covered him like a wet garment. He felt re-

lieved when Dolgram arrived several minutes later to help him walk back to the hut.

Leaving the Island

The next thing Ender knew, Dolgram woke him up from a sound sleep. As awareness returned, the feline martial arts master realized he lay on the bed in Dolgram's hut. Judging by the light, it would have been early in the evening or morning back on Earth, but that did not matter here. The only hint that much time had passed lay in the fact that the Kobold had changed clothes and a different group of animals scurried about the furniture. "Wake up," he said again. "The merchant will be here soon."

"Thanks," Ender said, sitting up.

"Don't thank me yet. Look, Kobolds are the only species native to this world, so be careful. I expect the merchant and his friends to be a little suspicious, so watch your back. Keep this cloak over your face and don't let your tail hang out too much." He handed Ender a brown garment with lots of holes and patches.

The Kobold hermit gathered up a few things, asked Ender to pick up a large sack of fruit lying next to the door, and they made their way through the forest to the dock.

The dock consisted of a raised wooden platform with several poles and a simple crane. After a few minutes of waiting, a boat appeared in the sky. It drifted toward the island before slowing down and centering overhead. Its design reminded Ender of a hot air balloon, especially when Dolgram had to climb up to moor it into place. He talked with someone aboard for several minutes before lowering the crane to drop off several large sacks and pick up the fruit.

Once finished with that, Dolgram returned to Ender. "They will take you, but only as far as their next stop and you will have to help load and unload the boat. I told them you don't speak the language, so they won't pry," Dolgram whispered, then he and Ender said goodbye.

The boat measured at least thirty feet long and twelve feet wide with a large sail and five crew members — all adult male Kobolds. Ender found a comfortable spot near the stern of the vessel, out of the way of the rigging and other cargo, and sat down with his back against a large bag of what smelled like oranges.

At the rear of the vessel he saw a large globe-like object set into a pedestal. One of the Kobolds placed both hands on the globe and the boat began to rise. As he rolled it back and forth, the boat pitched and turned until it cleared the trees and rose away from the island.

The other Kobolds checked the ropes, then settled in for the trip like Ender had.

Riding in the boat felt a little weird at first. When he looked over the side, Ender saw nothing below them — no sea, no ground — only sky. He could see other islands floating in the distance, but he gave up after counting seventy or so, knowing there were still more beyond. The local sun seemed normal enough, suspended high above the islands that passed over one another like clouds. The air felt cool and, except for the boat's movement, there was no cross breeze.

After several minutes, the Kobolds leapt to their feet. Off the starboard, a flock of large blue and black birds flew by. A sunburned Kobold rode in a saddle on the back of one of the birds like a cowboy. He waved and the crew returned the gesture as they passed.

The rest of the voyage passed quietly. Several hours went by before the pilot leveled off the boat and headed into a small dock built into the underside of an island. Ender saw a wooden ladder lower from a balcony carved into the stone, while a trap door opened above it and a net was lowered towards the boat.

The Kobolds prepared to dock. Within a few minutes they securely moored the boat underneath the trap door. A potbellied Kobold appeared on the balcony and asked what kind of cargo they carried.

"Fruits and pelts from below," the pilot answered. "And a passenger bound for the outer islands, Marzûl."

"Very good, Trevion. Welcome back."

"Thank you, Uncle. It's been a long week below, but we got everything."

"Who's the passenger?"

"I don't know. The hermit asked us to bring him back, said he was shipwrecked since our last stopover. Must be from Harghul, though, because he doesn't speak our language."

"I see. What is he going to do here?"

The pilot shrugged. "Find another ship home, I guess."

That answer seemed to satisfy Marzûl, who said nothing else while the Kobolds finished securing the boats to the docking lines. After a moment, Trevion tapped Ender on the arm and motioned for him to help fill the net.

Once they had loaded the net, the crew gathered up their personal items and left the boat via the ladder. The pilot always disembarked last, so he waited for Ender to follow the others.

The Kobolds disappeared into the darkened passage behind the balcony. The passage branched off into numerous passageways and stairs before they arrived in a huge cavern used as a bazaar. In fact, Ender recoiled at the variety of smells that assailed his nose (not all of them pleasant). He saw three tiers of small shops selling everything from meat to rugs, weapons to pots and alcohol to furniture. Kobolds crammed nearly every inch of floor space and Ender noticed that he stood a full head and shoulders taller than most of them.

"K'var!" the pilot signaled a middle-aged Kobold carrying a spear and dressed in baggy pants and a vest. He pointed to Ender. "This man is from Harghul. Will you give him directions to the passenger docks?"

"Certainly," the guard said and then he described to Ender how to find the docks. Luckily, Ender still wore the ring of 'tongues' that Matthias gave him, so he understood the Kobolds perfectly, no matter which language they used. "I think the next boat leaves in the morning, but you'd have to check the schedule to be sure," he said before walking away.

As he walked around, Ender realized that, except for small cooking fires, the cavern shrouded the bazaar in total darkness. It made sense, considering that Kobolds could probably see better in the dark than he could. They seemed to stand aside as he passed, too. His tattered cloak covered his face, hands and body, but that did not stop his ears from sticking up underneath the fabric.

As he passed by the booths, he got the impression that the locals used both gold coins and bartering to purchase wares. Apparently, anything of value could be traded, too, given the variety of shops. He hoped at least one of them sold maps, but since he could not read the signs, he had to wander around a little first. Then, of course, he had to figure out what to trade for the map once he found it.

After a few minutes, he noticed some Kobold children tailing him.

At first, he ignored them, assuming they were just curious youngsters. After a few minutes more of looking around, however, the children had disappeared. A guard walked up to him and said, "Excuse me, Sir. Do you mind removing your hood?"

Slowly, Ender removed his hood and the guard recoiled — so did most of the people standing around him. The guard stuttered for a moment while a circle formed around the feline martial artist. The Kobold took a fighting stance, lowering his spear at Ender. "What are you?" he finally managed to say.

"I am a traveler who is lost. I am trying to find my friend, who can help me get where I need to go."

"Who's your friend?"

"He is an Elf."

"I don't see any *Elves* around here. How do I know you are telling the truth?"

Ender noticed another guard emerge from the crowd at his eight o'clock position, similarly armed and attired as the first.

"Nothing I can think of will convince you right now. Can you tell me how to locate a map of the local islands and how to get to a ship? I hope to continue my search for my friend."

"Ships are expensive," another Kobold said as he stepped from the crowd. "Their cost depends on where you are going and how quickly you mean to get there. You guards have done your duty. I will handle this from here." He dismissed the others with a wave of his hand.

A moment later the crowd returned to normal, though people still looked back at Ender and whispered to each other. With his cybernetics, he could hear most of it, but chose to ignore them.

The Kobold standing before Ender raised his left hand, showing Ender an empty palm. "I am Crocius. Please follow me." He started walking the way he came, not waiting for the feline martial artist to answer.

Nor did he need to.

Crocius

Crocius led Ender through a series of tunnels out of the bazaar and up to the other side of the island. Shortly, they passed through a wooden door and into a lavishly furnished room. They walked through it and out onto a balcony. Once his eyes adjusted to the light, Ender could see the rest of the island blanketed in green trees and dotted with buildings, as well as several neighboring islands. A cool breeze tickled the curtain that separated the balcony from the rest of the dwelling.

The Kobold pointed to the table and said, "Please sit down. May I get you anything? Perhaps some wine or fruit would refresh you."

"Fruit please."

Crocius summoned a servant, relayed the order and sat down. "Now then," he began, "you said you are a lost traveler seeking an Elf? Is that correct?"

"That is correct. Have you seen any *Elves* recently?"

"No, I have not." A female servant wearing barely enough to cover herself set a tray of citrus fruit in front of Ender and then left. "But," Crocius continued, "I have friends throughout the islands who may be able to assist you."

"One thing I have been trying to locate is a map of the local islands so I have a better picture of where I am. Do you have such a map?"

"I have several." He summoned the female servant again and directed her to bring in some maps. "She will be only a moment. What is your purpose here in Cerulea?"

"I was here to assist in locating an artifact of interest to this Elf. It is a medallion shaped like a seven-pointed star, with an eye sculpted in the center and ornate carving on each of the star's arms. I am not sure of its significance, but he was hoping to find it here in Cerulea."

"It does not sound familiar, though I am a scholar. Perhaps there is more you can tell me?"

"I think it was called the Star of Horus."

The Kobold shook his head. "I don't think I have heard of it, though I have colleagues on other islands who might. What is its value?"

"I do not know."

Crocius laughed, almost spilling wine down his silk tunic. "I don't know if I believe *that*. You came all this way for an artifact whose value you do not know? What is your friend? A scholar? A collector?"

"I just came to assist — I believe he knows its value, but he isn't around right now to ask. Please forgive my ignorance, but what do you do here? You seem to do well based on your surroundings."

"I am a businessman blessed with good fortune. I am always looking for new investments. Perhaps there is a way for us to assist one another."

"In what ways are you thinking?"

"A friend of mine owns a large shipping fleet out of Grashona. He might be able to help you locate your friend. I could introduce you, for a price."

"What amount do you seek?"

Crocius took a sip of his wine and asked nonchalantly, "What is it worth to you to find your friend?"

"What do you want in exchange for help?"

"I noticed the blade you carry. It is quite beautiful."

"Not an option," Ender replied, hoping not to sound too defensive.

"What about that ring, then?" Crocius pointed to the ring of tongues on Ender's finger.

"This is also important to me. How about gold?"

"I *have* plenty of gold. Besides, travel is expensive and it takes a lot of gold to get from here to Grashona."

"How much is a lot?" Ender asked, knowing he had no money with him at the moment.

"It depends on the speed of the boat, directness of the route, potential docking taxes, entrance fees — things like that — and there are always risks like pirates and storms," Crocius took another sip of his wine. "Ten to twelve thousand at least."

"I can offer my skills as well. I may be able to work out an arrangement that would be beneficial to both of us."

"Are you suggesting I hire you?"

The female servant returned at this point with several long scroll cases and a book. She set them on the table next to Crocius. Standing, he thumbed through the book, set it aside and opened an ancient-looking leather case with wooden caps at each end. Carefully, he drew a map from within and unrolled it on the table. He placed the book and the cap at the top corners to hold it open.

Ender stood to look over the map as well, but found it a confusing diagram of odd-shaped masses, concentric circles and alien scribbles. Remembering the three-dimensional nature of this world helped him sort it out, but not much.

"We are here," the Kobold said, pointing to a small object in the middle left part of the map. "Grashona is here." He pointed to a larger island drawn in the bottom middle of the scroll.

"You believe that my friend will be found in Grashona?"

"I do not know where to find your friend. Where did you last see him?"

"In a monastery above the island I caught a ride on to come here."

Crocius thought about this a moment. He gave Ender a puzzled look. "You fell from Horo-Dur?"

Ender nodded.

"That's not possible. Horo-Dur is here," he pointed to a bean-shaped island near the center of the map, "its rotation takes it way outbound, but it is miles from there to the next lowest island. You should have been killed by the fall..."

"What can I say? I am still here."

Crocius took a step back. "What are you?" His tone hardened. "Some sort of demon? A monster?"

"Would a demon or a monster sit here and hold a civilized conversation with you?"

The Kobold stared intently at Ender for a few seconds, then took another sip from his wine. "Very well, then. Are you suggesting I hire you?"

"If that will allow me to continue the search for my friend that is what I am suggesting."

"What do you have to offer me that would offset the cost of assisting you to get to —?" he paused, then added quickly, "I don't suppose you want to go to Horo-Dur? The monastery was attacked last week. Most of the monks killed and the buildings destroyed by fire. Your friend is probably not there. Perhaps you should look elsewhere."

"Do you know who attacked the monastery, or where the monks went after the attack?"

"No one knows who attacked the monastery, though many have their guesses. If there were survivors, it will be difficult to track them down. Horo-Dur's orbit takes it within a few hundred miles of several islands. This map is not accurate enough to determine where it was on that night. They are working on a scale model at the University, but that would delay your search several days."

"A delay to determine the correct route of action may be better than a blind chase through the islands. Is there another monastery of the same sect on any of the islands that are located near here?"

"There is no other monastery of *any* sect, though my friend in Grashona would know of any secret locations used by the monks."

"Then it looks like I need to get to Grashona," Ender decided.

"You didn't seem so sure a minute ago."

"I am sure. I think that the monks will probably give me better leads on where to find my friend than anyone, and if your contact can help locate them, I feel that is the best choice available to me."

"That assumes your friend is still alive, of course."

"True."

"Well then, I will make the necessary arrangements. Perhaps in the meantime you would enjoy some companionship?" The female servant appeared again, waiting for Ender's reply.

"I think I would like somewhere to rest alone, if you don't mind, to prepare for the journey."

"Would you like some Jenelfin then? It will help clear your mind, maybe provide you with insight into the journey ahead."

"What is Jenelfin?"

"It is a fragrant oil that comes from a bean grown on some of the upper islands. When burned, it opens the mind to insights into the world around us and visions of the world beyond this one," Crocius explained.

"No, thank you. Just rest."

"Very well, then. I can have a ship ready in twelve hours. I will have my servant escort you to a guest room." The female servant turned to leave and Ender followed.

The guest room was fairly large with a lavish bed just large enough for him to stretch out on. The room contained other amenities as well: an armoire, a desk with writing paper, ink and quills, a basin with a pitcher of water and beautiful tapestries depicting scenes from other islands. A heavy curtain covered the large window, blocking out most of the light and leaving the room in a state of twilight.

"Do you require anything else?" the female Kobold asked, never making eye contact.

"No, thank you," Ender replied and then added, "How did you come to work here for Crocius?"

The servant hesitated, then she answered quietly, "He purchased my parents years ago. I have been part of his household since childhood."

"Is slavery common to this world or only to certain areas?"

"I-I do not know. I have not traveled to any of the other islands since I came here."

"Thank you for the information. I hope you have a good evening."

"Y-yes, Sir," the servant bowed deeply and then walked from the room a little more quickly than Ender had seen her move before.

Once he was alone, Ender mixed some of the tea that Dolgram had given him earlier. It warmed his belly with its re-

storative properties. Afterwards, he lay down on the bed. Before he knew it, his body had given in to the warm blankets, soft pillows and thick mattress — luxuries he had not enjoyed since before his arrival in Cerulea five days earlier — and with little effort on his part, Ender fell asleep.

Plans for Betrayal

Meanwhile, Crocius stood in his personal chambers ready to retire as well. But first, he went to a chest near the foot of his large bed and unlocked it with a key hung around his neck. He retrieved a small hand mirror from beneath a stack of silks and other valuables. Sitting on the chest, he ran his finger over a sapphire embedded at the top of the oblong surface. His reflection disappeared, replaced by a reptilian face.

“Yes,” the face hissed.

“Master,” the Kobold said, “I have something of interest to report.”

“Proceed.”

“Master, there is a visitor to our world: a cat-like being who claims to have come to our world with a wizard. They were separated the night the monastery on Horo-Dur fell to your forces and he does not know where the wizard is now. I have agreed to bring him to Grashona under the guise of helping him locate his friend. I thought you would be interested in his arrival. Perhaps, we could arrange a meeting of sorts.”

“Excellent choice, Crocius,” the Lizard Man hissed again. “Did he say why they came to our world?”

“They are looking for something called the Star of Horus.” Crocius watched closely for any sign that his master recognized the artifact’s name, but the lizard showed none.

“I suppose you desire payment for the journey?”

“He carries a sword of the most beautiful craftsmanship. Perhaps —”

“That can be discussed in more depth after I have had opportunity to inspect the weapon *personally*. In the meantime, make haste. I am most interested in meeting this visitor to your world.”

“Yes, Master,” Crocius paused, “Though I warn you — he is shrewd.”

“Does he suspect anything?”

“No.”

“Then I will deal with him when the time comes.”

The face in the mirror disappeared, replaced once more by the Kobold’s reflection. He stared at it for a long moment, before returning it to the chest and retiring to his bed. He fell asleep quickly, thoughts fixed on how to separate Ender and his sword.

En Route to Grashona

Morning — or the local equivalent thereof — came early. Once again, Ender reminded himself that Cerulea had no day or night. Occasionally, an upper island would eclipse the sun for a lower island, casting a shadow like an overcast day, but otherwise, the islands were bathed in continual sun. The Kobolds had adapted, however, by living mostly underground. In addition,

each island maintained its own schedule of when to sleep and when to be up — sometimes more than one. He had found it a little confusing — like working the midnight shift and trying to sleep during the day — but he had been so tired lately that it had not mattered much. When the servant finally came to wake him twelve hours later, his body still resisted getting up.

He felt better. Much of the soreness in his muscles had faded. Now only time stood between him and feeling one hundred percent again. Stretching, he rolled over in the warm blankets. Someone had left a fresh pitcher of water, a glass and a tray with bread, cheese and fruit on it.

Ender checked to see that his sword and other valuables remained hidden among the bedclothes and then crossed the room to wash up. The cold water stung his face, making his whiskers stiffen and his ears stand up. At that moment, he heard footsteps in the room. Spinning, he saw the servant girl — or slave, as he had realized after talking with her before — standing in the doorway, looking down at her feet.

“My master asks if you require anything before departing,” she said without looking up.

“Not at this time. When is the departure scheduled?”

“Two hours from now on the inward platform. My master will accompany you.”

“Thank you.”

“You are welcome, Sir,” the servant replied before turning to leave.

A few minutes later, Crocius entered Ender’s room. He inquired about how well his guest slept and then explained the itinerary for the next step in their journey. “Grashona is forty-five hours away. My crew has stocked enough supplies to get us there, but we will stop in Hazilla if there are any difficulties. My ship currently docks at the inward platforms. It will take us about twenty minutes to get there. I know I said we’d leave in two hours, but I have some business to attend to at the pier and would like to leave sooner, if that is all right with you.”

“Fine by me.”

“Excellent. I recommend you finish breakfast, since it may be a while before another opportunity arises to eat. I will return in a few minutes.”

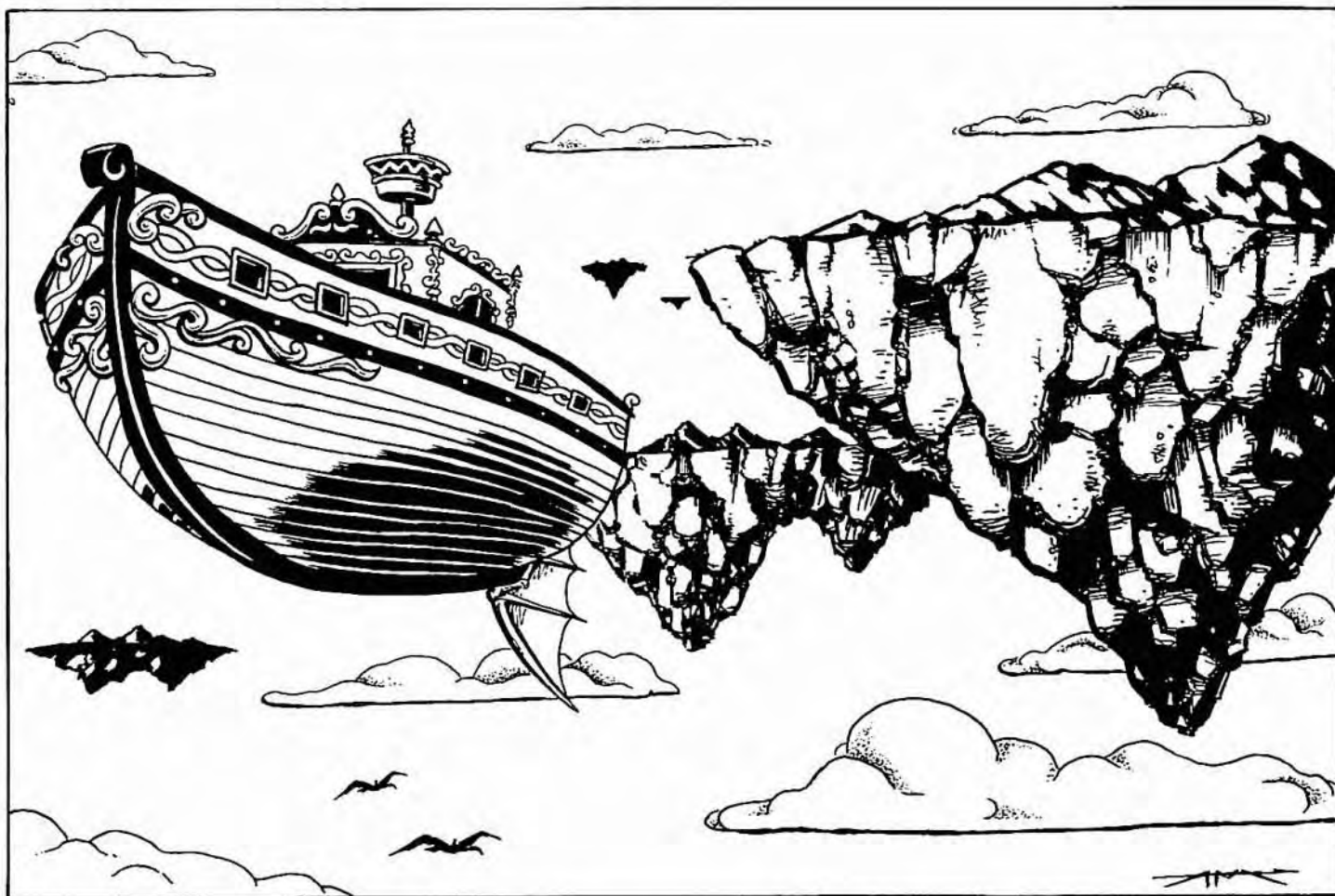
Ender ate the cheese, but packed the bread and fruit in his bag. Checking that he still had everything else with him, he waited for Crocius’ return.

The Kobold returned a few minutes later, dressed in leather pants and a coarse tunic. He carried a cap and a walking stick. He led Ender back through the house and out a different exit from the one they came in the day before. This exit followed a narrow passage for a hundred feet before coming to an intersection with stairs leading upward to a door where they stopped briefly. Crocius produced a key and warned Ender that they would be going outside. Both drew their hoods, though Ender did so more to cover his features than to block out the light.

Bright sunlight broke through the widening crack in the door, causing them both to pause a moment. Soon they continued down a shady, tree-lined sidewalk paved with cobblestones to a building where Crocius approached a street-level window.

“A rickshaw for two, please,” Crocius ordered.

“Destination, Sir?”



“Platform thirty-four at the inward platforms. We’d like your fastest runner, too.”

The clerk flipped through a thin book and said, “Two hundred gold, Sir.”

“I am Crocius the Merchant. Put it on my account.”

“Yes, Sir,” the Kobold made a few notes in his book, then rang a bell and called for someone in the back of the building. A moment later, a rickshaw appeared, pulled by the biggest Kobold Ender had ever seen, even though the feline martial artist still stood eight inches taller. Crocius stepped around the large wheel and sat on the cushioned seat inside the shaded carriage.

Ender noticed that the driver looked at him suspiciously as he climbed aboard. He decided it best to stay inconspicuous while en route to the pier and made nothing of it.

The driver hardly waited for him to settle in before starting off at a brisk run. Their course took them down several city streets with buildings of various sizes and lots of trees. The Kobolds he saw generally looked dirty, wore ragged clothes and did not look up as the rickshaw passed. Crocius seemed not to notice, but it did not take long for Ender to realize two things. First, Kobolds here functioned much better in the sunlight than others he had met, and second, those with money lived, worked and shopped underground while those without did not.

About the time Ender began to feel sweat collecting under his heavy cloak, the rickshaw turned onto a street lined with columns. A moment later, it stopped beside a stone staircase. He saw several small boats dock beyond it.

“Come,” Crocius ordered, sliding out of the rickshaw and starting up the steps without waiting for Ender.

The rickshaw driver watched them go before heading back to the station.

They walked along a wooden walkway with rails on both sides for several minutes before stopping at a balcony. Crocius pointed toward the dock. “One hundred and twenty feet long, twenty-two feet wide,” he said with pride. “She is the fastest cargo ship on the island.”

And the largest, Ender realized, *by a lot.* The boat took up all of the space along that particular pier, jutting out into the air by at least fifty feet. No sails jutted up from the deck. Instead, the bridge stuck up twenty feet with the steering tower prominently placed at its center. Ender saw dozens of Kobolds loading the vessel with crates, barrels and other containers.

“How far out does this ship range?”

“Theoretically, it can go anywhere in the world.”

“Is this her home port?”

“Oh, yes! That beauty is mine.” Crocius beamed. “C’mon!” He hurried down the walkway, reminding Ender of a child running to a favorite toy. Luckily, his longer legs made it easy to keep up.

“How old is your ship? Fairly new?”

“She’s been sailing three or four years now.”

“Did you construct it specifically for you?”

“Oh, yes. It’s too expensive to build pleasure boats, so I constructed this one as a cargo hauler *with all the extras.*” He laughed as if he had gotten away with something.

"Is there another like it anywhere?"

"I don't think so. Nimara might have some bigger — and Drodar — but I doubt anything with the same design."

"Do you travel with it on its journeys?"

"Sometimes, but not always. There is a lot to do here," Crocius admitted with some disappointment.

"How many ports do you trade with?"

"With this vessel? Just the major ones, but my fleet travels all over the region."

"What do you trade, mainly?"

"*Anything* that can make a profit, friend."

"So, if you had it your way, you would be sailing with this ship every time?"

"If I had my way, sure," Crocius said as they descended to the pier. "But pilots are expensive. Speaking of which..." As they approached the gangplank, two Kobolds dressed in loose fitting clothes appeared.

"We are about ready to disembark, Sir," one of them reported. He carried a thick book under one arm.

"Excellent," Crocius turned to the other Kobold, "Darimun, take my companion aboard. Show him to the guest suite."

A brief pause followed before the second Kobold nodded and replied, "Yes, Sir. Please follow me," he said to Ender. Darimun said nothing else as they walked across the pier and up the gangplank. The vessel impressed Ender even more as he approached. He noticed markings carved into the wood on the hull, as well as a distinct absence of windows and oars.

Finally, he asked, "What powers the ship?"

"Psychic energy," he said matter-of-factly.

"Whose energy?" From his time on the Palladium world, Ender knew that every living thing possessed psychic energy and that many of them, wizards and psychics especially, could develop this energy to power their spells and other unusual abilities. Skilled wizards had the ability to take that energy from others as well as absorbing it from other sources — humanoid and animal sacrifices, for example.

"Watch your head, Sir," Darimun warned while pointing to a crane on the pier that lowered cargo through an opening in the deck. "No one's in particular. Just whatever's available, mostly."

"So it runs on a psychic collector, more or less?"

"Sort of." They skirted past the crane on their way past stairs leading up to the bridge, before stopping at a door. The Kobold opened it, revealing more stairs that led down into the vessel. "Only pilots know how to harness the energy, so I guess they act as the collector. Mizal has never really explained it to me, so I don't know much about it."

Ender followed him to one of three doors on the narrow hallway where the Kobold announced, "This is your cabin, Sir." He turned the knob and pushed the door open. "If you need anything, ring the bell at the foot of the bed."

Darimun waited for Ender to enter, then left.

The cabin looked small and dark, despite the boat's size. Ender figured most of the space must go to cargo holds. At least he had the amenities. The bed seemed too narrow, but the mattress felt comfortable enough. The blankets felt thick. An extra

one lay folded up at the foot of the bed. He had a narrow armoire, a short table with a basin and a pitcher of water. A rug covered the floor. The small bell hung above a pot on the floor at the foot of the bed. No windows let in any of the ubiquitous light from outside, making the room completely dark.

After several minutes, Ender heard the shuffle of footsteps outside his door.

Quickly, he pulled his cloak over his head. Opening the door, he saw a single-file line of at least a dozen slaves — shackled, thin and some recently beaten — marching into the cargo hold beyond his door. Darimun brought up the rear. "Everything all right, Sir?" he asked.

"I heard a noise and wondered what it was," he said from under the cloak. "Out of curiosity, what do the slaves do on this ship?"

"Nothing. They are for sale in Grashona. I apologize for the disturbance. We should be ready to disembark in another hour or so and then you shouldn't hear them much after that."

"There was no disturbance, just curiosity on my part."

"Very well," Darimun walked away and Ender shut the door.

After a few more minutes passed, Ender decided to sleep for a while. He put his things under the mattress and laid down to rest. He awoke sometime later to the sensation of the boat falling. *We must be underway*, he realized after a moment of confusion.

Ender arrived on deck a few minutes later. He saw the pier disappearing in the distance as the boat moved into the open air. After a moment, the craft began to rotate on a central axis, throwing him off balance. He caught himself with the railing. From his position, he counted dozens of other islands, clouds, smaller boats and some large birds already in the air.

"Beautiful, isn't it?" Darimun stood beside him. He asked, "Aren't you hot in that cloak?"

"A little, but it seems easier than the reactions that come when people see me."

"Your height bothers people? Or is it something else?"

"No. My face — it seems to be a little startling to other people."

"All right," Darimun shrugged. "Well, keep that cloak. You will need it when we get to Grashona."

"Is it colder, or just more people who will not enjoy my facial features?"

"No, it's colder. The lower islands are farther from the sun, so they generally get colder than the mid-range islands."

"How long have you been sailing with Crocius?"

"Three or four years now. I have been with this boat since its maiden voyage."

"Do you travel with it on most of its voyages?"

"Every single one," the Kobold said. "I am Darimun, by the way. You are?"

"I am Ender."

Darimun put out his hand. "Pleased to make your acquaintance."

"Do you see many people who are not Kobolds around here?"

He looked at the fur on the back of Ender's hand. "No, I haven't, but I have heard stories. Are you — you aren't from Cerulea, are you?"

"No."

"Where are you from then?" The Kobold inquired, obviously trying to hide a hint of nervousness.

"A place called Earth, but I have not been there in a long time — it seems to be hard to find. Someday maybe I will return to that place."

"I have never heard of it. What is it like there?"

"There are no islands in the sky — it is one solid mass — and the part I left had about ten million people living there. Pretty interesting place, but I haven't been able to get back since I left. No telling what it is like now."

"How long have you been away?"

"It depends on how you look at it — somewhere between four and fourteen years."

The Kobold thought about that for a moment, before saying, "Ten million people seems like a lot."

"It is a bunch, but it is still not the biggest city on Earth. Others are larger."

"There are *bigger* cities?!" Darimun shook his head in disbelief. "Well, maybe you will find other travelers at the University. I have heard that they get visitors from places like that."

"The University? What happens there?"

"People learn things," he shrugged. "Is that why we are taking you there?"

"Could be. If I can find what I need there, it will help."

"Will you excuse me a moment? Lord Crocius is calling me." The Kobold walked away, leaving Ender alone at the railing. After a moment, he realized he heard nothing and *his* hearing was superior to most.

He walked around above deck for several minutes and then heard a bell ring. In response, several Kobolds came running from below decks, some armed with crossbows and others with long spears. They took up predetermined positions on the port side of the vessel. As they formed ranks, Ender could now see several large birds approaching from that side. He heard several of the crossbows cock, ready to fire.

The birds' riders bore weapons as well, though Ender doubted three birds would stand a chance against the crew of this boat. Still, as they closed the distance, he could see that the Kobolds wore bright blue tunics with their birds similarly girded. A white, stylized sun occupied the center of the fabric. The two outside riders carried staves with similar banners.

Presently, Crocius appeared on deck. He wore a dark green tunic, emblazoned with a silver handprint. He cursed, then said something Ender did not understand. A moment later, he ordered the crossbowmen and others to stand down, though the air around them remained tense with anticipation.

In his mind, Ender suddenly heard Crocius' voice warning him not to go below deck, "for your own safety." He remembered that his friend, Ted Smythe, had a similar power and it had saved his life many times. Curiously, he moved toward the back of the crowd, conscious of the fact he stood at least a foot taller than everyone else.

"Hail, Lord Crocius!" the center rider called as his bird prepared to perch on the boat's railing. The entire vessel dipped slightly to that side with the birds' added weight.

"Hail, messenger of Drodar!" Crocius called back, bowing slightly. "What brings you to my *humble* vessel?"

"We seek a traveler, a visitor from another world," the rider said, dismounting. "We thought you might have seen him."

"We have seen no one."

"Are you sure?" The rider closed the distance between his mount and Crocius.

"Positively."

The rider looked about the crew on deck, fully aware he was not welcomed there.

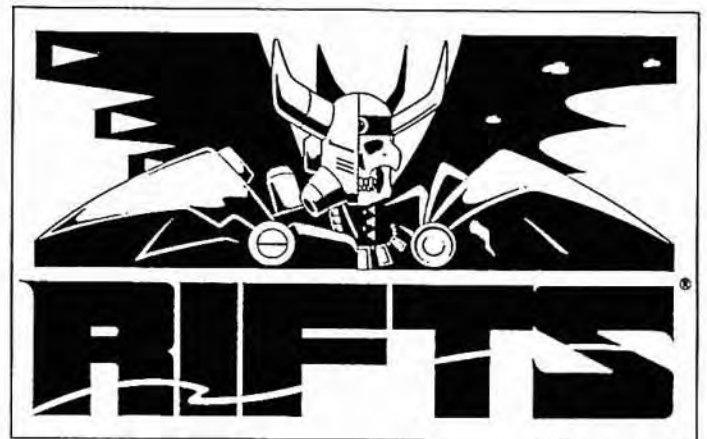
"Perhaps you would like some refreshment before continuing your search? And your companions as well," Crocius offered.

"Yes." He motioned for his companions to dismount. Warily, they joined their leader. Crocius called a name and a crewman came running. "Fetch these men fresh water."

"Yes, Sir."

"Then you must be on your way," he said to the rider.

"Yes, then we must be on our way."



The Maqui Knouldum

Optional Source Material
for **Rifts® Phase World®**

By **Samson Blackwell**

They call themselves Travelers — "Maqui Knouldum" in their tongue. Long ago this referred to their dimension-spanning empire; now it refers to their passionate exploration of the self, and of reality itself. Scattered enclaves exist throughout the Megaverse, although they go virtually unnoticed due to their

small numbers, their avoidance of technology, and their belief in pacifism and meditative seclusion. But they weren't always so retiring. In fact, they were once among the most influential and affluent races in the Three Galaxies.

A Brief History

The Maqui Knouldum made the best FTL engines in the Megaverse. Period. From space fold drives to hyperspace generators, the Maqui Knouldum led the way in quality and innovation, and in cost — their engines were astronomically expensive. Every major race, nation, confederation, and corporate conglomeration that could pay the price lined up to buy MK(i)SE (Maqui Knouldum (inter)Stellar Engines) new releases and upgrades. This included the then-united Splugorth nation, who were one of MK(i)SE's biggest customers. In fact, the Splugorth used MK(i)SE engines exclusively, and to great advantage. MK(i)SE engines helped the Splugorth carve out one of the largest, most powerful empires the Megaverse has ever seen. For generations, the Maqui Knouldum sold their products to the Splugorth, the Kreeghor, the Naruni, and others like them, paying little heed to the tragic outcomes their engines increasingly helped bring about. But, after 1,500 years of complicity in the suffering and loss of billions, the Maqui Knouldum collectively experienced a great turning-inward, and a race-wide reevaluation of self.

The Maqui Knouldum had historically been a peaceful and benevolent race, but their rise to power and accumulation of vast sums of money so corrupted their society that their past was almost completely covered up and forgotten. Their original purpose for creating and perfecting FTL engines — to peacefully interact with new cultures and expand their own understanding of the Megaverse — was consciously ignored. Then, some 10,000 years ago, the Sage Council (for generations a figure-head body) regained power and forced a reckoning. After a brief but tumultuous period of readjustment, the Maqui Knouldum made the collective decision to forego technology and turn their formidable intellects inward to a study of the self and the nature of existence. This introspection traced a path back to their peaceful roots, and led them to rediscover some core truths. They committed themselves to defending their race and others against the perpetrators of any kind of violence. For this reason, MK(i)SE immediately ceased all business with any race or group engaged in the exploitation or subjugation of another race or group. In a communiqué to their former customers, the Maqui Knouldum condemned their acts of violence and pleaded with them to cease any future acts. The Kreeghor, the Naruni, and many others were thrown into disarray, but none more so than the Splugorth, whose entire fleet utilized MK(i)SE engines.

The Splugorth responded by obliterating every living thing on the Maqui Knouldum's homeworld. This was to be the Splugorth's last act as a unified race. In the aftermath of the Upending, as the Maqui Knouldum's fateful decision came to be known, the Splugorth lost huge swathes of their empire and ultimately turned on each other out of frustration and desperation. It would take them more than a thousand years to recover even a fraction of their former empire, and they will never hold sway as they did in their unified state. But the Upending didn't stop the vengeance-driven Splugorth and others from pursuing the

Maqui Knouldum into every corner of the known Megaverse. The Maqui Knouldum became a hunted race; none of their traditional strongholds could withstand the Splugorth's fury and hatred. Nearing extinction, the Maqui Knouldum were finally forced to abandon dimensional travel and disappear into the backwaters of the Three Galaxies.

The Maqui Knouldum Now: An Overview

For more than 7,000 years the Maqui Knouldum have lived in the humble seclusion of their walled temples — far from other races and civilizations — where they have devoted themselves to the study of the self and the nature of existence. The Sage Council, a body of Maqui Knouldum in the final quarter of their Growing (see below), governs the affairs of the temple and handles relations with the outside world. Recently, as their numbers have increased, the Maqui Knouldum are beginning to reach out to peaceful races and civilizations, teaching what they have learned after thousands of years of introspection, and they have learned much.

The Maqui Knouldum's lengthy inquiry has led to the evolution of a philosophy known as the Five Stones to Enlightenment. In a metaphorical sense, each of the Five Stones represents a sure step across what is known as the Streams of Confusion. A false step means being forever swept away into the confusing world of mere appearance. Those few who reach the Fifth Stone achieve transcendence and see the Megaverse in its truest form, though reaching the Fourth Stone is considered to be the apex for most Maqui Knouldum — and this is where many end up. In a literal sense, the Five Stones are each indicated by a major event in a Maqui Knouldum's intellectual, physical, and spiritual development. Briefly, the events are listed here:

- **The First Stone** occurs upon a Maqui Knouldum's successful Separation from its parent and entails a realization of its importance relative to the massive workings of the Megaverse.
- **The Second Stone** involves an Initiate's realization that things are not separate, as perceived, but whole and unified — that all things are manifestations of the One Energy.
- **The Third Stone** is achieved by the Outcast who comes to understand the chaotic nature of existence, and the role of free will and individuality in the dynamic balance of chaos/order in the Megaverse.
- **The Fourth Stone** is an epiphany regarding the true value of life that follows a Maqui Knouldum's successful Separation from its offspring.
- **The Fifth Stone** is transcendence; the Maqui Knouldum is now known as a Wisdom and exists by force of will alone.

Maqui Knouldum

Racial Character Classes and Non-Player Characters

The following information is common to all Maqui Knouldum except the Divided and Wisdom NPCs. Differences are noted under the specific R.C.C.

Alignment: Any, but the vast majority (99%) are Principled or Scrupulous.

Appearance: Tall, thinly muscular humanoids with shiny silver skin. Maqui Knouldum have no apparent mouth or nose, tiny ears, and deep blue, lidless eyes. They also have five fingers and two opposing thumbs, making them extremely dexterous. Dozens of black, dreadlock-like prehensile tendrils begin to grow from their head approximately 10 years after Separation and continue to grow throughout their long lives; the length of these “dreads” provides a good judge of a Maqui Knouldum’s age.

Attributes: I.Q. 4D6+10, M.E. 3D6+10, M.A. 3D6, P.S. 3D6, P.P. 5D6, P.E. 3D6, P.B. 3D4, Spd 4D6.

Size: 6 to 6.5 feet (1.8 to 2 meters).

Weight: 160 to 190 lbs (72 to 86 kg).

M.D.C.: Conditional. See Natural Abilities.

S.D.C./Hit Points: 2D4x5 S.D.C. and P.E. x 2 in Hit Points. Add an additional 3D6 Hit Points per level of experience.

Horror/Awe Factor: 6 (Wisdoms: 15).

I.S.P.: M.E. attribute number x10, plus 15 per level of experience. Considered a Master Psionic.

P.P.E.: 4D6x10

Average Life Span: Wisdoms: unknown (possibly immortal). All others: 400-600 years.

Natural Abilities: Nearly impervious to disease; unaffected by normal cold and heat; can sense the energy fields of others and fight while blind; energy weapons do *half* damage.

Connection with the One Energy: Possess the ability to tune into the One Energy of the Megaverse. Magic and Psionic powers are derived from this fundamental energy, so the Maqui Knouldum possess large amounts of these, but their true power is gleaned from the One Energy in its most fundamental form. This melding with the One Energy provides the Maqui Knouldum with supernatural powers and M.D.C. capabilities, as well as a level of understanding and wisdom unattainable by most other beings. During battle, a Maqui Knouldum can create an M.D.C. energy field, imbuing it with 3D4x10 M.D.C. plus 4D6 M.D.C. per level of experience. The Maqui Knouldum can sustain this field for 4D4 melees plus 1D6 melees per level of experience.

Seeing: This ability allows the Maqui Knouldum to see living things as physical manifestations of the One Energy. When a Maqui Knouldum concentrates it can see reality as streams of energy flowing in specific patterns. These patterns make up the parts of reality everyone else sees as individual things, such as trees, rocks, clouds, humans, etc. The Maqui Knouldum can also see thin or weak points in these patterns of One Energy. If it chooses, a Maqui Knouldum can disrupt,

or *Alter*, this flow of energy, so that the pattern either changes slightly or completely disappears.

Altering the flow of One Energy: A Maqui Knouldum can injure or destroy another living thing (or non-living things, like rocks) with a single touch. Essentially, this power operates like magic or psychic energy, but on a much more fundamental and powerful level. Since the Maqui Knouldum is altering a being’s energy, these attacks inflict *Hit Point* damage on S.D.C. beings, and *M.D.C.* on Mega-Damage beings. Because the only creatures known to possess this connection to the One Energy are the Maqui Knouldum, it is much less developed — and less sophisticated — than magic or psionic energy, but it is still lethally effective.

Use of the One Energy for sustenance: Maqui Knouldum live off the power of ambient energy and usually do not need food in the traditional sense. The only exception is during the time of the Growing. Because it normally consumes enough energy only to support itself, the Maqui Knouldum must consume traditional foodstuffs to provide all the basic elements necessary to create another being. This includes grains, vegetables, fruits, and even meats.

Prehensile “Dreads”: These tendrils actually perform a variety of functions, from semiotic communication (expressing emotions much like humans do with their eyes, mouth, etc.), to aiding with balance or becoming a “third arm,” to providing an additional means of defense in hand to hand combat.

Psionic Powers: All Healing abilities except Bio-Regeneration and Resist Fatigue, plus Mind Block, See Aura and Empathy.

Magic Powers: None. An Outcast can learn magic if it wants to, but gains no additional P.P.E., even if a magic O.C.C. is selected.

Damage: See the Maqui Knouldum martial art style, *Rablum qui Patracul*, below.

Bonuses: +4 to save vs psionics/insanity.

Vulnerabilities/Penalties: Rune weapons and uranium (U) rounds do double damage.

R.C.C. Skills:

Dance (+25%)

Sing (+20%)

Escape Artist (+35%)

Tracking (+15%)

Holistic Medicine (+20%)

Acrobatics (+25%)

Math: Advanced (+10%)

Literacy (+20%)

Language: Other: Two of choice (+10%).

W.P.: Two Ancient of choice.

R.C.C. Related Skills: See the Initiate or Outcast R.C.C.s.

Secondary Skills: Select an additional ten skills from the appropriate R.C.C. Related Skills list, below. These are areas of knowledge that do not get the advantage of the bonuses listed in parentheses. All Secondary Skills start at the base skill level.

Alliances and Allies: Most races regard the Maqui Knouldum with respect. Very few will attack a Maqui Knouldum on sight; not including the Splugorth and their minions, the

Kreeghor, vampires and other evil creatures, and evil godlings/gods.

Weapons: Tend to use melee weapons as an augmentation to their martial arts. Will use ranged weapons if they deem it necessary.

Body Armor: Rarely use any type of body armor. Not that they have an aversion to it, they just regard it as unnecessary given their natural abilities.



Initiate R.C.C.

Immediately after a successful Separation, the Maqui Knouldum becomes an Initiate. It will remain an Initiate until it is cast out to find the Third Stone. The Initiate spends its days tending the grounds of the temple, studying, discussing philosophy, and in quiet reflection. The Maqui Knouldum does the bulk of its concentrated study at this time — reading books, investigating the sciences, and researching history, among other things.

Note: The Initiate's skill choices are more restricted than the Outcast's due to its seclusion from the outside world. Once an Initiate becomes an Outcast, refer to the Outcast's R.C.C. Related Skills for additional skill selections.

R.C.C. Related Skills: Select 14 other skills, but at least three must be from the Technical category. Plus select three at level three, two at level five, two at level seven, and one at level nine. All new skills start at level one proficiency.

Communications: None.

Domestic: Any (+10%).

Electrical: None.

Espionage: Any (+15%) except Sniper.

Mechanical: Locksmith only.

Medical: Any (+5%) except Medical Doctor or M.D. in Cybernetics.

Military: None.

Physical: Any except Boxing, Gymnastics, or S.C.U.B.A.

Pilot: Horsemanship only (+10%).

Pilot Related: None.

Rogue Skills: Any (+5%) except Computer Hacking and Streetwise.

Science: Any (+15%) except Computer Operation or Computer Programming.

Technical: Any (+15%).

W.P.: Ancient Weapon Proficiencies only.

Wilderness: Any (+10%).

Equipment: Two plain robes, one ceremonial robe, plain sandals, ceremonial sandals, three ancient weapons, personal belongings.

Outcast R.C.C.

Outcasts are Maqui Knouldum who have been thrown out of the temple in order to reach the Third Stone. Interaction with the outside world is required to attain this next level of Enlightenment. Some return enlightened; some return broken by failure; many never return.

Save for the Growing, this can be the most trying time in a Maqui Knouldum's spiritual life. Up to this point, the Initiate has never been outside the great walls of the temple, and any interaction with other intelligent beings has been very limited. The grim reality of the Megaverse often comes as quite a shock. Those Initiates who return without reaching the next Stone are often bitter and nihilistic; their search for Enlightenment is at an end. Those who do not return are spoken of with a reverence reserved for the dead. For the Initiate who does reach the Third

Stone, a dramatically different perception of the universe is its reward.

Although an Initiate knows the quest for the Third Stone lies outside the walls of the temple, it is not allowed to decide when the quest will begin. That decision is made by a Wisdom, and often to the dismay of an Initiate, who may wake at dawn to find itself outside the gates with little more than the clothes on its back. And the only Maqui Knouldum with the authority to allow an Initiate re-entrance to the temple is the Wisdom who made the decision to cast it out.

The journey of the Outcast can take weeks and comprise a trip to the closest town, or it can take a lifetime and encompass vast portions of the Megaverse. Only the Outcast and its Wisdom know when the time is right to return.

Note: Because an Outcast travels the outside world, it is exposed to a greater variety of learning opportunities. Those player characters who were previously Initiates should refer to this list for all additional skill selections after they have been cast out. Those players who are beginning as Outcasts should choose exclusively from this list.

R.C.C. Related Skills: Select 14 other skills, but at least three must be from the Technical category. Plus select three at level three, two at level five, two at level seven, and one at level nine. All new skills start at level one proficiency.

Communications: Any.

Domestic: Any (+10%).

Electrical: Any.

Espionage: Any (+15%).

Mechanical: Any.

Medical: Any (+5%).

Military: None.

Physical: Any except Boxing or Gymnastics.

Pilot: Any, but favor traveling by foot or as a passenger.

Pilot Related: Any.

Rogue Skills: Any (+5%), but tend to avoid high technology.

Science: Any (+15%).

Technical: Any (+15%).

W.P.: Any.

Wilderness: Any (+10%).

Equipment: Plain clothes, traveling cloak, wide brim hat, plain sandals, backpack, sleeping pad, three ancient weapons, one lesser rune weapon, one modern weapon, personal belongings.

Council Member R.C.C.

The Maqui Knouldum are asexual beings. This means they reproduce by splitting their cells, or Growing, in order to form a separate, complete, and independent entity. Each Maqui Knouldum is capable of Growing only *once* in its entire existence, and only those who have reached the Third Stone possess the ability to do so.

In many ways, the new entity is essentially a clone, which is why the Maqui Knouldum are all uniform in appearance. However, the difference between the original being and its offspring

is apparent in their consciousnesses, which are completely separate and individualistic. The dichotomy that develops as the nascent consciousness becomes self-aware makes for an interesting and unstable period in the life of a Maqui Knouldum. As the Maqui Knouldum doubles in size to produce enough cells for a new, fully-formed Maqui Knouldum at the end of gestation, it undergoes a profound psychological transformation as well.

The sixteen months of growth are the most uncertain time in a Maqui Knouldum's life. The first four months are relatively calm, and the parent only experiences hunger and discomfort due to its rapidly expanding body. The second four months see the emerging consciousness slowly becoming aware of its environment. Much learning takes place at this time — all through the parent's eyes and via a telepathic link. It is at some point during this second quarter, or shortly thereafter, that the emergent consciousness becomes suddenly self-aware. A battle of wills takes place as the new consciousness, fully aware of itself but unaware still of others, strives to overcome its parent and attain control of the body. This battle can go on for months, as the new consciousness exerts its will-to-power and the parent consciousness seeks to contain it and to teach it the sanctity of others. If the parent manages to win this battle of wills, and the new consciousness learns to value life, the clone will have stepped onto the First Stone of Enlightenment. When this point is reached, the twin consciousnesses merge and the Maqui Knouldum is admitted as a Council Member for the remainder of its gestation, usually four months. All Council Members are Maqui Knouldum in their last stage of gestation.

When the time is right, and both consciousnesses are prepared, the Maqui Knouldum admits itself to a chamber deep beneath the temple for the Separation. Once there, the Maqui Knouldum meditates into a state of near suspended animation, where nearly all of its energy is given over to the reordering of its cells and the creation of a new, independent being. This ordeal can take up to a month and leaves both parent and offspring in a weakened and fragile state for several weeks following the event.

Only a Maqui Knouldum in the last stage of Growing can reside on the Council. The combined intelligence of the two consciousnesses make for a being with both wisdom and spontaneous insight. They are the most qualified members among the Maqui Knouldum to make decisions regarding the course the society takes. Even Wisdoms do not interfere with the Council. During this time of Growing, all the Maqui Knouldum's stats are effectively doubled. This includes all attributes, hand to hand bonuses, P.P.E. and I.S.P.

Equipment: Two silk robes, two ceremonial robes, slippers, Speaker's staff, and any additional equipment the Maqui Knouldum acquired as an Outcast.

The Divided (NPC)

On rare occasions, the parent Maqui Knouldum can lose its battle of wills with its offspring. The result is a being with two competing minds. These failures are called the Divided. Since the Separation takes the effort of both consciousnesses, the Divided remains physically combined. Throughout its life the par-

ent consciousness will seek to separate, long after Separation is a possibility; and the new consciousness will fight to stay combined, believing it has more power in this condition. The result is insanity for both the parent and its offspring. Remember, the Divided consists of a new consciousness that has stalled on its path to the First Stone. Because of this, it will never move beyond the philosophy of a will-to-power; it will never understand the concept of sympathy for the other combined with an autonomous will. The result of this wrangling for division and combination is a horribly disfigured mass of flesh and bones weighing at least three hundred pounds (135 kg), sometimes with partially formed limbs jutting out of all the wrong places, two misshapen heads in odd locations, etc.

These corpulent schizophrenics spend the rest of their lives in a secret compound at the temple, where they are kept under constant surveillance. Although almost unheard of, escapes do occur. Once free, these disturbed beings can wreak havoc. With the combined powers of two Maqui Knouldum, and none of the conscience, the Divided represent a grave threat to all they encounter. And only death can stop them once they've experienced freedom.

The Divided are completely unpredictable and dangerous beings (and horrific to look upon). They are the antithesis of Maqui Knouldum philosophy — divided chaos instead of unified order. Their existence is a lesson to the Initiates that the universe does not obey traditional logic but has a logic of its own — one that is privy only to those who are connected to it as One, as the Wisdoms are.

The Divided effectively freezes at its last experience level, since it is no longer able to concentrate on any one thing long enough to learn it. As a result, all hand to hand bonuses, P.P.E., I.S.P., etc. do not progress any further.

Equipment: None.

Wisdoms (NPC)

Wisdoms are so unlike their brethren as to be fundamentally alien. Wisdoms have achieved such closeness with the One Energy that they are nearly cosmic energy themselves. In fact, the only element that prevents Wisdoms from becoming pure, unrestrained energy is their will. It is by their will alone that Wisdoms continue to exist.

The Wisdoms' understanding of reality at this stage renders them virtually incomprehensible to others. And although their physical appearance remains unchanged, the Wisdoms are supernatural beings with enough power to rival the gods. For this reason, even their brethren view the Wisdoms with awe.

Alignment: Principled.

Attributes: I.Q. 5D6+10, M.E. 4D6+10, M.A. 5D6+5, P.S. 5D6, P.P. 6D6, P.E. 4D6+10, P.B. 3D4, Spd 5D6. (All attributes are supernatural.)

Size: 6 to 6.5 feet (1.8 to 2 meters).

Weight: 160 to 190 lbs (72 to 86 kg).

M.D.C.: 4D6x100. Considered a supernatural being.

Horror Factor: 15

I.S.P.: 4D4x20. Considered a Master Psionic.

P.P.E.: 2D4x100

Average Life Span: Unknown.

Natural Abilities: Impervious to pain, disease, normal cold and heat; can sense the energy fields of others and fight while blind; energy attacks (*including* magical ones) do *no* damage. All other Natural Abilities are the same as those listed above.

Psionic Powers: Possesses all known psionic powers.

Magic Powers: Retains any gained through its long life of travel and study.

Damage: Destroy on a roll of 14-20; Disable or Debilitate on a successful strike. See the Maqui Knouldum martial art style, *Rablum qui Patracul*, below.

Bonuses: +10 to save vs psionics/insanity; +9 to save vs magic; +98% to invoke trust/intimidate.

Vulnerabilities/Penalties: Rune weapons and uranium (U) rounds do double damage.

Alliances and Allies: Most races regard Wisdoms with awe and reverence. Virtually none will attack a Wisdom on sight; those who will include the Splugorth, the Kreeghor if their forces are large enough, vampires, and evil gods.

Weapons: Rarely use ancient weapons. Never use modern weapons.

Body Armor: Never use armor.

Equipment: One plain robe, plain sandals, simple wooden staff.

The One Energy

Every living thing, from the largest sun to the smallest bit of matter, is composed of vibrating strings of energy. The oscillation — or frequency — of each string determines the nature of the matter it forms — a gluon, an electron, a proton, etc. The One Energy is simplicity itself. To the Maqui Knouldum, who have learned to peer through the superficial physicality of matter and instead see reality as innumerable oscillating layers of energy, it is also a source of awe and wonder. They compare the graceful, flowing, and dynamic interweaving of strings to an impossibly complex and beautiful dance.

From a practical perspective, this allows the Maqui Knouldum to understand the Megaverse on a fundamental level, a level other beings can't even begin to comprehend. They experience the unified nature of reality on a daily basis. This gives them the ability to be incomparable healers, and to kill with a single touch.

Rablum qui Patracul

“Quickly Resolving Physical Conflict”:

The Maqui Knouldum's Martial Art

Pacifistic by nature, the Maqui Knouldum designed their martial art to end a conflict as quickly as possible, and with as little damage to both parties as is feasible. To that end, their art is built around devastating one, two, or three move attacks meant to disable, debilitate, or even kill the opponent (should the situation deem it absolutely necessary). Nearly all of their moves are point attacks delivered to spots where their opponent's flow of the One Energy is weakest. This does not prevent

them from using more traditional moves, but they are generally employed to allow the Maqui Knouldum the opportunity to launch an appropriate point attack.

One of the endowments the Maqui Knouldum gain from a connection with the One Energy is an ability to see other living things as manifestations of that energy. This allows them to locate points on any being where the One Energy flows more weakly or is obstructed. And as the Maqui Knouldum cross the Stones to Enlightenment, this ability becomes more sure and powerful. Wisdoms can cause a creature to disperse into pure energy with one touch, snapping the being's physical grounding at the weakest point where the One Energy flows through it.

Every living thing has certain, consistent points of weakness according to its species. Though these points of weakness may be stronger or in slightly different places on different individuals, the points are nonetheless there. The Maqui Knouldum have several volumes — known as the *Quitztal Deraluc* — detailing these weak points on thousands of species. The books aid Initiates in perfecting the art of Seeing. Of course, these books are prized the Megaverse over by all races seeking to gain an upper hand; unfortunately for those races, the books are protected by a powerful spell which will cause them to disintegrate if they are handled by anyone other than a Maqui Knouldum.

Rablum qui Patracul has three major divisions in the amount of damage its attacks will do: Disable, Debilitate, and Destroy. Every creature who has its energy Altered by a Maqui Knouldum will instantly feel the effects. A failed attack, however, does no damage and causes no ill effects.

Although the effects for all attacks are cumulative, the Maqui Knouldum will seldom launch a successful point attack more than once. The Maqui Knouldum's philosophy of pacifism dictates that it choose the least harmful attack to resolve the conflict. Once the opponent has been neutralized, the Maqui Knouldum will walk away.

Disable: Opponents struck by an attack meant to Disable lose one-third of their Hit Points or M.D.C. and will feel nausea, dizziness, weakness, and pain. These opponents lose initiative, one attack, and are -3 to strike, parry, and dodge for 1D6 melees. They also suffer from muscle soreness, headaches, double vision, are -1 to strike, parry, and dodge, and are more susceptible to disease and sickness (01-30%) for 1D4 days following the attack.

Debilitate: Aggressors who are subjected to an attack meant to Debilitate will lose two-thirds of their Hit Points or M.D.C. and, in addition to the above effects, suffer from hallucinations, claustrophobia, panic, searing pain, and occasionally, euphoria. They will lose initiative, three attacks, and are -6 to strike, parry, and dodge for 3D6 melees. After the attack, the aggressor suffers from nausea, severe muscle cramps, dizziness, migraine headaches, is -15% on skills, and is -2 to strike, parry, and dodge for 1D6 weeks. They also have a very good chance (01-60%) of falling ill during this time.

Destroy: Attackers subjected to an attack meant to Destroy will lose all their Hit Points or M.D.C. and collapse. If they are given *immediate* medical attention and manage to survive they will suffer from double vision, debilitating headaches, sudden nausea, incapacitating muscle cramps, will be -6 to strike, parry, and dodge, and -30% on all skills for 1D4 months. Additionally, the unfortunate attacker will permanently lose 1 point each of

P.E., P.P., and M.E., almost certainly contract a grave illness (01-80%), and must roll once on the insanity table.

Note: Those who are unlucky enough to be at the receiving end of a *Wisdom's* Destroy strike dissipate into non-specific patterns of the One Energy. There are *no* saving throws, since the attacker quite simply ceases to exist.

Rablum Qui Patracul

Point attacks are only effective on S.D.C. beings until the sixth level. All point attacks are Called Shots.

Level

- 1 Two attacks per melee; +3 to pull/roll with punch, fall or impact.
- 2 +3 to parry and dodge; +2 to strike; Disable on an unmodified 19 or 20.
- 3 +1 to parry and dodge; Disable on an unmodified 18, 19, or 20.

- 4 One additional attack per melee; point attacks can harm M.D.C. beings.
- 5 Leap attack (Critical Strike); Debilitate on an unmodified 20.
- 6 Entangle; Disable on a modified 17 or higher.
- 7 One additional attack per melee; +1 to parry and dodge.
- 8 Spinning attack (Critical Strike); Debilitate on an unmodified 18, 19, or 20.
- 9 +2 to pull/roll with punch, fall or impact; +2 to entangle.
- 10 +1 to strike; Destroy on an unmodified 19 or 20.
- 11 One additional attack per melee; Debilitate on a modified 17 or higher.
- 12 Flip attack (Critical Strike); Destroy on an unmodified 19 or 20.
- 13 +1 to entangle.
- 14 Destroy on an unmodified 18, 19, or 20.
- 15 +2 to strike, parry and dodge.

Galactic Tracer Starship Creation Rules

By Eric Fackler

The following is a point based creation system for the personal spacecraft of the Galactic Tracer O.C.C. in Phase World. I think we can all agree that one of the things that is most compelling about bounty hunters in a space opera setting are their unusual and generally awesome ships. The first step provides a selection of several different vessels to get the basic hull design of the Tracer's ship before it's modified. Categories two through four provide points with which to buy upgrades, some of which can be spent in any category, others which have to be spent in a particular category. Finally, steps five through fourteen detail a variety of upgrades to finish off the ship's creation process in style. Enjoy!

Step One: Ship Type

Galactic Tracers stick to small to medium-sized space ships as a rule. Their chosen craft tend to find a good balance between unobtrusive appearance, speed, firepower, and cargo capacity. Several basic models of ship are most commonly used. The choice of the ship's chassis is up to the player and costs no points. Each has its own benefits and detriments.

1. Light Freighter: These ships are small cargo freighters that were initially designed to fulfill the same function as tractor trailer trucks do today. They are one of the most unremarkable ships in the Three Galaxies and can be seen everywhere. The ships generally run around 100 feet (30.5 m) long, weigh around 300 tons, and can carry around 100 tons of cargo. Space to accommodate passengers is limited unless the Tracer stuffs them

into the main cargo bay. Normally, eight passengers can be accommodated, with an additional forty to eighty possible for short durations. For longer voyages with many passengers, the canny Tracer would be well advised to invest in a mop and bucket.

M.D.C. by Location:

Main Body: 2,000

Cockpit: 600

Engines: 1,000

Communications Array: 300

Point Bonuses: +20 to Miscellaneous Systems and +40 to FTL Drive. The Brig upgrade is free with this class starship.

2. Small Shuttle Craft: These ships are around the smallest of those that Tracers use. They are probably the most common ships in the galaxy and are produced by most companies. They run about 40 to 60 feet (12.2-18.3 m) in length, weigh around 150 tons and can carry around a ton of cargo. The shuttle's passenger compartment generally accommodates six to eight passengers comfortably.

M.D.C. by Location:

Main Body: 1,500

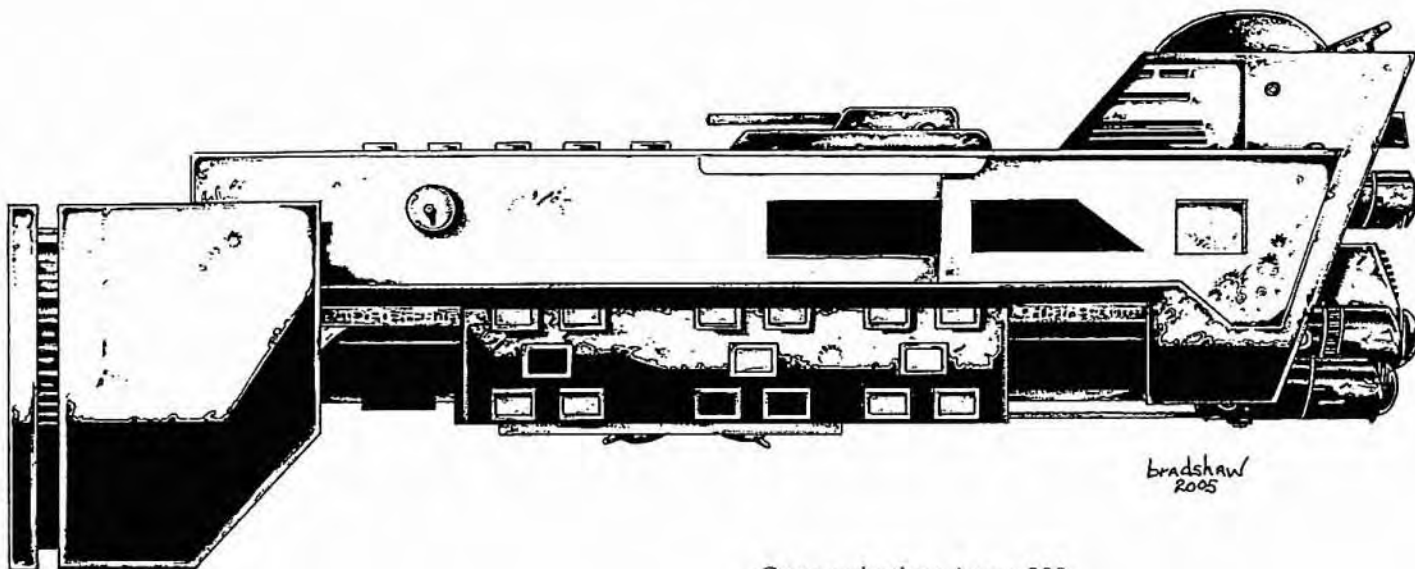
Cockpit: 500

Engines: 900

Communications Array: 300

Point Bonuses: +10 to Sensor Systems, Sublight Drive, Shields, and Miscellaneous Systems, and +30 to Atmospheric Flight.

3. Courier Ship: Couriers are small, fast, and light owing to their primary use as a quick delivery vehicle. They run about 30



to 60 feet (9.1-18.3 m) in length, weigh around 100 tons and can carry one ton of cargo or less. Couriers can carry two or three passengers, but conditions are cramped as the ships generally are not used to move more than one important person at a time.

M.D.C. by Location:

Main Body: 1,000

Cockpit: 400

Engines: 900

Communications Array: 300

Point Bonuses: +20 to Sublight Drive and +20 to Stealth Systems.

4. Patrol Ship: These small ships are basically heavy fighters that perform patrol duty and form picket lines for capital ships. They are around 80 feet (24.4 m) in length but tend to be fairly heavy in weight, running from 400 to 500 tons. When unconverted, they carry little cargo, with a small cargo locker capable of holding around 1,000 lbs (450 kg) of equipment. Their increased weight is usually due to weapon systems and added armor. Patrol ships can usually carry a max of four passengers but a few more can be squeezed in if willing to sacrifice comfort for capacity.

M.D.C. by Location:

Main Body: 2,000

Cockpit: 800

Engines: 1,200

Communications Array: 300

Point Bonuses: +20 to weapons, +20 to armor, and +10 to Shields.

5. Light Scout Ship: These ships are used for reconnaissance and espionage. They vary widely in size, running from 50 to 100 feet (15.2-30.5 m) in length and weighing between 200 and 300 tons. The scout ships are designed to carry a modest amount of cargo, usually one to two tons. They can comfortably accommodate four passengers with an additional six to ten squeezed in during emergencies.

M.D.C. by Location:

Main Body: 1,500

Cockpit: 600

Engines: 900

Communications Array: 300

Point Bonuses: +10 to Stealth Systems, Sublight Drives, and FTL Drives, and +20 to Sensor Systems.

Step Two: The Origin of the Ship

This step covers just where the Tracer obtained his ship. Let's face it; there are lots of ways to get things in life. This step covers the benefits and detriments of ship ownership based on where the character got it. Each area will provide a number of points, but may have negative qualities to go along with them so choose carefully.

1. Acquired by Inheritance or Gift: (All) In this case, the ship was given to the character by a friend, family member, or other generous party for a variety of reasons. The character has proof of ownership of said vessel and is free and clear from any initial payments for the ship itself. **Points for Construction:** 160

2. Paid in Full: (All) No one likes bills. In most cases, if a Tracer has an opportunity to fully pay for his ship, he will. The Tracer has managed to scrape up the cash to fully purchase a starship. He owns the vessel completely and has all the appropriate documentation. The only drawback is that the ship is not new. New ships cost more than any young bounty hunter can afford to pay. The player cannot select the option of New in the Age category. **Points for Construction:** 180

3. Purchased on the Open Market: (All) The ship is either new or used and was legally obtained by the character through payment up front. He has all the necessary papers indicating ownership of the vessel. Unfortunately, spaceships don't come cheap, even at the best of times. The character still owes the seller monthly payments of 5,000 credits for the next five years (total comes to 300,000 credits). **Points for Construction:** 200

4. Found: (All) People lose things. Anything that's lost can potentially be found. In this case, the character acquired his ship free of charge, finding it either derelict or crashed. The character owes no additional funds on the ship but there are a few issues that need to be addressed. Just because no one was in it when you found it, doesn't mean it's not still owned. The character runs the risk of potential unpleasantness from any former own-

ers who may recognize their ship. Additionally, the character lacks genuine documents of ownership for the vessel, which during a search may cause additional problems. **Points for Construction: 220**

5. Theft: (All) It isn't yours. You stole it. Whether you lifted it from pirates, civilians, or the military, there's no way around the fact that the ship was obtained through illegal means. Also, the ship is known to be stolen and is being sought by its former owners. Naturally, the character has had the ship for some time and the search may have cooled down a little, but the ship is hot and will be at risk near many civilized systems. Just where the ship was stolen from will be up to the player with G.M. approval. Additionally, keep in mind that future choices during ship creation may dictate where the ship came from. **Points for Construction: 240**

6. Sponsor Owned: (All) Though the Tracers who sit at the top of the heap in the Three Galaxies claim that their unbelievable success is the result of their unimpeachable skills, you know better. The best bounty hunters are the ones who have the best equipment and a good ship is probably the most important equipment in the lot. Few can afford the very best, so an enterprising Tracer finds someone who can! The character pilots a sponsor's starship and has it on a sort of long term loan. On the plus side, he gets the benefit of the sponsor's vast stocks of ready cash when building his ship. On the other hand, the character is bound very tightly to his sponsor and is expected to work ONLY for them. After all, that ship is company property. The ship is likely bugged to all get out by the sponsor, who will want to guard against untrustworthy bounty hunters absconding with a thirty million credit ship. Hopefully the Tracer won't get any "brilliant" ideas for escaping his obligations with his ship. Obviously, Independent may not be chosen under the Sponsorship category. **Points for Construction: 250**

Step Three: Age of the Ship

The vast bulk of the ships in the Three Galaxies are not brand new. A ship ceases to be considered new at three to five years of age. However, ships are frequently kept for many decades (even centuries!) and every space port has a great variety of ships from decrepit tramp freighters to gleaming, brand new star yachts. Unlike capital ships that can be reliably serviced for several centuries, smaller ships like the size that Tracers use wear out more quickly and generally meet the end of their usefulness when they pass 150 years of age.

1. Relic (150+ years old): (All) The Millennium Falcon has nothing on this hunk of junk. The ship is ancient and has been kept running by a combination of good maintenance, creative jury-rigging, and dumb luck. Many of its systems are subject to shorts and breakdowns (even newly installed systems run the risk when interacting with the ancient and quirky central computer) and the ship is potentially unreliable in a pinch. Reduce the top speed of a relic by 20% (even with new systems) and reduce M.D.C. by 25%. Additionally, during times of strenuous use, there is a 30% chance that a critical system will go. G.M.'s choice which, and how often the roll is made. Dog fight at your own risk! **Bonus Points for Construction: 200**

2. Elderly (100+ years old): (All) Marginally better than a relic, elderly spacecraft are still potentially dangerous in their unreliability. However, a ship of this Age is infinitely better at adapting to new replacement systems and has far fewer compatibility problems than the oldest ships. Reduce top speed by 10% (5% with upgraded drives) and reduce M.D.C. by 15%. The chance of a system failing during heavy use is low at 5%. **Bonus Points for Construction: 100**

3. Middle Aged (65+ years old): (All) Many ships fall into this category. They are not top of the line or current models, but they are still fully functional and suffer from no particular penalties of wear and tear. **Bonus Points for Construction: 70**

4. Prime Age (6+ years old): (All) Barring suicidal or idiotic piloting, the ship is in the prime of life. It's still considered to be of excellent and current quality and with proper care it has many more years of active life left before it. +1 to dodge due to the excellent condition of the ship. **Bonus Points for Construction: 30**

5. New (1 to 5 years old): (All except Patrol Ship) The ship is a new model, sporting an unworn hull and excellent systems. +1 to strike and +2 to dodge owing to the pristine condition of the ship. **Bonus Points for Construction: 10**

Step Four: Sponsorship

Not all bounty hunters are freelancers. Some have the support of an influential organization. Some have preferred clients or employers. Either way, the Tracer has a line of credit from an organization or group with some clout and as such, has been able to upgrade his ship in order to better get the job done.

1. Independent: You call no man master. You take your jobs from whomever you damn well please. Because of this, you must find your own work by your wits or a brokerage service. Also, the Tracer's Guild is an option. At any rate, the independent Tracer is often independent for a reason. Add 20,000 credits to your character's total money and be reassured by the fact that you have no entangling obligations other than your own. Also add 20 points to any category as a benefit of your wits.

2. Planetary Government: The Tracer is on retainer for a specific planet or small collective of planets. He is expected to take any and all jobs that they throw his way. This can be a pain if it interrupts other bounties but the benefits speak for themselves. A bounty hunter with this level of Sponsorship adds 10 points each to the categories of Sublight Drive, FTL Drive, and Sensor Systems.

3. Criminal Organization: The Tracer is on retainer to a specific crime organization within the Three Galaxies. Most organizations of this type employ scores of bounty hunters so the demands on an individual Tracer's time are small, but if one works for the Splugorth or a similar large scale crime syndicate, it is expected that you drop everything and come running the second a job comes your way. If sponsored by a small (i.e. local) crime organization, add 10 points each to the categories of Sublight Drive, Stealth Systems, and Weapon Systems. If sponsored by a large scale crime organization, add 20 points to the aforementioned categories, but be prepared to earn it.

4. Naruni Enterprises: The premier arms dealer in the Three Galaxies employs a slew of Tracers to aid with their various

dealings. Through their generosity, a Tracer can outfit his ship well, and the Naruni are always willing to provide their own make of starship in the event that the Tracer wants the very best. Add 20 points to the category of Weapons and 20 points to the category of armor. The Naruni Manufacturer level is free if desired.

5. TGE: Unlike the prudish CCW, the TGE has no qualms about using Tracers and frequently employs them on tasks where they don't wish their influence to be detected. They are an insistent employer and often demand loyalty from those they place on retainer. Add 10 points to the categories Weapon Systems, Armor, and Shields, and 20 points to FTL Drive. Note that the Kreeghor require their bounty hunters to be untraceable. Consequently, a Tracer with TGE Sponsorship may not select the Kreeghor choice in the Manufacturer category.

Step Five: Manufacturer

There are a great many manufacturers of the small starships that Tracers favor for their personal craft. The ships are similar in size and cargo/passenger capacity, but they differ in terms of appearance, maneuverability, speed, and ease of piloting. Some manufacturers produce a limited variety of models, relying on their old standbys over a wide variety of products.

1. Homemade: (All) There are some ships out there that simply did not come from any factory. Plenty of enterprising ship mechanics have created their own ships and sold them on the open market. As a rule, the homemade ships are much less desirable than a ship produced by a name manufacturer. Most large shipbuilders got to where they are because of a pronounced talent for the construction of starships. The main benefit of using a homemade ship is that it is ALWAYS underestimated by the competition based on its shoddy appearance. Homemade craft have a penalty of -1 to strike and -1 to dodge. Additionally, there is a 10% chance of the sublight engine system failing during hard use. G.M.'s discretion as to when this crops up. But on the plus side, no one is going to target you for piracy! Also, by virtue of your penny pinching ways, add +20 points to any category except Manufacturer (obviously). **Cost: 0**

2. Generic Manufacturer: (All) One of a gross of small starship manufacturers in the Three Galaxies that make adequate models of small spacecraft. These ships are perfect for the stingy bounty hunter who is looking for a totally nondescript ship with decent performance. **Cost: 0**

3. General Galaxy: (All) A known and proven manufacturer of a variety of different size spacecraft. General Galaxy is not one of the giants in the industry but it is one of the better private manufacturers around. GG craft have a bonus of +1 to strike and +15% to pilot due to the easy and intuitive design of their ships. **Cost: 20**

4. Galactic Armory: (All except Freighter and Courier) One of the most reliable starship and weapons manufacturers in the CCW, the Galactic Armory's wares can be found throughout the CAF navy and army. The Black Eagle Fighter and HI series laser weapons are all their products. GA craft have a bonus of +1 to strike and +1 to dodge. **Cost: 30**

5. Human Alliance: (All) The Human Alliance is part of the core of the CCW and manufactures much of its own equipment for the use of its independent defense forces. Their commercial

and transport craft are some of the most numerous in the Three Galaxies. HA craft have a bonus of +2 to dodge and +10% to pilot due to the easy and intuitive design of the ships. **Cost: 30**

6. Wulfen Federation: (All) The Wulfen have long excelled as shipbuilders. Two of the mainstay ships of the old Wulfen Empire (the Hunter Destroyer and the Packmaster Carrier) see current and widespread use within the CCW and hundreds of independent defense forces. Wulfen craft have a bonus of +3 to strike. **Cost: 30**

7. Kreeghor: (All) The Kreeghor race, as the founders of the sprawling Transgalactic Empire and as former slaves of the Splugorth, trust their own technology first and foremost. They have a great variety of shuttle-sized craft that see a great deal of use within the TGE, UWW, and independent worlds. TGE craft have a bonus of +2 to strike and +1 to dodge. **Cost: 30**

8. Draygon Industries: (All except Freighters, Couriers, and Scout Ships) A relatively new company, but an instant hit and a worthy competitor of Naruni Enterprises. Draygon produces superior attack ships and fighters boasting heavy firepower and excellent maneuverability. Draygon ships have a bonus of +2 to strike, +1 to dodge, and +10 points to the Armor Category (this bonus is only applicable in the purchase of VPA Armor). **Cost: 40**

9. Bushi Federation: (All except Freighter or Scout Ship) The Oni are another relative newcomer to the world of starship construction but they have proved themselves to be quite adept at the task. Their Katana Fighter replaced the Naruni Broadsword fighter as one of the CAF's mainstays and their use of stealth technology is unmatched, even by the jealous Naruni. Bushi craft have a bonus of +1 to initiative, +1 to strike, +1 to dodge, and +10 points to the Stealth Systems category. **Cost: 40**

10. Naruni: (All except Freighter) What can be said about the Naruni that has not already been said? They are superb weapons manufacturers and hold the top spot in the Three Galaxies due to their high quality weapons, robots, and spacecraft. Naruni craft have a bonus of +2 to strike and +3 to dodge. **Cost: 40**

11. Kittani: (All) One of the most technologically adept races in the Three Galaxies and an incredibly valuable servant of the Splugorth. The Kittani generally keep their technology to themselves and their masters, but many of their nonmilitary ships have been sold on the open market for decades and have made quite a splash due to their excellent performance. Many a pirate has been surprised by an unusually well armed Kittani shuttle-craft style vessel. Kittani craft have a bonus of +2 to strike, +2 to dodge and +1 attack per melee. **Cost: 40**

12. Promethean: (All except Freighter and Patrol Ships) The Promethean vessels are fairly rare around the galaxy but they are sold to outsiders without prejudice. Their performance is decent, but their armament and presumably their Phase Fields and Phase Drives make them truly exceptional vessels. Promethean vessels all have Phase Drives instead of Contra-Gravity Drives. Promethean craft have a bonus of +1 to strike and +1 to dodge. Additionally, they get a bonus of +20 points to Shields when spent on Phase Shields and +10 to Sublight Drive. **Cost: 50**

Step Six: Sublight Drive

All starships have a sublight drive. It is the main engine of every ship, big and small. The commercial varieties are readily available to any and all with the money, but they fall far behind the military model sublight drives in performance. Any Tracer worth his salt knows the value of a fast and reliable sublight drive. What good is securing a bounty if you're chased down by a planet's independent defense force before you even break high orbit?

1. Low-End Commercial: (All) Something for the tourists who only need to putter about and have no real business anywhere. These drives are reliable, but slow in the extreme. CAF Battleships are faster than this. Max sublight speed is Mach 2. Ships with this drive system have a penalty of -1 to dodge. **Cost: 0**

2. High-End Commercial: (All) You know that guy at the office who always brags about his super fast space shuttle? The one he claims is the fastest in the Three Galaxies? Yeah, he probably has this class of drive. While a definite improvement over the low-end commercial drives, don't try to run slaves in the CCW because the Scorpion, Katana, and Black Eagle class fighters are all at least three times as fast. Max sublight speed is Mach 3. Ships with this drive system have no penalties or bonuses. **Cost: 20**

3. Low-End Military: (All) This is the drive system used by most military supply craft and many of the patrol craft. It is a quick and dependable sublight drive system. Max sublight speed is Mach 5. Ships with this drive system have a bonus +1 to dodge. **Cost: 40**

4. High-End Military: (All) These drives are some of the best and fastest in the three galaxies. Both the CCW and the TGE use similar drive systems for their couriers, scouts, and assault shuttles. The drives are fast, safe, and reliable. Max sublight speed is Mach 8. Ships with this drive system have a bonus of +1 to strike and +1 to dodge. **Cost: 50**

5. Courier Drive System: (Courier only) These drives are only installed on courier class ships that have a special need for high speeds in normal space. The drives are meant to function only with the sleek and narrow profiled ships indicative of the courier class. Attempts to install these drives on other classes of ships have proved dangerous, as the engines are simply not meant for use with heavier craft. Explosions, internal shaking, and other malfunctions plague ships that have installed courier drives. No Tracer worth his salt would mix these high-powered engines with an unsuitable chassis. Max sublight speed is Mach 11. Ships with this drive system have a bonus of +1 to strike and +3 to dodge. **Cost: 50**

Step Seven: FTL Drive

There are three main types of FTL drive in use in the Three Galaxies. The most common and least exotic is the Contra-Gravity Drive. Following that is the Phase Drive and the Rift Drive, used by the Prometheans and the UWW respectively. This list deals specifically with CG Drives due to their reliability and easiness to repair. However, Tracers who take the Promethean Manufacturer automatically get the slightly quicker and more exotic Phase Drive.

1. None: (All) Sadly, many ships are fitted only with sublight drives. For transport between systems, get used to paying ferry fees. **Cost: 0**

2. CG-A: (All) Contra-Gravity Drive model A. Max speed is 1 light year per hour (1.5 if a Promethean made vessel). **Cost: 10**

3. CG-B: (All) Contra-Gravity Drive model B. Max speed is 2 light years per hour (2.5 if a Promethean made vessel). **Cost: 20**

4. CG-C: (All) Contra-Gravity Drive model C. Max speed is 3 light years per hour (3.5 if a Promethean made vessel). **Cost: 30**

5. CG-D: (All) Contra-Gravity Drive model D. Max speed is 4 light years per hour (4.5 if a Promethean made vessel). **Cost: 40**

6. CG-E: (All) Contra-Gravity Drive model E. Max speed is 5 light years per hour (5.2 if a Promethean made vessel). **Cost: 50**

7. CG-F: (All) Contra-Gravity Drive model F. Max speed is 6.5 light years per hour (6.7 if a Promethean made vessel). **Cost: 60**

8. CG-G: (All) Contra-Gravity Drive model G. Max speed is 7-8 light years per hour. **Cost: 70**

Step Eight:

Atmospheric Flight

Not all ships are meant to travel within an atmosphere. A good bounty hunter will often need to land on planet in search of his mark. Because of this, most Tracers favor ships that can travel within an atmosphere. Many classes of ships are not necessarily designed for atmospheric flight, but most can be refitted if needs be.

1. None: (All) Atmospheric flight is for chumps! I'll dock in orbit. **Cost: 0**

2. Rudimentary: (All except Patrol Ship) This is only the most basic atmospheric flight possible. Just enough to get the ship from the landing pad to low orbit. Max speed in an atmosphere is 350 mph (560 km). **Cost: 20**

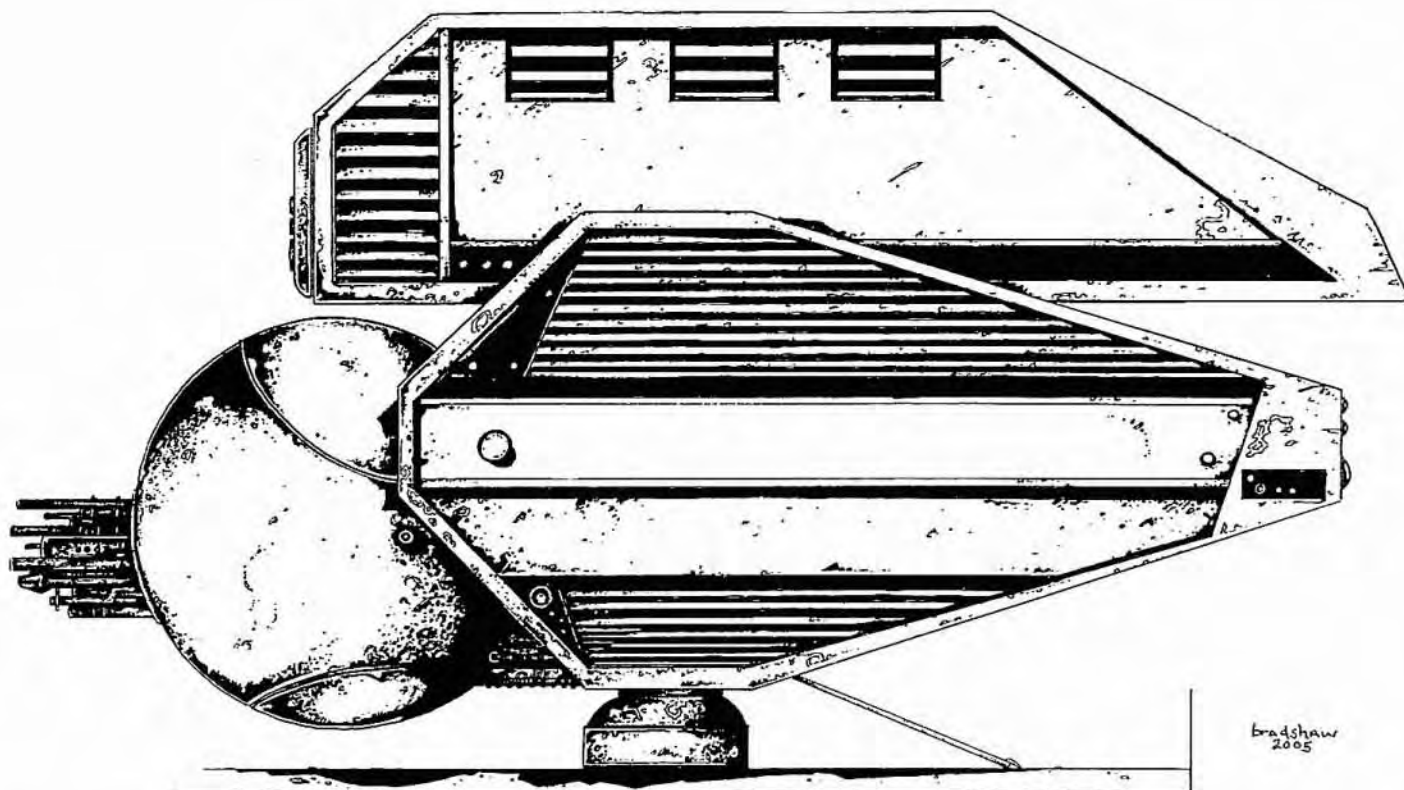
3. Average: (All except Patrol Ship) Ships with this atmospheric flight system have excellent control within an atmosphere. Max speed is Mach 1. **Cost: 30**

4. Exceptional: (All except Patrol Ship and Scout Ship) The best atmospheric Contra-Gravity system available for most shuttle-craft sized vessels. Max speed is Mach 1.5. **Cost: 40**

Step Nine:

Weapon Systems

A Tracer's private vessel is often overloaded with weaponry. However, most shuttles, freighters, and couriers have little to no weaponry at all when built to spec. This being the case, a bounty hunter would be remiss if he didn't trick out his personal ship a



little bit. One can't have the quarry flying a superior vessel. Any combination of the options below may be purchased providing the Tracer has the means. All damage is, of course M.D. unless otherwise noted.

Note: The M.D.C. of the various weapon systems can be found on pages 153 to 155 of *Rifts Phase World*.

1. None: (All) If you're going for non-threatening or unobtrusive, you're there. Your ship has no weapons systems. It has no ability whatsoever to inflict harm on an enemy vessel with the exception of ramming them. Not the soundest choice for a galactic Tracer, but certainly cheap. **Cost:** 0

2. Forward Firing Weapons: (All) A pair of fixed GR, laser, or particle beam cannons, which serve as the ship's primary weapon system. The weapons can be fired singly or can concentrate on an individual target. The bounty hunter also has the option of making the weapons dual-barreled in order to double the firepower of their weapons.

- GR cannons do 1D4x10 if single-barreled and 2D4x10 if double-barreled for a combined total of 2D4x10 or 4D4x10 if both are fired in concert. Their range is 3 miles (4.8 km) in space and 6,000 feet (1828.8 m) in an atmosphere. Their payload is 10,000 rounds which allows 1,000 ten round bursts before needing a reload.
- HI Laser cannons do 1D6x10 if single-barreled and 2D6x10 if double-barreled for a combined total of 2D6x10 or 4D6x10 if both are fired in concert. Their range is 3 miles (4.8 km) in space and one mile (1.6 km) in an atmosphere. Their payload is effectively unlimited.
- Particle beam cannons do 1D6x10+5 if single-barreled and 2D6x10+10 if double-barreled for a combined total of 2D6x10+10 or 4D6x10+20 if both are fired in concert. Their Range is 4 miles (6.4 km) in space and 1.5 miles (2.4 km) in an atmosphere. Their payload is effectively unlimited.

Cost: 20 for GR cannons, 30 for Laser cannons, and 40 for Particle Beam cannons. Multiply the cost by two if the weapons are double-barreled. A set of dual-barreled lasers for instance would cost 60 instead of 30.

3. Point Defense Systems: (All) Point defense weapons are either manned or automated weapon systems (freighters, shuttles, scout ships, and patrol ships have both options, while couriers always have automated weapons) that are used to deter fighters and shoot down missiles. If an automated targeting system is used, all point defense weapons have 3 attacks per melee. GR cannons have a +2 to strike, lasers have a +3 to strike, and missiles have a +2 to strike (also see advanced targeting system in the Miscellaneous Systems category).

- Light GR cannons do 1D4x10 per burst of ten rounds and have a range of 2 miles (3.2 km) in space and 6,000 feet (1828.8 m) in an atmosphere. Payload is 2,000 rounds per cannon. Couriers and Scout ships have three of these cannons, while freighters, patrol ships and shuttles have four.
- HI Laser cannons do 1D6x10 per shot and have a range of 2 miles (3.2 km) in space and 1 mile (1.6 km) in an atmosphere. Payload is effectively unlimited. Couriers and Scout Ships have three of these cannons, while freighters, patrol ships and shuttles have four.
- Mini-missile launchers do 1D6x10 per missile and can fire in volleys of 2, 4, 6, and 10. Their range is 2 miles (3.2 km) in space and 1 mile (1.6 km) in an atmosphere. Payload is 50 per launcher. All ships have two launchers.

Cost: 20 for Light GR cannons, 30 for Light HI Laser cannons, and 40 for mini-missile launchers. (Note that mini-missiles can be mixed with either GR cannons or HI lasers for a total of 60 points. GR cannons and lasers cannot both be purchased however.)

4. Medium-Range Missile Tubes: (All) Medium-range missiles are a good dealer of damage and an excellent way to slow down any fleeing marks who are foolish enough to think they can escape. Medium-range missiles do 2D6x10 per missile and can fire in volleys of two to six. Their range is 50 miles (80 km) and the payload is 10 missiles per tube. The medium-range missile tubes are forward firing only. **Cost: 30**

5. Long-Range Missile Tubes: (All) Similar to the medium-range missiles but with greater punch and much greater range, the long-range missile is a fantastically flexible weapon system. Long-range missiles do 4D6x10 per missile and can fire in volleys of two to six. Their range is 1,200 miles (1,920 km) and the payload is 6 missiles per tube. The long-range missile tubes are forward firing only. **Cost: 40**

6. Phase Cannon: (All) The PC-100 Phase Cannon is a favored weapon for all those who wish to disable a ship without harming it. The Phase Cannon fires through hulls and damages living creatures while leaving inorganic surfaces unharmed. Only shields prove an effective deterrent against Phase Weapons. The Phase Cannon inflicts 3D6 to all living targets within a 30 foot (9.1 m) area, and 1D6x10 to force fields and creatures of over 10 feet (3 m) in height. Damage is S.D.C. or M.D. depending on the creature. All damage against a force field is Mega-Damage. Effective range is 10,000 feet (3,000 m). **Cost: 40** (Cost is reduced to 10 if the Tracer has a Promethean Manufactured vessel.)

7. Cruise Missiles: (All except Courier) There are some times when a Tracer has to pull out all the stops and inflict a serious amount of damage in a short amount of time. Be it some rich target who could afford heavy armor for his getaway craft or a run-in with an over-aggressive frigate captain, many a bounty hunter has found a need for heavy ordnance. The ship is equipped with two cruise missiles which inflict either 2D6x100 for nuclear or 4D6x100 for anti-matter (many Tracers shy away from anti-matter cruise missiles on the grounds that they have been known to be unstable when used on smaller vessels). The missiles can be fired individually or simultaneously and have a range of 1,000 miles (1,600 km). **Cost: 80**

8. Energy Lance: (Kreeghor made Patrol Ships and Freighters only) The Energy Lance is a Kreeghor made HI Laser of impressive power. This style of weapon is the signature weapon of the Kreeghor fleets and its various makes can be found as the main cannons on all of their capital ships. The Energy Lances are more powerful for their size than the standard HI Laser and as such, are a favored weapon of many Tracers. The only problem with the weapon is that it works in sync with a Kreeghor power core and if powered by another source it loses some of its kick. The Energy Lance inflicts 1D4x100 per shot and has a range of 4 miles (6.4 km) in space and 1 mile (1.6 km) in an atmosphere. The payload is effectively unlimited. **Cost: 70**

9. Bomb Bay: (All except Courier and Scout Ship) The ship has a small bomb bay on its underside, perfect for use against ground or space station based targets. All bombs are sensor shielded and point defense systems are at a -5 to strike when targeting the bombs. The bombs themselves are guided by a targeting computer and spotting system that provides a bonus of +1 to strike. The charges are fusion based and damage for the bombs is 5D6x10. Payload is 10. Range is 10 miles (16 km) in space and effectively unlimited (until the charge hits something solid) in an atmosphere. **Cost: 40**

10. Mine Dispenser: (All) The ship has a small number of mines that can be deployed behind it during flight or can be seeded at the area of an ambush. There are three classes of ballistic fusion mines labeled light, medium, and heavy. Light explosive mines inflict 2D6x10, medium explosive mines inflict 4D6x10, and heavy explosive mines inflict 1D4x100, all with a blast radius of forty feet (12.2 m). The fourth type of mine is a shield disruptor. This mine does no damage but it will knock out a force field for 1D4 melee rounds. If the target is using a standard force field, the entire shield is knocked out. If the shield is variable then only the nearest side is knocked out. However, redistributing the M.D.C. of the shield will be ineffective as the shield projector system for that side has been temporarily disabled. Once the effects of the disruption have worn off, the shield projectors reset and raise the shield again at its former level. All four types of mines are normally stationary, however they can be made to move with electromagnetic systems (can reach speeds of 200 mph/320 km and have no bonus to strike) or a small thruster system (can reach speeds of 500 mph/800 km and have a +1 bonus to strike). Moving mines are able to make one pass per melee and so have one attack. Payload for the mine system is 30 light mines, 15 medium mines, 5 heavy mines, or 5 shield disruptors. Mine types may not be mixed due to differing size. Shooting down a mine is difficult due to their small size. All attacks against the mines are at -2 to strike. **Cost: 20** for light mines, 30 for medium mines, 50 for heavy mines or 50 for shield disruptors. Add 10 points to the cost for electromagnetic thrust systems or 20 points for micro thrusters.

11. Retractable Weapon Systems: (All) We all know how important it is to hide your true strength from an opponent. This upgrade can be added to forward firing weapon systems or cruise missiles. It allows the weapons to remain hidden until needed when, with the flick of a switch, they can emerge to punish the Tracer's foes. **Cost: Add 20 points to the cost of Forward Firing Weapons or Cruise Missiles.**

Step Ten: Shields

Shields are without a doubt one of the most important systems in a starship. However, in civilized society many ships are built without shields as they are usually necessitated by military action. Most civilians won't be out hunting for battles, but a Tracer often finds himself in need of defense against touchy marks who don't really wish to come quietly. Thus shields are a luxury that one MUST be able to afford.

1. None: (All) Your ship has no energy shield and is basically defenseless before any second-rate rebel or pirate who manages to dig up a ninety year old fighter. Consider getting an upgrade or changing your occupation to something less dangerous. **Cost: 0**

2. Light Commercial Shields: (All) A light standard shield common throughout the Three Galaxies. The force field is non-variable. Light Commercial Shields have 600 M.D.C. **Cost: 10**

3. Heavy Commercial Shields: (All) A favorite of many small freighter and shuttle pilots around the Three Galaxies. The force field is non-variable. Heavy Commercial Shields have 1200 M.D.C. **Cost: 20**

4. Light Military Shields: (All) A light, variable force field used by a variety of militaries, independent defense forces, and

companies rich enough to pay the premium required for military equipment. Light Military Shields have 1800 M.D.C. (300 M.D.C. per side). **Cost: 40**

5. Heavy Military Shields: (All except Courier) A heavy, variable force field similar to the light force field but with greater protection. Heavy Military Shields have 2400 M.D.C. (400 M.D.C. per side). **Cost: 50**

6. Defensive Phase Field: (All except Freighter) Similar to the Phase Field of the Star Ghost Phase Fighter, the Promethean Phase Field is arguably the best shield money can buy. It doesn't actually add any additional M.D.C., but it does provide one's ship with formidable protection. The ship is put into a state of phase which greatly reduces damage from most forms of attack. All damage (with the exception of phase weapons, magic, and psionics) is divided by ten. The only down side is that when the field is active, only energy weapons can be fired. The Phase Field has a maximum life of 200 charges before it must be shut down for an hour and recharged. Each attack that is blunted by the field depletes one charge. **Cost: 80** (Note that Phase Field must be purchased from the Stealth category in order to gain access to Defensive Phase Field.)

Step Eleven: Armor

Armor is generally only found on military craft but many a Tracer has found that the liberal application of armor to one's vessel is key to survival in what is probably the most dangerous line of work out there. One drawback of armor is that the added weight will often slow the ship's top speed in space and it always has a negative impact on atmospheric flight. Despite this shortcoming however, most Tracers invest in at least some armor for their ships. After all, it's better to be prepared than dead.

1. None: (All) With the exception of military and heavy industrial craft, few ships are built with armor. While most Tracers upgrade the armor of their vessels, there are a select few out there who leave the ship's hull as is. Pray that your target was as stingy with his weapon systems as you were with your armor. **Cost: 0**

2. Light Armor: (All) Light ship armor provides a bonus of 250 M.D.C. to the main body of the ship, +10% M.D.C. to the other areas of the ship, and incurs no speed penalties. It is also unobtrusive and not readily visible to casual observers. **Cost: 20**

3. Medium Armor: (All) Medium armor provides 400 M.D.C. to the main body of the ship and +15% M.D.C. to the other areas but it incurs a slight speed penalty of 10% when flying in an atmosphere. Clad in medium armor, it is fairly obvious to all that the ship's hull has been reinforced. **Cost: 30**

4. Heavy Armor: (All except Courier and Scout Ship) Heavy armor provides a bonus of 650 M.D.C. to the main body of the ship and +20% M.D.C. to the other areas. However, the ship's added mass makes it slower. Decrease sublight speed by 10% and atmospheric speed by 50%. Unless the ship has at least a rank of Average in the Atmospheric Flight category, the addition of heavy armor renders it incapable of travel within an atmosphere. **Cost: 40**

5. Variable Phase Armor: (All except Courier and Scout Ship) A revolutionary invention by Draygon industries, the VPA was originally marketed as a style of personal body armor.

Draygon's canny board of directors, keying in on the VPA's popularity, elected to try it out as a starship armor several years ago. It was an instant hit and sales have been through the roof. VPA utilizes a Phase Field that disperses laser energy, vastly limiting the effectiveness of laser weapons. A sensor analyzes the incoming laser energy and determines its frequency. After the frequency has been found, the Phase Field adjusts to counter the attack. In game terms, the VPA field cuts laser damage in half during the first melee round of combat and then divides it by ten for the remainder of the fight. Additionally, the armor itself grants 600 M.D.C. to the main body of the ship and +20% M.D.C. to the other areas. Decrease max sublight speed by 10% and max atmospheric speed by 50%. Unless the ship has at least a rank of Average in the Atmospheric Flight category, the addition of VPA renders it incapable of travel within an atmosphere. It must be noted that the VPA field will not function if the ship has Phase Field shielding or Stealth systems. **Cost: 50**

Step Twelve: Sensor Systems

Sensor systems are one of the most basic (and necessary) parts of a spaceship. Without sensors, a ship is blind and basically helpless. In a Tracer's line of work, a good sensor system is the key to tracking their prey. Without adequate sensors, you might as well sell your ship and just collect bounties on one planet.

1. Standard Commercial Sensor System: (All) All ships in the Three Galaxies possess a standard sensory system. The sensor package includes radar, sonar, radiation, motion, and gravity wave sensors, which can detect ships as far away as 200,000 miles (320,000 km) if they are traveling at sublight speeds. Ships in FTL can be detected at distances of up to a light year away, due to the disturbances that they make when traveling faster than light. **Cost: 10**

2. Premium SoroCom Sensor System: (All) This is the top of the line sensor package offered by the SoroCom corporation (a giant in the sensory industry) to those who don't want to rely on the bare minimum. It has all the features of the standard sensor system but has a 10% greater range. Additionally, it boasts short-range scanners that give details on the capabilities and attributes of another ship. The sensors record weapons (exterior mounted, not recessed), engine power (based on power core readings), ship's mass, estimated M.D.C., and estimated crew number. When the scanned ship is a recognizable model, the known specs of said model are posted next to the data being gleaned from the target for comparison. **Cost: 20**

3. Military Grade Sensor System: (All) This system, used by the CAF and the TGE, is the top of the line for commonly available sensor systems. It has all the features of the SoroCom sensor system but boasts a 20% bonus instead of 10%. Ships so equipped can pick up incoming craft in normal space at 240,000 miles (384,000 km) and craft traveling FTL at nearly 10 light years. **Cost: 30**

4. CAF Deployable Listening Array: (Scout Ship only) This system is used by CAF scout ships operating between Con-

sortium and Empire space. The array was developed in an attempt to enhance the CAF's asset tracking ability. Specifically, CAF fleet command worried about the massive Doombringer Dreadnaughts, which had roughly the same firepower as an entire fleet. Clearly, a way to track them had to be developed. The listening array is programmed to recognize specific FTL and engine sublight signatures. In this way, the array picks up not just ship class, but individual ships. The CAF has cataloged the signatures of all of the known Doombringers and scores of smaller Kreeghor craft. The array can detect ships moving in FTL up to 25 light years away. Vessels moving in normal space are detectable up to a light year away. In order to use the array, it must be deployed and the ship cannot be traveling faster than Mach 2. Deploying and stowing the array takes three minutes each and it is advised that the ship be stationary whenever this is done. With the purchase of this upgrade, the Tracer automatically receives the Military Grade Sensor System as well. **Cost: 50**

Step Thirteen: Stealth System

All of the greatest smugglers and Tracers are avid students of stealth methods. Surprisingly, most of the best stealth technology is readily available in the marketplace with the Prometheans and Oni boasting the best and most reliable systems in the Three Galaxies. Despite the fact that there are few ships originally built with stealth systems, many ships end up with them anyway. Fortune favors the prepared.

1. None: (All) Stealth is for wimps and Noro. All you need to get the job done is a full magazine of missiles. **Cost: 0**

2. Generic Sensor Shielding: (All) A stealth system provided by one of the less reputable manufacturers in the galaxy. The stealth system reduces the ship's sensor signature and limits the range of an enemy's sensors by 30%. This stealth system does nothing to mislead or baffle an enemy's system once the ship has been detected. An enemy will be able to get all information and statistical data on the ship (class, estimated speed, etc.) with normal accuracy, provided they have the proper sensor systems. **Cost: 10**

3. CAF Sensor Shielding: (All) The CAF spy and courier ships use a sensor shielding that is similar to the commercial model except that it is much much more efficient. The stealth system reduces the ship's sensor signature and limits the range of an enemy's sensors to 3,125 miles (5,000 km) when attempting to detect the Tracer's ship. An enemy vessel may still get statistical data on the ship once they have a positive sensor lock. **Cost: 20**

4. Sensor Baffling Array: (All) This device is used to obscure the functions of close-range systems that estimate the capabilities of the ship they're scanning. With this device, the ship can be scanned but the enemy's sensors will get a false reading. Just what the reading is can be programmed into the Baffling Array, though it is beneficial to keep the lies within reason. **Cost: 20** (This device can be taken in addition to a sensor shielding system.)

5. Oni Phantom Array: (All except Freighter and Patrol Ship) The Oni have always had a fetish for the art of stealth. The Phantom Array is a combination of sensor shielding, baffling arrays, electronic countermeasures, and a light-bending polymer that coats the hull. Tracers who purchase the Phantom Array get the following.

- **Oni Sensor Shielding:** Similar to the CAF Sensor Shielding except more efficient. Opposing ship sensor range is limited to 2,500 miles (4,000 km) when trying to detect the Tracer's ship.
- **Baffling Array:** Just like the one described above.
- **Phantom Bursters:** A series of advanced electronic countermeasures that produce pulses of static, which confuse an enemy's sensor systems. The static bursts have an 80% chance of creating 1D4 duplicates of the Tracer's ship that appear on the enemy's radar. These duplicates last for one melee round but during that time, they are as real as the Tracer's ship (at least according to sensor and targeting software). The PB can be used once every two minutes (eight melee rounds).
- **Star Glow:** A synthetic, light-bending polymer, developed by the Oni, which makes the ship difficult to detect visually. The ship basically becomes a chameleon and there is a 60% chance that it will be visually undetectable by other vessels even at extremely close distances. Human gunners firing at a target using this polymer suffer a penalty of -1 to strike.

Cost: 60

6. Phase Field: (All) The Phase Field is the pinnacle of stealth technology. The Promethean Phase technology is universally revered and is some of the most expensive in the Three Galaxies. When the "Ghost Mode" is activated, the ship is removed from the three dimensional world. The ship becomes invisible and is undetectable by both conventional and magical means. Only Phase Technology can detect ships concealed by this Phase Field. Additionally, the ship is intangible and can move through normal barriers like asteroids, ship hulls, or even stars. Only force fields or Phase Fields are capable of stopping a phased ship. Unfortunately, a phased ship's speed is lowered to 25% of its normal range and the field cannot act in concert with a force field or Defensive Phase Field. Also, none of the weapon systems are usable while the ship is phased. Like the Defensive Phase Field, the Stealth Phase Field runs on a generator with 200 charges, one of which is used whenever the field is turned on. **Cost: 80**

Step Fourteen: Miscellaneous Systems and Features

This step covers some of the odds and ends that a Tracer might want to add to his ship. Most of the upgrades in this section deal with the interior of the ship and many have to do with the transportation of prisoners. It's usually frowned on among bounty hunters to have a target die on the way home because they were improperly cared for.

1. Hidden Compartments: (All) Everyone has things they want to hide. Bounty hunters as a group are certainly no exception to this rule, with all manner of illegal equipment to conceal. With this upgrade, the Tracer's ship has half a dozen compartments in the floor, ceiling, and walls (player's choice). The cargo spaces can hold an additional 600 lbs (270 kg) of cargo and the largest two compartments can accommodate a person. **Cost: 10**

2. Brig: (All except Courier and Patrol Ship) One thing a captured target cannot expect is four-star accommodations. With this upgrade, the Tracer is able to ensure that his mark remains safe and secure within his ship. The brig upgrade allows two fully monitored cells for the Tracer's mark. The two cells each have a human-sized bunk but can uncomfortably accommodate a larger prisoner. The rooms have a surveillance system and both force field and physical doors. **Cost: 20** (In addition to the points spent, the ship loses either two passengers or a half-ton of cargo space.)

3. Stasis Cell: (All) It is a box. That's all. You have no time to clean a brig and no room for it anyway. The stasis cell is a ten-foot (3 m) long cylinder that will accommodate just about any sized alien. Mechanical locks seal the cylinder and a force field adds another level of security. While inside, the captured prisoner is provided with food pellets and a water tube, as well as a small waste hatch. Many Tracers who have room for a brig will get stasis cells instead simply because it's amusing to transport your target to your employer in the same way you'd transport a hamster to your daughter. **Cost: 10**

4. Climate Controlled Brig: (All except Courier and Patrol Ship) Exactly the same as the standard brig except with the addition of a climate control system that can keep some of the Three Galaxies' more fragile species alive while in the Tracer's custody. Atmospheric composition, temperature, humidity, and air pressure can all be controlled from the cockpit or outside the cell block. **Cost: 30**

5. Small Vehicle Bay: (All except Courier and Scout Ship) A customized storage cell in the belly of the vessel, which stores the Tracer's personal ground vehicle. The Tracer can enter his vehicle from inside the ship before the doors open and he's released onto the planet's surface. The bay fits a single size class of vehicle (hovercycle, hovercar, etc.). **Cost: 10**

6. Advanced Targeting Computer: (All) This is military targeting technology used by the CAF and TGE. It's perfect for Tracers who rely heavily on automated point defense guns or missiles. The computer provides the point defense systems with 4 attacks per melee and a bonus of +4 to strike with GR cannons and lasers and +3 with missiles. **Cost: 30**

7. Security System: (All) A Tracer's ship is generally not the best thing for your average thugs to try to steal. The security system features interior and exterior cameras, advanced locking hardware, and security software that indicates sabotage on physical and computer systems. At the Tracer's discretion, traps can be installed in certain key areas of the ship, which vary in effect from incapacitating to lethal. **Cost: 20**

8. Sensor Probes: (All) The Tracer's ship has the ability to deploy sensor probes. The probes travel at Mach 16 and extend the ship's sensor radius as they go. The probe continues to augment the mother ship's sensor range until it's destroyed, reaches 300,000 miles (480,000 km) away from the ship, or runs out of

power (though this rarely happens since the probe has a battery and a solar panel system). Overall, the probe can extend the ship's range by 150%. The system has three probes available. When they're expended, more must be purchased for 30,000 credits apiece. **Cost: 20**

9. Calling Circuit: (All except Patrol Ship) Sometimes even the best Tracers find themselves in a position where it would be useful for their ship to come to them. With the calling circuit, the Tracer has this option. By triggering the call, the ship will automatically power up and move to the Tracer's position at a speed to be determined by the twist of a dial. The range of the call pad is fifty miles (80 km) and the ship's computer will negotiate any obstacle that it detects (though it can't fight while on autopilot). When it gets within one hundred feet (30.5 m) of the Tracer, he or she can choose to bring it in manually, using the call pad. If the Tracer is inside a building or another ship or some other structure that prevents the called ship from reaching him, it will stand by until another order is received. **Cost: 40**

10. Modular Docking Tunnel: (Any) Sometimes it is necessary to transfer cargo and personnel between two vessels without the aid of a space station. There are two main ways to accomplish this. The first is the use of shuttle craft or some other EVA capable vehicle. The second is moving between air locks. This can be a problem however since there is no galactic standard for air lock size that is universally accepted. With the modular docking tunnel, a well equipped Tracer finds himself able to board any vessel he chooses. The tunnel extends out from the air lock of the Tracer's ship. It has 300 M.D.C. and can extend fifty feet (15.2 m) away from the hull. Once it has reached another ship's air lock, it locks on using magnetic locks. For the rare occasions in which the other ship's hull is not metal, the head of the tunnel will use a mechanical locking system that bores in and holds fast. Once the connection is made, the tunnel is pressurized, further strengthening the seal. The ring at the head of the tunnel is flexible and capable of assuming any shape required in order to fit another ship's air lock. This is naturally a very great advantage to spacer and bounty hunter alike. Additionally, the tunnel has six points along its length where it can drop force field bulkheads in the event of a breach, which seal the tunnel automatically with 10 M.D.C. force fields. Not only can the tunnel link up with any air lock configuration in the Three Galaxies, but it can seal against a ship's hull and provide a place to cut through using high-powered laser torches. Truly, the modular tunnel is a valuable innovation for any Tracer. **Cost: 50**

Communications Note

It is noteworthy to point out that there is no category for communications. This is because every ship everywhere has to have a communications system. It is flat out necessary in order to interact with the spacefaring Megaverse. All ships are outfitted with basically the same communications equipment, allowing for instantaneous communication via radio, video, or holographics within system and the sending of long-distance laser transmissions out of system. Basic levels of encryption are available to even the most dense of inhabitants of the Three Galaxies. Both commercial and military communications providers are struggling with the same basic problem, which is instant-

neous long-distance communication. The differences between military and commercial communications are few and basically have to do with slightly better quality.



CS Operation Holy House

By Jason Richards & Kevin Siembieda

Official source and adventure material for
Rifts® World Book 28: Arzno – Vampire Incursion™

The following material was intended as part of the *Arzno World Book*. Space limitations prevented its inclusion, but we are providing it here for your gaming pleasure.

The involvement of the Coalition States engaged in secret operation in the New West adds a third element to the growing conflict in the Southwest, particularly Arizona. The original concepts are Jason Richards, while Kevin Siembieda expanded and added considerably to the final material. Enjoy.

The CS Response to the Vampire Threat in the New West

The Coalition States routinely deal with unimaginable situations and threats to their security. External enemies like the Xiticix, demonic monsters, the Splugorth, and the Federation of Magic constantly plague the Coalition States. Otherworldly threats such as the Vallax aliens (involved in the events leading up to the *Juicer Uprising*) sometimes even compromise the States from within. In short, the Coalition is in no way a stranger to the bizarre, the supernatural or magic. Coalition soldiers somewhere face these dangers every day. The threats are real and constant, and on Rifts Earth the tables of power can turn in no time flat.

For this reason, contrary to public statements and policies, the Coalition States take the rumors and stories of the Vampire Kingdoms very, very seriously. It's easy to dismiss the legends told by uneducated peasants, but enough reports filed by veteran Coalition soldiers have convinced the CS leaders that vampires are real, and a danger to operations in the Southwest. Moreover,

Coalition High Command has run simulations to determine if vampires pose a threat to communities in the North, and the answer was a resounding affirmative. In fact, the computer test model is very similar to the spread of an epidemic disease. Consequently, the Coalition Military intends to contain and isolate the undead in much the same way as one would quarantine a virulent disease. If push comes to shove, the CS is willing to write off the New West, with the exception of Lone Star, holding the line of contamination along the old American States of New Mexico, Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska and the Dakotas. However, the Coalition military would like to see vampires contained along the Mexican border, and ideally, by independent forces like Arzno, manipulated (and perhaps secretly supported) by the CS to battle the undead without direct CS involvement.

At home, in the Coalition States, the propaganda machine condemns the notion that vampires are real and insists they do not exist. However, unofficially, the Coalition leaders and CS Military are very concerned and taking action.

Coalition Special Forces, Dog Packs and ordinary Coalition soldiers are regularly dispatched from the State of Lone Star into the Pecos badlands and the outer border of New Mexico, some in uniform, others undercover, to learn about the undead, pick up on vampire fighting techniques, and learn how the enemy thinks and operates.

Operation Holy House

Since they are the closest to the problem, the Coalition State of Lone Star has been entrusted with the investigation and study of vampires. As noted above, a number of plans and operations are in place, even ranging from capturing select vampire subjects for scientific study and experimentation (similar to Doc Reid's studies), to breeding of super-Dog Packs (ideally immune or resistant to vampire mind control) to hunt and kill the undead.

However, the most aggressive and expansive operation is **Operation Holy House** under the command of *General Kashbrook*.

Operation Holy House calls for a number of elite teams to be assembled and let loose into the Pecos Badlands, New Mexico, Arizona, and even across the Rio Grande into Mexico.

Their mission: To evaluate the vampire threat. To study the enemy and learn their habits and hiding places, their strengths and weaknesses, and their supernatural abilities. To learn the most effective methods, weapons and combat techniques in battling the undead and to engage them in limited combat.

For the last two years, completely unnoticed thanks to events from the Siege on Tolkeen capturing everyone's attention, **CVR Teams** (Coalition Vampire Reconnaissance Teams) and **UDE Squads** (UnDead Extermination Squads) have been sent into the Southwest to observe and deal with the vampire threat. This means observing the enemy (and vampire hunters), studying their behavior, assessing the level of danger, watching for potential enemy escalation, and, when suitable without bringing too much attention to themselves (after all, they are undercover), destroying the undead. Attacks on vampires are not done in an effort to contain or reduce the number of undead, but to get real, firsthand field combat experience.

All of these field teams are part of CS Special Operations, dispatched under deep cover for 10-24 months at a time before returning and reporting back with their findings. For this purpose, top Special Forces operatives are used: *Commandos, Military Specialists, Rangers, Juicers, Coalition Cyborgs, RCSG Scientists, NTSET, Dog Boys* and *psychics* have been assembled for this operation.

Some of these teams are Dog Boys and other Lone Star mutants who claim to have gone rogue or escaped CS slavery. Most humans pretend to be (and are disguised as) mercs, gunfighters, cowboys, adventurers and drifters.



Holy House Team Composition

A typical Holy House “human” team (may be a CVR/Coalition Vampire Reconnaissance Squad or a UDE Squad) includes:

- 1 CS Military Specialist (team leader and strategist).
- 1 CS Ranger (scout & reconnaissance).
- 1 NTSET Officer (advisor in the supernatural)
- 1 RCSG Scientist (advisor, researcher and observer)
- 2 Dog Boys or Psi-Stalkers or Psychics (combat force specializing in the supernatural).
- 2 CS Grunts (combat force).
- 1-2 CS Cyborgs (combat force) or SAMAS or RPA ground.
- 1 CS Juicer or Commando or Special Op (combat force).
- 1 CS Technical Officer: Communications M.O.S. (support).
- 1 CS Technical Officer: Medical M.O.S. (support).

A typical Holy House UDE Squad (UnDead Extermination squad), also known as a *Psi-Field Team (PFT)*, includes:

- 1-2 Psi-Stalkers.
- 2-3 Dog Boys or non-canine Lone Star mutants.
- 2-3 CS Grunts or non-canine Lone Star mutants.
- 1-2 Psychics (any type).
- 1 Military Specialist (team leader).
- 1 Mind Melter (alternate team leader).

Note: All Military Specialists, NTSET, RCSG, and at least half of the other members of a CVR or UDE squad will have the *Vampire Hunter M.O.S.* described elsewhere in this section.

Military Specialists are assigned to lead the team and/or function as a military/anti-vampire strategist. When there are two on the team, one Military Specialist will already have experience in dealing with vampires and serve as the team leader and strategist, while the other is there to watch, listen and learn so he too may become a leader in the secret, CS Anti-Vampire division.

Coalition Rangers function as advance scouts, engage in reconnaissance and typically lead the team through the wilderness.

NTSET Protector. NTSET operatives are not usually combat veterans, and many (like most citizens of the mega-cities and other large CS settlements) have never even left the borders of their city homes. Consequently, they serve as *special operatives* and *advisors* and are given special consideration and protection by the rest of the team.

The NTSET are normally employed by the *Coalition Internal Security Service (ISS)*, a division of paranormal investigators and exterminators dubbed the *Nonhuman Tactical Strike and Eradication Team (NTSET)*. These are highly-trained enforcers of Coalition cities and towns, protecting innocent civilians from monsters and demons that may breach the defensive borders and gain access to the city itself. (Which happens much more often than the Coalition lets on, or there wouldn't be a need for the NTSET.) These fanatical anti-supernatural troopers never leave the cities of the CS, not even to go into the 'Burbs. However, their training and expertise in tracking and eliminating the supernatural (including the occasional vampire) make them ideal for this type of duty, so they are the center around which the Coalition's new anti-vampire teams are assembled.

RCSG Scientists are included as observers and advisors. Those assigned to any vampire related operation are there to observe and study the undead so that the CS may have a greater understanding of the enemy. They are specifically charged with learning everything they can about the undead and finding and exploiting all vampire weaknesses and vulnerabilities. This includes devising anti-vampire weapons, vampire defenses and combat strategies.

Dog Boys are included both for combat support and for their natural psychic ability to “sniff out” supernatural beings, particularly the undead. They are always part of any extermination mission.

Dog Boys can sense the undead with ease, but they are so sensitive to them that a small percentage (5%) have been driven into killing frenzies or exhibit paranoid tendencies when forced to deal with tracking, observing and killing the undead for more than 10 months. As a result, Dog Boys are usually rotated in and out in eight month cycles. Even Psi-Stalkers loathe and fear vampires.

Grunts or Coalition Soldiers provide combat support and firepower. They always participate in extermination operations.

CS Cyborg Strike Troopers offer heavy support and are included in the team because their *full bionic conversion* makes them impervious to vampire conversion and the killing bite, and they are +2 to save vs vampire mind control/charm attacks.

CS Juicers and Power Armor Troops (SAMAS or ground power armor; nothing giant and obvious) provide heavy combat support and human augmentation that can match the heightened speed and strength of vampires. They can also participate in co-

ordinated strikes, stealth missions, sabotage and extermination operations.

Coalition Commandoes, Specialists and Special Forces provide specialized areas of combat expertise and engage in covert operations involving espionage, sabotage, assassination and rescue (of the rest of the team) as well as extra firepower. **Note:** G.M.s may include a member of the elite *Target Acquisition Group/TAG* (optional CS Sniper O.C.C.; see **The Rifter® #23**).

Technical Officers provide communications and medical services, and assist in the general operation of the team and their mission.

Psi-Stalkers and **Dog Boys** are valuable in the tracking and fighting of vampires and other supernatural beings as well as general scouting, reconnaissance and trailblazing in the wilderness.

Psychics are usually reserved for UDE (extermination) squads, but may be members of any CS combat team, especially where **Special Forces** are involved. Any Major Psychic, Mind Melter, Burster, Zapper or nearly any type of psychic character may be part of this team (see **World Book 12: Psyscape** for a larger range of unique and powerful psychics).

CS Mind Melters, Psi-Slayers, Psi-Warriors and Psi-Slingers seem especially violent and brutal when dealing with the undead. It is almost as if some innate instinct earmarks the undead as their natural enemy, and makes these psychics more aggressive when dealing with them.

Each team is handpicked by **General Kashbrook** and given a specific area or region to infiltrate and investigate. Most go in disguised and are given a free hand in how they carry out their mission. The General and her staff trust those who receive the assignment, and allow them to follow any leads and take any action that the team believes credible. They may also go anywhere in the Southwest and Mexico the trail takes them. Most are assigned undercover identities to travel in the wilderness as something other than Coalition soldiers; typically as mercenaries, adventurers, and drifters, sometimes as CS deserters or civilian vampire hunters.

The disguises are done for three reasons: 1) To conceal the Coalition's presence in the New West; 2) to conceal CS anti-vampire operations and studies; and 3) to protect the soldiers from enemies in the field. Most vampire operations take place in areas hostile to the Coalition States. The CS is hated by most D-Bees, practitioners of magic and free thinkers, all of whom are found throughout the New West, as well as enemies such as the Pecos Empire, Cyber-Knights and countless groups of bandits, mercs, Tolkeen fugitives and Coalition-haters. Consequently, if the troops were not in disguise, the local people would not trust or help them, and CS enemies and haters would likely attack, torture and kill them out of revenge or spite.

Communication from these deep insertion squads is infrequent, averaging one status report every three to four weeks, as the opportunity presents itself.

There are some full squads decked out in CS armor, gear, and full regalia, carrying CS credentials and operating in the field. However, they are usually restricted to operations in and around the *State of Lone Star* (Texas, Oklahoma and Arkansas), territory claimed by the CS if not actually controlled by it, and in rescue extraction operations to pull its undercover teams out of a hot zone situation.

The military minds at Lone Star are hoping that the variety of approaches will put the operatives in touch with the widest array of possible sources, and maximize the effectiveness of their anti-vampire investigation and extermination efforts.

Currently, there are approximately 12-24 CVR and UDE Teams operating in the New West at any given time. With the war in Tolkeen at an end, that number is likely to double or even triple by the end of 109 P.A., many coming right off the line from Minnesota.



Coalition Vampire Hunter M.O.S.

Using information made available by interrogations, academic investigations, field reports, and first-hand experience, many members of the CVR and UDE Teams in Operation Holy House learn the Vampire Hunter M.O.S. This includes special indoctrination and instruction in combating the supernatural, in general, and vampires in particular. The result is a unique and highly-refined M.O.S. available to any special advisor participating in *Operation Holy House* and the following O.C.C.s:

- CS Military Specialist
- CS Technical Officer
- CS Commando
- CS Special Forces
- CS RCSG Scientist
- CS Psi-Hound (Dog Boys assigned to NTSET and Operation Holy House only.)
- CS Psi-Stalker (particularly Dog Pack leaders)
- NTSET Protector

Coalition Vampire Hunter M.O.S.

- Lore: Undead/Vampire Hunting (special area of expertise)
- Lore: Demons & Monsters
- Lore: Magic
- Lore: Psychic
- Lore: Religion
- W.P. Handguns
- W.P. Rifles or W.P. Archery

Skill Bonuses: For most applications, the skills offer the base level of knowledge (plus the usual percentage per level of experience) and do not receive any O.C.C. bonuses.

However, each of these skills gets a +10% M.O.S. bonus when specifically dealing with the specific powers, abilities, vulnerabilities, and habits of vampires and the undead. If any of these skills were already listed as O.C.C. Skills, the bonus is in addition to the O.C.C. bonus. (e.g. The NTSET Protector al-

ready has Lore: Demons & Monsters with a bonus of +20% as an O.C.C. Skill. If taking the Vampire Hunter M.O.S., the character receives an additional +10% when dealing with vampires/undead.)

Lore: Undead/Vampire Hunting: A dedicated skill that teaches the habits, powers and abilities of the undead, but focuses on their weaknesses and vulnerabilities, how to identify them, how to locate lairs and hiding places, and how to contain/hold at bay, hurt and destroy them.

Base Skill: 45% +5% per level of experience.

CS Vampire Hunting Teams of Note

Teams assembled under Operation Holy House were sent out all over North America to pursue the rumors of the Vampire Kingdoms. Some teams of note are detailed below.

Team Huddy's Hunters

Huddy's Hunters is a squad of nine elite CS soldiers put on the vampire trail, and one of the few without any NTSET personnel assigned. Led by (8th level) *Military Specialist* Captain James Huddy, the team has taken up the identity of a small, elite team of mercenaries and bandits from the Pecos Empire. The team includes a 6th level Ranger, a 4th level Coalition Juicer, a 5th level CS Cyborg, two 3rd level Grunts, a 7th level RCSG Scientist, a 4th level Communications Officer and a 5th level Major Psychic with Healing and Sensitive psionic powers. Their Psi-Stalker recently perished at the hands of the enemy.

They use precious little Coalition equipment (mostly old-style, when it is used at all), and are equipped with weapons, armor and gear confiscated by the CS from raids on Black Market dealers and bandits in the State of Lone Star prior to the start of Holy House. Their general strategy is to try and learn everything they can about the vampires by interacting directly with other bandits and low-lives of the Pecos Badlands.

Whiskey Squad

A pair of 6th level Psi-Hounds (Howler, a 6th level Bloodhound, and Brawler, a 5th level Boxer), and (Lieutenant) Milton Neidlemier, a 5th level Mind Melter, are one of the unusually small squads operating under deep cover in Arizona.

Code named **Whiskey Squad**, because the Mind Melter pretends to be a whiskey running moonshiner and adventurer, the team's modus operandi is to *join other* bands of mercs, adventurers and drifters. (The player characters, perhaps?) The two Dog Boys pretend to be Free Born mutants whose parents went feral from the CS years ago. Milton has a supply of whiskey, and a still located in a barn he rents in the *Clarkdale Confederacy*. Milton pays a local family to keep the still running and keep him supplied with booze.

Their mission, to make first-hand contact with locals and observe and assess the vampire situation in that part of the country.

To get the most gossip and meet the widest range of people in the area, the trio often fill their hover truck with their moonshine and run a circuit along the *Great Trade Road* and various other towns and settlements throughout Arizona, including *Arzno*, *Tombstone*, *Gallup*, the *Clarkdale Confederacy*, the *Phoenix community*, and *Homely House*. When the trio disappear to report back to the CS, they tell folks they're headed back home to Lone Star to visit family or resupply, or are going off on a sales run, their *TW Sand Ranger Combat Truck* loaded up with booze. Since they "trade" with locals, they may also offer basic M.D.C. weapons, wilderness gear and other trade goods for the Arizona market when they come back from Lone Star.

When the trio is tired of sellin' and tradin' or they have to wait for a new batch or supplies, they are known to "go adventurin' with others to kill the time and have a little fun." It's known the three have no love for vampires and, in fact, they are known by a number of local vampire hunters and some of the mercs (and merchants) at Arzno. The trio have been playing this scam for three years now and are considered notable and trustworthy "local" merchants and personalities in Arizona. The group know about the *Black Swords* and the Bisbee vampires, but know nothing about the Tombstone vampires. However, they have an uneasy feeling that "something" isn't quite right in Tombstone, because the place is more closed off to strangers than ever, and won't even let them in town as a result of trumped up charges against one of the Dog Boys (Howler).



Team Able

Team Able is a squad of the elite **1st Texas Rangers Battalion** based out of Lone Star. Their job is to sweep the State of Lone Star (Texas; particularly southern Texas along the Mexican Border), and the borders of New Mexico in search of trouble with undead.

The team leader is 9th level Ranger, Lieutenant Clive McCaffrey. The rest of the team is composed of five CS Rangers (5th to 7th level), one 6th level NTSET Protector, one 5th level NTSET Psi-Hound/Dog Boy, one 6th level NTSET Psi-Stalker, a pair of 5th level SAMAS pilots, and one 8th level RCGS Scientist.

The team operates as Coalition Regular Army in Dead Boy armor and CS gear, and sweeps Lone Star, New Mexico, and southern Colorado on foot or in two CS Skull Patrol (Hover) Cars.

Their mission is to report unusual and/or increased vampire activity. They also investigate claims of vampire mind control, enslavement, cattle mutilation or slaughter, and all manner of suspected vampire activity. Whenever a situation seems manageable, Team Able will track down and exterminate individual vampires and small bands of 2-8 undead causing trouble in an area.

Although Team Able is a discreet operation, since they are regular army, they can call for *backup* and extraction if things should get too hot for them to deal with. A squad (8-12) to platoon of (40-60) troops transported by *Death's Head Transport* or *Death Bringer APC* can respond and be at their side within *40-80 minutes* at most locations around the Lone Star Compound based in Northern Texas. That means pretty much *anywhere* in **Oklahoma, New Mexico, Kansas and southern Colorado** or **western Arkansas**. A wing of (6-10) Smiling Jack or Standard SAMAS can reach a hot zone 200 miles (320 km) away within 2D6+30 minutes, 400 miles (640 km) away in 3D6+50 minutes, while a wing of Super-SAMAS, Rocket Bikes or Sky Cycles can arrive at a hot zone 200 miles (320 km) away in 2D6+22 minutes. SAMAS and small fliers can mobilize faster and attain speeds of 400-500 mph (640 to 800 km).

Yankee Team

The brash young lieutenant glowed as he smiled at the large interactive table map in front of him. Across the room at the other station the colonel mumbled and swore under his breath as he looked at his troop positions with dismay. The annual war games in the City of Iron brought out the best small-unit strategists in the Coalition military, and it had all come down to two men.

Colonel Thompson finally came to a decision as he punched his remaining troops' movements into the keypad and the images projected onto the table began to shift in real time. The old man didn't have a lot left after an hour of missteps, bad luck and pitfalls. He had been textbook-perfect in his execution, but unfortunately for him, Lieutenant Stevens wasn't playing by the same rules. The colonel's new move seemed reasonable – safe – under the circumstances. He was playing the odds, which is why it was destined to fail.

Lt. Stevens tapped a few keys and watched the display on the table. His troops had suffered their share of losses over the simulated campaign, but had fared better than anyone. He'd thrown out the rule book long ago and took chances. Chances that paid off, as the holograms representing his forces illustrated as they quickly eliminated those of Colonel Thompson. There was polite applause from those on the colonel's side of the room, then a quick exit. The old man would not be happy.

Lieutenant Stevens sat back in his chair, closed his eyes, and grinned as he imagined how he was going to spend his two week pass in Chi-Town.

It's not that Lieutenant John Stevens is a particularly good student or an experienced veteran. He's just a genius, plain and simple. Human behavior and response are just transparent to him, and he is somehow always able to see that response and behavior and counter it two moves before his opponent.

It is this eye for strategy and tactics that makes the young lieutenant such an excellent field combatant and platoon leader in Coalition Special Forces. In his short career at Iron Heart, he made a name for himself as a premier tactician and soldier. In fact, three months before General Holmes' trek through Xiticix territory to win the day against the Xiticix, young Lt. Stevens had conducted a similar maneuver in a military simulation. Ironically, Lt. Stevens' approach was ruled to be impossible, he lost all his troops in the simulation and he was criticized for being rash and careless. Three months later, General Holmes would prove the strategy to be a winner, although the cost in lives was astronomical.

After his stunning, out-of-nowhere victory in the annual City of Iron war simulations tournament, Lt. Stevens caught the eye of military leaders in other Coalition States. One of these was General Kashbrook, who has tapped him for heading up the next phase of *Operation Holy House*. After their first meeting, the general was immediately impressed and offered him the assignment. To sweeten the deal, she offered him leadership of a team in the field – Detachment Commander – a level of autonomy that is rare for junior officers. He accepted and set off into the Western Wilderness.

While a military strategist of his caliber would normally be kept out of the field and locked away in simulations to develop new strategies and tactics, General Kashbrook decided she needed the Lieutenant to completely understand the enemy before he could work on countermeasures. This was, after all, a supernatural force that functioned differently from *living* beings. If they were to accurately assess the danger and develop an effective response, there could be no margin for error. Her chief strategist needed to see how vampires behaved and learn to think like them.

Out in the plains of the New West, Lieutenant Stevens has the opportunity to stretch his wings. Everything is his way, or the highway, and he is determined to be the one who develops a plan to push the vampires out of the old US and maybe even develop a plan to take the battle to their strongholds in Mexico. With only a few months under his belt, he is convinced that the undead are a greater threat than most people realize and must be contained. In fact, his initial findings suggest that a capable vampire leader could establish a stronghold and build an army in Arizona, New Mexico or along the northern border of Mexico

without anyone being the wiser. From that starting point the vampire leader could take over the southwestern United States, push up into the Midwest, take over everything west of Missouri and Idaho, and wait until he could raise enough troops to threaten the CS stranglehold over the Domain of Man. Although conventional wisdom and 98% of all other military minds looking at the vampire problem insist this could never happen, because vampires do not cooperate in large, organized groups the size of a conquering army, Lt. Stevens insists it is only a matter of time before it takes place. He wonders how it hasn't happened already, but believes such a scenario is possible. If such a vampire general should rise among the undead, the lieutenant warns that he must be stopped before getting a solid footing, even if it means committing more than 50% of the Coalition's military resources to the cause. Only General Kashbrook has taken the initial analysis to heart. All others have written the idea off as impossible.

The lieutenant likes Captain Bryant, the *Second in Command* who handles the troops. Although the two men only met on this assignment, they work well together, as if they've known each other for years. In short, Lt. Stevens is the brains of the operation. He calls the shots and develops mission plans and strategies, while Captain Bryant is the *facilitator* who makes sure the lieutenant's orders are carried out. Lt. Stevens is respectful of Captain Bryant's years of duty in the field and he appreciates having such a warhorse serving under him. For one thing, not everybody is as understanding or professional as the good Captain Bryant. There are some, like advisor, NTSET Captain Duran, who resent having a young, inexperienced officer such as him in command. Captain Bryant has been able to keep the underlying resentment and subsequent hostilities to a minimum. It's a gesture the young lieutenant greatly appreciates. As a result, Lt. Stevens tries to stay out of Capt. Bryant's way when it comes to commanding and disciplining the troops.

As Team Commander, Lt. Stevens has authority over everyone on his team. This has created some level of disgruntlement among a few of the men. Lt. Stevens tries to ignore it and let Capt. Bryant deal with such undercurrents. The lieutenant sees his personal objective as scrutinizing the enemy, learning everything possible – to get inside the enemy's skin, think like him, feel like him, understand his every motive – so that he can develop a full range of strategies, tactics and counter-maneuvers to contain and repel vampire incursions, and ultimately, to develop a plan to destroy them. All he wants from his men is their support and trust. He (and Captain Bryant) finds it regrettable that NTSET Captain Duran is at odds with him, and constantly challenging and questioning the young lieutenant's judgement, missions and course of action. The trouble is the arrogant Captain Duran simply can't accept someone younger and less experienced than he in a position of authority over him. Especially someone of lower rank. Capt. Duran stops short of outright insubordination, but he has come close.

In time, Lt. Stevens hopes he can win over Capt. Duran, just as he has Capt. Bryant and most of the team. In fact, the lieutenant and Capt. Bryant operate on the level of *equals* and function more like co-commanders than anything else. Stevens bows to the captain's judgment on matters of lore and the study of the supernatural, and trusts the Dog Boy, Hank's supernatural senses more so even than Captain Duran. This alone has won

over most of the men, but Capt. Duran won't be a team player or give his gripes a rest. He hates being an "advisor" to a hot shot punk and a grunt in Captain Bryant.

Code named **Yankee Team**, First Lieutenant John Stevens has led his squad into *Arizona*, where he fears the vampires would have the greatest chance to establish a foothold. Although 1st Lt. Stevens is not the team leader (that responsibility belongs to Captain Dustin Bryant), the captain and most everyone else take his advice seriously, and treat him as an advisor and second in command. The NTSET officer is the only one on the team who challenges and condemns every theory the lad comes up with. The two are at each other's throats constantly, and their bickering divides the team. (The NTSET agent takes a more traditional look and time-proven approach to vampires, their behavior and methods of dealing with the monsters. He doesn't believe they could ever be an invading army or threaten people, en masse, in the Domain of Man.) Their research and actions are likely to bring them into contact with the mercenaries and mages of *Arzno* as well as *General Xavier Stuart's vampire army* at Fort Tombstone. (Possibly the Bisbee vampires as well.)

The stats for Team Yankee follow:

First Lieutenant John Stevens

Real Name: Marcus John Stevens.

Rank: 1st Lieutenant, Advisor and Second in Command.

Race: Human.

Alignment: Scrupulous; totally loyal to the CS, but likes to defy convention and enjoys the fame and power that his skills bring him as a military strategist.

Attributes: I.Q. 27, M.E. 17, M.A. 11, P.S. 12, P.P. 14, P.E. 17, P.B. 11, Spd 20.

Height: 6 feet (1.8 m), **Weight:** 187 lbs (84 kg).

Age: 24

Hit Points: 29. **S.D.C.:** 37.

P.P.E.: 9. **I.S.P.:** Not applicable.

Experience Level: 4th level CS Special Forces.

Description: Lieutenant Stevens has the look of a young Coalition officer. He is clean cut with short, blonde hair and a crisp salute. Only a couple of years out of the small military academy in Iron Heart, he has yet to develop any bad habits or lose any of his good ones. He exercises daily and always makes sure his gear is in tip-top shape. His boots shine as brightly as his smile, or his résumé.

The young lieutenant is a competent leader who cares about the men under his charge, and never flaunts his authority over his senior. Nor does he make rash decisions that put his men in danger. However, he is always several steps ahead of everyone, and men like Captain Duran who can't bring themselves to trust "the kid," are constantly questioning his choices and authority. However, Lt. Stevens is used to this and takes it all in stride. He tries to explain his point when appropriate, without losing his temper, and ignores his critics and the jokes directed at him, knowing that sooner or later, he'll be proven right and have the last laugh.

Lt. Stevens dislikes Captain Duran and hopes the arrogant loudmouth does not do anything to jeopardize his Yankee



Team or get himself killed. Even at his young age, the lieutenant has learned to never assume he knows everything or is always right, that's a good way to get oneself killed.

Disposition: Stevens does everything in an intelligent, organized manner, at least to his way of thinking. He's not afraid to question or defy convention, thinks quick on his feet, and uses his analytical mind to get a good picture of a situation (or enemy). From there he can respond accordingly. He is determined and full of a cold, deliberate drive that makes him truly a sight to behold on the battlefield. Personally, he is very open and friendly, and enjoys life. There is nothing he likes better than a good challenge, be it a complex military objective, learning some new skill, or winning over a pretty young lady.

Skills of Note:

O.C.C. Skills: Mathematics: Basic (93%), Camouflage (63%), Radio: Basic (93%), Electronic Countermeasures (78%), Language: American (98%), Language: Euro (98%), Language: Spanish (65%), Literacy: American 79%, and Literacy: Spanish (45%) Land Navigation (71%), Intelligence (67%), Streetwise (61%), Lore: Demons & Monsters (63%), Pilot: Automobile (89%), Pilot: Robots & Power Armor (88%), Pilot: Robot Combat Elite: Special Forces SAMAS, Wilderness Survival (73%), Climbing (83%/73%), Prowl (68%), Running, Boxing, and Parachuting (78%).

Espionage M.O.S.: Detect Ambush (73%), Detect Concealment (68%), Interrogation Techniques (73%), and Tracking (68%).

Secondary Skills: Athletics, Swimming (68%), Pilot: Hover Craft (Ground, 68%), Anthropology (48%), Computer Operation (68%), and History (focusing on military history, 58%).

Weapon Proficiencies: W.P. Energy Pistol, W.P. Energy Rifle, W.P. Knife, W.P. Rifle and Sniper.

Special Abilities: None, other than elite special training.

Psionics: None.

Magic Knowledge: Lore only.

Combat Training: Hand to Hand: Commando and Boxing.

Attacks Per Melee: Six.

Bonuses Modifiers: +2 to initiative, +1 to strike, +5 to parry and dodge, +5 to pull punch, +5 to roll with punch/fall/impact, and +1 to disarm, +13% to all skills (already included), and +3 to save vs Horror Factor.

Other Combat Info: Paired weapons, body flip/throw, body block/tackle, backward sweep kick, karate punch/strike, karate kick, and knockout/stun on an unmodified roll of 20.

Weapons of Note: Prior to his reassignment, a friend in a military supply depot granted Lieutenant Stevens access to a number of caches of confiscated and exotic weaponry. From these, he selected a few he felt were well-suited to his new assignment. Other weaponry was issued by Lone Star prior to Yankee Team's departure.

TX-16 Pump Rifle: Mega-Damage: 4D6 M.D. single shot for the standard explosive shell. Lieutenant Stevens has gotten hold of 32 rare U-Rounds from the NGR via his con-

tact in the Iron Heart supply dump. How they came into his possession, nobody is saying. U-Rounds do 1D6 M.D. and prevent supernatural creatures from regenerating the damage. See **Rifts® World Book Five: Triax and the NGR™** or the **Rifts® Game Master Guide** for details. Each shot counts as one melee attack. Range: 1,600 feet (488 m). Payload: 16 rounds. Extra Ammo: 640 explosive rounds for the TX-16, plus 32 U-Rounds. Extra explosive ammunition for this weapon will be difficult to come by in the wilderness, and the U-Rounds are totally unavailable.

NG-56 Light Ion Pistol: Mega-Damage: 2D6 M.D. Rate of Fire: each blast counts as one melee attack. Range: 400 feet (122 m). Payload: 12 shots with a long E-Clip; has an extra 12 long E-Clips for the NG-56.

Vibro-Knife: Mega-Damage: 1D6 M.D.; hand to hand combat.

Water Pistol: Damage: None to mortal beings, 2D6 Hit Point damage to vampires, per shot. Rate of Fire: Each blast counts as one melee attack. Range: 40 feet (12.2 m). Payload: A thin hose connects the pistol to a hip water container with 60 blasts of water. Note: The water pistol is made of light plastic and ceramic materials that make it durable and shock resistant (100 S.D.C. or one M.D. point.)

Matched pair of Silver Knives (2): For use against the undead. Damage: 1D6 S.D.C. damage against most mortal opponents, double damage against vampires.

Pair of weighted Wooden Throwing Knives (2): Damage: 1D4+1 against normal foes, but 2D4+2 damage against Vampires. One is concealed in each of his boots. Effective Throwing Range: 100 feet (30.5 m).

Wooden Club (1): A wooden club similar to those used by warriors of ancient, pre-Rifts Polynesia. Damage: 1D6+2 S.D.C. damage against most mortal opponents, double damage against vampires. Easy to conceal.

Other Anti-Vampire Gear: A dozen wooden stakes and a mallet, a 12 inch (30 cm) wooden cross (lightweight), a small (about 3 inch/7.6 cm) silver cross worn around his neck, a pocket compact mirror and two cloves of garlic. Note: Lt. Stevens insists that all the members of his team carry similar items, including the silver knives, but not the wooden knives or club.

Body Armor: NG "Buffalo" Riding Armor (EBA). M.D.C.: Main Body: 65, Arms: 30 each, Legs: 28 each, and Head/Helmet: 40 M.D.C. Penalties: Minus 5% to climb, -10% to prowl, swim, acrobatics, and similar physical skills/performances.

Other Equipment: Three months' supply of rations, plenty of fresh water, plus iodine for purifying water in the wilderness, a handheld computer with educational software on vampires and other menaces to be expected in the New West, passive light amplification binoculars, infrared goggles, infrared flashlight, note pad, two pens and a mechanical pencil, digital camera (with four discs capable of holding 2000 images each), 300 feet (91.4 m) of high-test nylon cord, sunglasses, air filter, and some personal gear.

Vehicle: Yankee Team operates a Northern Gun Rolling Thunder Combat Truck, with 155 Main Body M.D.C., maximum speed of 166 mph (265 km), and a 525 mile (840 km) range.

Weapons include an NG-202 rail gun (1D4x10 M.D. per burst) and twin particle beam cannons (1D6x10 M.D. from a dual blast). The mine deployment system has been removed to make room for more cargo space. See **Rifts® World Book 10: Juicer Uprising™** on page 84 for more details on this vehicle.

Cybernetics: Clock calendar, gyro-compass, radar detector, oxygen storage cell, and a multi-optic eye with nightvision.

Captain Dustin Bryant

Captain Bryant has had a good career and a solid record. He's a career soldier and a strong leader who knows when to listen and when to take charge. He trusts his gut and those who have proven themselves in the field. Other than that, he hasn't had a particularly illustrious career. He's a grunt with Captain's bars who knows how to get the job done, and that's exactly why he was chosen to help lead Team Yankee. General Kashbrook knew Captain Bryant wouldn't let his ego get in the way of the job, and that once he got to know the young, First Lieutenant Stevens, he'd trust him and work with him. More importantly, he'd make sure the rest of the team fell in line and followed the commands and unconventional approach of Lt. Stevens.

Indeed, Captain Bryant has come to respect and appreciate Lt. Stevens. He trusts his judgement completely, even when it seems counter-intuitive. The two men work almost as one, with Lt. Stevens coming up with strategies, plans and mission objectives, and Captain Bryant serving as the facilitator. This, of course, rubs NTSET Captain Duran the wrong way and has resulted in a certain amount of friction in the group. However, there can be no denying that Captain Bryant is the alpha male in the group who keeps the grousing in check and the mission on track. Everyone, even and ornery and vindictive Captain Duran, respects and obeys Captain Dustin Bryant.

Capt. Dustin Bryant

Real Name: Dustin Scott Bryant, Jr.

Rank: Captain.

Race: Human.

Alignment: Scrupulous and fiercely loyal to the Coalition States and the preservation of humanity against inhuman foes.

Attributes: I.Q. 15, M.E. 14, M.A. 18, P.S. 19, P.P. 17, P.E. 12, P.B. 11, Spd 25.

Height: 6 feet (1.8 m). **Weight**: 200 lbs (90 kg).

Age: 32

Hit Points: 42. **S.D.C.**: 46.

P.P.E.: 2. **I.S.P.**: 62.

Experience Level: 8th level CS Military Specialist with plenty of field experience, most recently in the clash with Free Quebec and combat duty on the border of Xiticix Territory.

Experience Level: 9th level Bandit: Highwayman.

Description: An nice looking human male, with kind eyes. He has light brown hair cut short on the top and buzzed to stubble on the sides. He often looks like he slept in his armor (probably because he has), but carries himself with an aura of authority.

Disposition: Captain Bryant is a born commander who is more at home in the field of battle than in the conference room. He believes all good commanders should lead by example and be in the trenches with their men. He commands with a firm but fair hand, cares about his men (and they for him), is honest, respected and trusted.

Captain Bryant believes Operation Holy House, and their role in it, is of paramount importance. When he started this mission he had questions concerning the urgency of the mission and the young man who was effectively the head of the entire operation. However, in just the short three months they have been in the field, the Captain has developed an entirely new perspective on the "vampire problem" and recognizes First Lieutenant Stevens as a true genius.

He dislikes NTSET Captain Duran – not just the man himself, but has always had a healthy disdain for any officer who thinks he's too smart to listen to the men in his command – and wishes the man would wise up or shut up. As it is, Captain Bryant finds himself constantly at odds with the NTSET Captain and caught in the middle of Duran's vendetta against Lt. Stevens. Thankfully, most of the other men have come to realize that Captain Duran is a jerk and a bully best to be kept at an arm's length, and his comments to be viewed with considerable discretion.

Skills of Note:

O.C.C. Skills: Language: American (98%), Language: Spanish (94%), Literacy: American (35%), Radio: Basic (95%), Camouflage (80%), Computer Operation (90%), Demolitions (98%), Demolitions Disposal (95%), Electronic Countermeasures (90%), Find Contraband (72%), Intelligence (78%), Math: Basic (98%), Pilot: Ground Hovercraft (98%), Pilot: Hovercycles, Skycycles & Rocket bikes (94%), Pilot: Robots & Power Armor (65%), Pilot: Robot Combat Basic, Sensory Equipment (60%) Land Navigation (83%), Streetwise (62%), Prowl (70%), Surveillance (75%), Weapon Systems (70%) and Wilderness Survival (80%).

Secondary Skills: First Aid (85%), Gambling (Standard, 70%), Lore: Demons & Monsters (65%), Climbing (70%/60%), and Basic Mechanics (35%).

Weapon Proficiencies: W.P. Energy Pistol, W.P. Energy Rifle, W.P. Heavy M.D. Weapons, W.P. Rifle, and W.P. Knife at 9th level of experience, W.P. Blunt at 7th level of experience, and W.P. Handguns at 3rd level of experience.

Psionics: Minor psychic with the powers of Intuitive Combat (10) and See Aura (6); needs a 12 or higher to save vs psionic attacks.

I.S.P.: 62

Magic Knowledge: None.

Combat Training: Hand to Hand: Expert at 9th level of experience, and Power Armor Combat: Basic at 4th level of experience.

Attacks Per Melee: Six.

Bonuses Modifiers: +1 to initiative, +3 to strike, +4 to parry and dodge, +4 to damage, +5 to pull punch, +4 to roll with punch/fall/impact, and +3 to disarm.

Other Combat Info: Karate punch, karate kick, critical strike on an unmodified roll of 18, 19, or 20, paired weapons, back-hand strike, and body flip/throw.

Additional Modifiers (Power Armor Combat): +1 attack per melee, +1 to strike, +1 to parry, +1 to dodge, +1 to roll with impact, and +4 to save vs Horror Factor. Sensor bonuses listed with the PA-06A SAMAS give an additional +2 to strike and +1 to dodge in ranged combat only.

Other Combat Info (Power Armor Combat): Body block/tackle/ram (1D4 M.D. plus 50% chance of knocking opponent down; counts as two attacks), restrained punch (1D4 M.D.), punch (1D6 M.D.), kick (2D4 M.D.).

Weapons of Note: Captain Bryant has access to basically anything in the Lone Star armory, and uses whatever he feels best suits the job at hand. For most of his operations, this means demolitions for the execution of ambushes, and a combination of laser pulse rifles and heavy weapons to bring a conflict to a swift resolution. Listed below are some of his favorites.

TW Grenades (Carpet of Adhesion): When thrown, these grenades explode, spraying an 8 foot (2.4 m) radius with a magic goo, adhering all caught in the blast to the ground, their vehicles, etc. Those who successfully make a save versus magic (12 or better) are stuck for 2D6 melee rounds; those who fail to save are stuck for 30 melee rounds.

TW Grenades (Flash Freeze): This device encases everything within a 10 foot (3 m) radius in ice, doing 1D4 M.D. as well as trapping those inside in a suspended animation. The ice lasts 3D6 minutes (half that in the daytime in the desert) and has 50 M.D.C. Attempts to blast the ice have a 50% chance of harming those inside as well.

TW Fireburst Rifle: When not in his SAMAS, Capt. Bryant loves to use the Fireburst, but only has enough I.S.P. to recharge it a few times. **Mega-Damage:** 3D6+6 M.D. per single blast. 3D6+6 x2 M.D. for a three round pulse or x3 for a five round pulse. A spray (wild shot) inflicts 3D6+6 M.D. to 1D6 targets. **Rate of Fire:** Single shot, or a three- or five-round burst. **Range:** 1,200 feet (366 m). **Payload:** 20 single shots. 18 P.P.E. or 36 I.S.P. recharges the weapon with 10 shots.

Wilk's 237 "Backup": Carried as a standard side arm, he even carries this pistol in a holster on the utility belt he wears outside of his power armor, just in case he needs more firepower. **Mega-Damage:** 3D6 M.D. per single blast or 6D6 per double blast. **Rate of Fire:** Standard. **Range:** 500 feet (152 m). **Payload:** 16 single shots with a standard E-Clip, or 8 double pulse shots. Has 6 extra standard E-Clips for the Wilk's 237. **Bonus:** +2 bonus to strike on an aimed shot because of the light weight and superior balance.

C-40R Coalition SAMAS Rail Gun: Loaded with conventional or silver coated rounds as the situation demands. This weapon is used when the Captain is in his repainted and modified SAMAS power armor. **Mega-Damage:** 1D4x10 M.D. for a burst, or 1D4 M.D. single shot. **Rate of Fire:** Each burst or single shot counts as one melee attack. **Range:** 4,000 feet (1,219 m). **Payload:** 2,000 round drum (good for 50 bursts).

Body Armor: When going into combat, the Captain prefers to wear his PA-06A "Old Style" SAMAS, which he says he acquired during his early days as a bandit. **M.D.C.:** Shoulder Wings: 30 each, Main Rear Jets: 60 each, Main Body: 250, Arms: 50 each, Legs: 100 each, and Head/Helmet: 70 M.D.C.

Speed: 60 mph (96 km) running, 300 mph (480 km) flying. See the **Rifts® Ultimate Edition**, page 240, for the full write-up.

If the SAMAS is inappropriate for the job, or for just everyday wear, he has NG "Maverick" Riding Armor with the optional helmet. **M.D.C.:** Main Body: 36, Arms: 12 each, Legs: 16 each, and Head/Helmet: 35 **M.D.C. Penalties:** None; excellent mobility.

Anti-Vampire Gear: The same as Lt. Stevens: A dozen wooden stakes and a mallet, a 12 inch (30 cm) wooden cross (lightweight), a small (about 3 inch/7.6 cm) silver cross worn around his neck, a pocket compact mirror and two cloves of garlic. **Plus** a TW Water Cannon that can be hooked to the SAMAS power armor in place of the rail gun, and a TW Stake Driver. **Note:** See the new *World Book 28: Arzno – Vampire Incursion* for details on the TW weapons.

Other Gear: Basic adventuring stuff, backpack, bedroll, He also usually carries a pup tent, a small field radio, high-powered passive nightsight binoculars, a multi-optic band, infrared goggles, infrared flashlight, note pad, two pens, a pair of sunglasses, two canteens, and some personal gear.

Vehicle: In addition to his SAMAS (see above), he has a fondness for his NG-300 "Speedster" Hovercycle with its double-barrel heavy laser. Top speed is 220 mph (352 km) and the electric engine has a range of 800 miles (1,280 km). The laser does 2D6 M.D. per single shot, or 4D6 M.D. for a simultaneous, double blast; payload is 40 shots. The hovercycle handles like a dream, giving the rider a +10% bonus on his pilot skill, +1 initiative, and +1 to dodge. See page 54 of **Rifts® World Book 13: Lone Star** for more details on the vehicle.

Cybernetics: Gyro-compass and clock calendar only.

Captain William Duran

NTSET Protector and

Anti-Supernatural Specialist

When 35 year old Capt. Duran heard that he was being assigned to "field duty" outside of his home city of Chi-Town, he was shocked. When he heard that he was to be in the field hunting and studying vampires for at least a year, probably longer, he balked. Then, when he heard he was to be under the command of a 24 year old 1st Lieutenant, he very nearly walked out of his unit commander's office in a white-hot rage. Operation Holy House was not Capt. Duran's idea of perfect duty.

Duran initially objected to his inclusion in Holy House for a number of reasons. First and foremost, he was on the fast track to a significant promotion within NTSET and a command of his own. Duty for a year or more beyond the walls of Chi-Town would do nothing but help other younger officers pass him by and leave him at the end of the line after the operation ended and he returned home. Furthermore, going from a junior command position to *advisor* for a Special Forces hot shot from outside the glorious State of Chi-Town (the damn City of Iron, of all places!) would make him an instant laughingstock all across the ISS.

Three things changed his mind. First, he was told he could pick his own Psi-Hound or Psi-Stalker NTSET agent from anywhere in Chi-Town to serve as the team's vampire tracker. Secondly, it was explained to him that while First Lieutenant Stevens would maintain strategic command and operational control, he would be the team's chief advisor when it came to dealing with the undead and the supernatural. He was handpicked for the this assignment due to his excellent service in Chi-Town. And finally, he was told that this project is being watched very closely by Coalition High Command, and that he would become a Major upon his return from the field deployment and given his own command. Captain Duran was, in fact, one of the only officers assigned to the detail without an interview by General Kashbrook and her staff because he came so highly recommended. This at least partially satisfied his ego, and more than satisfied his ambitions. He agreed to be reassigned, temporarily, to Lone Star.

Captain Duran chose his favorite Dog Boy, Hank, to come along with him. Hank was the best he had, was completely loyal, and if push came to shove with Lt. Stevens, Captain Duran trusted that Hank would be at his side (and watch his back).

Captain Duran was chosen for this high profile team because he has had actual combat and extermination experience with a Secondary Vampire and two of its undead servants. The creature had penetrated Chi-Town defenses, created two subservient Wild Vampires, and all three stalked the lower levels of the city until Duran and Hank the Dog Boy put an end to it. He was also selected because he is one of the best in the ISS.

Duran went through the paces of the obligatory prep courses in the lore and legends of vampires, but believes he already knows everything there is to know about vampires. Consequently, the arrogant Captain challenges, questions and mocks every unconventional observation and speculation made by Lieutenant Stevens. The power-hungry Captain Duran has decided that Stevens is an overrated punk still wet behind his ears and makes a point of belittling him for every mistake he may make. In fact, Captain Duran is constantly poking fun at Lt. Stevens, laughing at his theories, and arguing about his choices. For him, this assignment is the fast track to his own city command, so he hates Lt. Stevens for taking them on a wild goose chase to Arizona, so far from home. He just wants to finish his tour of duty and go home in one piece. In short, when it comes to Lieutenant Stevens, Duran is a jackass.

Secretly, Captain Duran finds the prospect of hunting vampires on their own turf to an exciting one, and promises to add another shining paragraph to his already-impressive résumé.

Captain William Duran

Real Name: William Henry Duran.

Rank: Captain of the NTSET City ISS Division.

Race: Human.

Alignment: Anarchist, believes in the Coalition only slightly more than his own importance in it.

Attributes: I.Q. 13, M.E. 18, M.A. 10, P.S. 12, P.P. 14, P.E. 13, P.B. 14, Spd 20.

Height: 5 feet, 10 inches (1.75 m). **Weight:** 182 lbs (81.9 kg).

Age: 35 (almost 36)

Hit Points: 39. **S.D.C.:** 42.

P.P.E.: 8. **I.S.P.:** Not applicable.

Experience Level: 7th level NTSET Protector.

Description: Captain Duran is an elite NTSET officer. Unlike a line soldier whose life and limb depends on discipline and order, this Protector can let things slide a bit and get away with it. He always seems to have exactly one day's worth of stubble on his face and his dark red hair is clean, but disheveled and starting to gray at the temples. Still, his uniforms are always up to par and when compared with most NTSET officers of his experience, he looks sharp.

Disposition: Captain Duran is devoted to himself and his own career 110%. He has shunned everything else in his life for the sake of moving up the ladder at NTSET. He works extremely hard and virtually non-stop to achieve his own personal and professional goals. That said, he does genuinely hate the demons and monsters that plague Chi-Town and humanity, and loves his fellow citizens. Whether this dedication to mankind comes from a desire to excel at his job, or vice versa, is hard to tell.

Duran enjoys being in a position of authority and prefers to be giving the orders, not taking them. He is an arrogant, overconfident snob who thinks he is the end all and be all when it comes to dealing with supernatural menaces. He does know his stuff, and has had his share of combat experience dealing with mutants, rogue psychics and supernatural monsters, including one run-in with a vampire. Sadly, he is one of those individuals who thinks his socks don't stink and that he knows everything. Consequently, he firmly hangs onto the popular, but false notion that most vampires are savage monsters incapable of working together in groups larger than a dozen or two, that vampires are creatures of instinct not intellect, and that the undead cannot survive in northern climates where there is ample rain and snowfall. Thus, vampires have no desire to live in the region known as the Domain of Man and are not a large scale threat to the CS.

He hates Lt. Stevens, resents being under "the kid's" command and makes a point of questioning or complaining about everything the lieutenant says, and would harass and bully Lt. Stevens 24/7 if not for the intervention and calming influence of Captain Bryant.

Skills of Note:

O.C.C. Skills: Language: American (98%), Land Navigation (70%), Mathematics: Basic (95%), Radio: Basic (95%), Surveillance Systems (75%), Tracking (70%), Intelligence (66%), Streetwise (64%), Pilot: Automobile (82%), Read Sensory Equipment (70%), Climbing (80%/70%), and Running.

Vampire Hunter M.O.S.: Lore: Demons & Monsters (75%), Lore: Magic (75%), Lore: Psychics & Psionics (55%), and Lore: Religion (60%). Add +15% to each of these skills when dealing with various aspects of vampires.

Other Assorted O.C.C. Related Skills: Wilderness Survival (60%), Paramedic (55%), Pilot: Hover Craft (Ground, 70%), Prowl (59%), and Literacy: American (70%).

Secondary Skills: Cook (55%), Camouflage (50%), Athletics, Computer Operation (70%), and Language: Spanish (50%).

Weapon Proficiencies: W.P. Handguns, W.P. Energy Pistol, W.P. Energy Rifle, and W.P. Blunt, all at 7th level of experience. W.P. Knife at 3rd level of experience.

Special Abilities: None.

Psionics: Lore only.

Magic Knowledge: Lore only.

Combat Training: Hand to Hand: Martial Arts.

Attacks Per Melee: Five.

Bonuses: +3 to initiative, +2 to strike, +4 to parry and dodge, +3 to pull punch, +4 to roll with punch/fall/impact, +1 to entangle, +2 to disarm, +2 to save vs psionics/insanity, +2 to save vs possession, +1 to save vs magical illusions and mind control, +1 to save vs magic, and +7 to save vs Horror Factor.

Other Combat Info: Body flip/throw, all hand strikes, all foot strikes, including leap kick, critical strike on an unmodified roll of 18, 19, or 20, paired weapons, and all holds.

Weapons of Note:

C-14 "Fire Breather" Assault Rifle and Grenade Launcher: Mega-Damage: 3D6 M.D. for the laser, or 2D6 M.D. to a blast area of 12 feet (3.6 m) for the grenade. Each shot counts as one melee attack. Range: 2,000 feet (610 m) for the laser, 1,200 feet (365 m) for the grenade launcher. Payload: 20 blasts for the laser, 12 for the grenade launcher. Has an extra 12 E-Clips for the C-14.

10mm Automatic Pistol: S.D.C. Damage: 4D6 S.D.C. Silver rounds may be used versus vampires and do 4D6 Hit Point damage. Rate of Fire: Single shot, burst, or wild. Range: 135 feet (41 m). Payload: 14 shots per clip, but has an extra 144 standard rounds and 288 silver rounds for the pistol.

Neural Mace with Silver Studs: This is a standard-issue Neural Mace like those typically used by the ISS, except the mace head has been fixed with two dozen silver studs and bands to allow it to have some limited use against vampires. Vampires are not affected by the stun effects of the mace. Damage: 4D4 Hit Points to vampires, or 2D4 S.D.C. plus stun damage to humans. Produces a non-lethal stun that makes the victim -8 to strike, parry, and dodge plus reduces the character's speed and number of attacks per melee round by half for 2D4 melee rounds. Additional stuns cause additional damage. See the description of the Neural Mace in the **Rifts® Ultimate Edition** on page 259 for details. Length: 2 feet (0.6 m).

Other Equipment: A dozen wooden stakes and a mallet, a large silver cross, an extra canteen of water, backpack, air filter, radio, audio recorder, pen and notebook, sunglasses and other basic gear.

Body Armor: CA-1 Old-Style "Dead Boy" EBA painted desert camouflage. Knock-offs of the old-style Coalition armor are commonplace throughout the New West. M.D.C.: Main Body: 80, Arms: 35 each, Legs: 50 each, and Head/Helmet: 50 M.D.C. Penalties: -10% to climb, -25% to prowl, swim, acrobatics, and similar physical skills/performances.

Vehicle: See Lieutenant Stevens' information above for details on the Northern Gun Rolling Thunder Combat Truck used by Yankee Team.

Cybernetics: Clock calendar and gyro-compass.

Corporal Hank

NTSET Psi-Hound and Yankee Team Tracker

Hank is a hulking Elkhound built to track and combat the supernatural. He relishes the hunt and bringing down his prey, and serves with pride to keep humanity safe. More than just his genetically programmed instincts to love and protect humans, Hank genuinely enjoys being included by them and feels fortunate to have ended up at NTSET, where there is such great acceptance and appreciation of Dog Boys. Hank especially likes Captain Duran, who he has had a chance to work with several times in the past, including the tracking and extermination of a trio of vampires in Chi-Town. The captain never forgets to praise and thank the Psi-Hounds for the work they do together, and genuinely seems to mourn when a Dog Boy is lost in battle. Captain Duran treats mutant canines as if they are real people, and that inspires Hank to push himself to the very limit for the man.

While he loves NTSET, prior to his assignment to Holy House, Hank sometimes wished he could leave the city for a while and see the world. Chi-Town can be a pretty harsh place, where low-levelers disdain Dog Boys as an incarnation of an oppressive upper class, and the lofty elite residents view the canines as pets and servants designed to protect them. Although NTSET Dog Boys diligently track down and destroy nests of monsters and supernatural creatures operating in the alleys and sewers of the mega-city, some of the citizens dismiss their work and few have any idea how vital the job of the Dog Boys is to the safety of any megalopolis. Thus, the big cities are not a paradise for NTSET or ISS Dog Boys. In fact, it can be a very lonely place and a hollow existence. It is humans like Captain Duran who show genuine appreciation, approval, and loyalty that makes it all worth doing to the Dog Packs assigned to ISS duty.

Hank was beside himself with excitement when Captain Bryant told him that they were heading off to Lone Star and wilderness duty for a temporary reassignment. While he didn't know the details of the assignment or how long they would be gone, Hank was thrilled. Here was an opportunity of a lifetime, to see some of the outside world and spend time alongside one of his favorite human partners. When he eventually learned they would be hunting vampires through the wilds of the New West, Hank slavered with excitement.

Three months into their tour of duty, Hank is a little confused and frustrated. He can't understand why Capt. Duran hates Lieutenant Stevens so much, and he feels torn between the two. The young officer treats the Elkhound as well or better than Captain Duran, he has a keen understanding of the enemy, shows him (Hank) his complete and total trust, and seems to be a capable leader. Perhaps needless to say, Hank feels like he should support his long-time friend and associate, Capt. Duran, but the captain's undisguised contempt and constant needling of the lieutenant really bug Hank. Part of it is the whole pack mentality. To Hank, Lieutenant Stevens *is* the pack leader, and he does a good job as leader. That means everyone else, including Capt. Duran, should follow the leader without question, yet Capt. Duran is constantly challenging Lt. Stevens' authority and causing dissension in the pack/team. Worse, Capt. Duran is becoming increasingly terse with Corporal Hank, because the Dog Boy

has shown support and loyalty to the lieutenant. This confuses and disturbs Hank all the more, because he happens to agree with Lt. Stevens' choices, while Capt. Duran disagrees with almost everything out of spite. This has opened Hank's eyes about his friend, and disappoints him. Even the Dog Boy realizes that Capt. Duran is used to having Hank around with a whole Dog Pack, leading them on hunts and handing out their orders. In a group where the captain is not the Alpha male, he is a disruptive force and a whiner. Furthermore, Lieutenant Stevens regularly asks Hank his opinion. At first, this caught the Dog Boy off guard, but Hank has found that he likes being involved in the discussion rather than just handed orders. He tries to restrain himself since he senses that his newfound outspokenness doesn't sit easy with Captain Duran, but when Duran isn't present, Cpl. Hank speaks freely and is thrilled to be a true part of the team.

For the most part, Hank feels important, needed and is having the time of his life. Every turn seems to offer a new experience or opportunity. He's hoping that Yankee Team makes a big impact in the secret war against the vampires. He may get his wish sooner than he can imagine if Yankee Team stumbles across or joins the battle against the Tombstone vampire army.

Corporal Hank

Real Name: Hank DG-S49657.

Rank: Corporal.

Race: Mutant Humanoid Canine (Elkhound).

Alignment: Principled; totally dedicated to the protection of mankind and the Coalition States.

Attributes: I.Q. 11, M.E. 19, M.A. 11, P.S. 19, P.P. 14, P.E. 17, P.B. 19, Spd 44.

Height: 6 feet, 5 inches (2.0 m). **Weight:** 259 lbs (117 kg).

Age: 6 years.

Hit Points: 35. **S.D.C.:** 55.

P.P.E.: 8. **I.S.P.:** 100.

Experience Level: 5th level NTSET Psi-Hound.

Description: Hank is a huge Elkhound and very canine in his appearance and behavior. He has thick, fluffy fur all over his body that is mostly gray, but black on his chest, back, muzzle, and his pointed ears. He likes to move about on all fours when tracking or running, and he bays and growls a great deal. He had a tail, but it was bobbed when he was a pup, leaving only a small stub.

Disposition: Hank is a gentle giant, totally committed to helping, serving and protecting humanity. He is extremely friendly to kind humans and children, but is deeply hurt by those who talk down to or ridicule him. That's another reason he is so disappointed in his old squad leader, Capt. Duran, because that's exactly what Duran is doing to Lt. Stevens, and it's unnecessary and inappropriate conduct. Hank despises vampires and evil supernatural creatures that he has encountered as a NTSET agent in Chi-Town. He's not trusting or fond of most D-Bees, either. He loves nothing more than to hunt and destroy the monsters that plague mankind.

Skills of Note:

O.C.C. Skills: Language: American (98%), Land Navigation (72%), Mathematics: Basic (85%), Radio: Basic (80%), First

Aid (60%), Find Contraband (40%), General Repair and Maintenance (50%), Surveillance (60%), Tracking (60%), Intelligence (58%), Streetwise (46%), Climbing (70%/60%), and Running.

Vampire Hunter M.O.S.: Lore: Vampires (85%), Lore: Demons & Monsters (65%), Lore: Magic (65%), Lore: Psychics & Psionics (45%), and Lore: Religion (50%).

Secondary Skills: Military Etiquette (50%), Body Building & Weight Lifting, Prowl (47%), and Hunting.

Weapon Proficiencies: W.P. Energy Pistol, W.P. Energy Rifle, W.P. Blunt, W.P. Knife, and W.P. Paired Weapons, all at 5th level of experience. W.P. Handguns at 2nd level of experience.

Special Abilities: Sense psychic and magical energy (60%) at a range of 70 feet (21.3 m) if the psychic or practitioner of magic is not using his or her powers, or 600 feet (183 m) if powers are in use, recognize psychic scent (26%/16%) at a range of 70 feet (21.3 m), sense supernatural beings (70%), track supernatural beings by scent (45%), superior sense of smell and other senses. See **Rifts® Ultimate Edition** or **Rifts® World Book 13: Lone Star™** for all of the details on these powers.

Penalties: Psi-Hounds are vulnerable to ley line energy, which makes sensing or tracking psychics, magic users, or supernatural creatures impossible. Other psychic powers are enhanced, as usual. For more information, see **Rifts® Ultimate Edition** or **Rifts® World Book 13: Lone Star™**.

Psionics: Master Psychic, requires a 10 to save vs psionics. Empathy (4), See Aura (6), Sense Evil (2), Sense Magic (3), and Sixth Sense (2). I.S.P.: 100.

Magic Knowledge: Lore only. Can sense and “sniff out” magic, as per Special Abilities, above.

Combat Training: Hand to Hand: Martial Arts.

Attacks Per Melee: Five.

Bonuses: +5 to initiative, +3 to strike, +4 to parry and dodge, +3 to pull punch, +3 to roll with punch/fall/impact, +1 to entangle, +4 to damage, +4 to save vs psionics, +2 to save vs insanity, +4 to save vs possession, +2 to save vs mind control, +5% to save vs coma/death, +1 to save vs poison, +2 to save vs magic, +1 to save vs magic illusion, +2 to save vs disease, 45% charm/impress, and +4 to save vs Horror Factor.

Other Combat Info: Body flip/throw, all hand strikes, all foot strikes including leap kick, and bite (3D6 damage).

Weapons of Note:

NG-LG6 Northern Gun Laser Rifle & Grenade Launcher: Mega-Damage: 3D6 M.D. per laser blast or 4D6 M.D. per grenade. Each shot counts as one melee attack. Range: 1,600 feet (488 m) for the laser, 1,100 feet (335 m) for the grenade launcher. Payload: 70 blasts for the laser with the power pack, 4 for the grenade launcher. The NG-LG6 has an extra power pack, plus 6 spare standard E-Clips (10 shots each).

Silver Forearm Claws (2): Vambraces built into each arm of Hank’s armor hide three retractable wicked, hooked blades used for slashing at close range. Hit Point Damage: 3D6 S.D.C./Hit Point damage against mortal opponents or

6D6 Hit Points to vampires! Length: 18 inches (0.5 m) extended.

Body Armor: MI “Vaqueros” EBA painted in grey and yellow, with a customized helmet to fit the Psi-Hound’s head. M.D.C.: Main Body: 90, Arms: 32 each, Legs: 45 each, and Head/Helmet: 45 M.D.C. Penalties: -20% to climb, prowl, swim, acrobatics, and similar physical skills/performances.

Other Equipment: A dozen wooden stakes and a mallet, a large silver cross, plus the general group equipment listed in Lieutenant Stevens’ information previously.

Vehicle: See Lieutenant Stevens’ information for details on the Northern Gun Rolling Thunder Combat Truck.

Cybernetics: None; avoided, since bionics and cybernetics interfere with psychic powers.

Other Members of Team Yankee

Lt. Burton “Cowboy” Kentazi – 8th level Technical Officer: Medical; Principled alignment.

Sgt. Douglas “D-Man” Marks – 7th level Coalition Cyborg Strike Trooper; Scrupulous alignment, has served under Captain Bryant for six years.

Sgt. Walter “Chuck” Charles – 7th level Technical Officer: Communications; Scrupulous alignment, has served under Captain Bryant for six years.

Sgt. Darrel “Boom Boom” Mika – 7th level Technical Officer: Weapons & Demolitions; Anarchist alignment.

Sgt. Arnie Kristovich – 9th level RCSI Scientist, Anarchist alignment; specializes in the study of vampires.

Sgt. Zeus “Mech” Aruma – 5th level SAMAS/RPA Pilot, Unprincipled alignment.

Sgt. Clark B. Brandon – 6th level Commando, Unprincipled alignment; has served under Captain Bryant for four years.

Sgt. Lynol “Hound Dog” Rodriguez – 9th level Ranger, Anarchist alignment.

Sgt. Wilson “Torch” Martello – 8th level Burster, Unprincipled alignment.

Some Notable Creatures of Arizona

Cliff Diver Lizard

These incredibly bizarre creatures are both vexing and hilarious to watch as one travels through the canyons of the New West. These cold-blooded wall crawlers eat bugs and small animals when they can get them, but feed primarily on nests of eggs built in the nooks and crannies of the canyon walls by birds and snakes. They simply climb the canyon walls, feeding as they go along. When they get tired or full, they take over an abandoned nest or sleep just hanging there on the sheer stone by their claws.

In a most bizarre evolutionary twist, the Cliff Diver can really only climb straight up, straying no more than 15 degrees right or left from vertical or else its long, needle-like claws are unable to support its weight. It simply climbs up and up until it reaches the top. There, it has a dilemma. It can no longer go up, and is unable to climb down, so it simply . . . jumps!

As the Cliff Diver releases its claws and gives a small push with its stubby legs, the lizard free-falls back down into the canyon, across toward the other wall. From under its tail, it unfolds a sort of rudder that guides the critter toward the opposite canyon wall. As it approaches, it twists its body around with a quick wag of its tail, and does what is effectively a belly-flop onto the side of a cliff, extending its claws and holding on for dear life. If the ravine is too wide or too short to make it across, the Cliff Diver Lizard simply flops belly-first onto the ground. You'd think a drop of several thousand feet would kill it, but it does not. Instead, the lizard lays there for a moment and then slowly walks toward the nearest cliff wall to begin its slow trek up the wall again. The process is truly a sight to behold, and can't really be believed unless witnessed first-hand.

Cliff Divers are only useful for one thing (aside from entertainment value), and that is their meat. While their hides are tough and their outer layer of protective muscle thick and hard, their innards are soft and delicious. The heart, liver, kidneys, and the brain are all delicacies of tribal people and enjoyed by many folks who live in and around the canyons of Arizona and Utah. The meat is usually cured and served as a sort of sausage stuffed into the stomach and intestines. The hide is occasionally used to make small M.D.C. purses and pouches, but is too thick and stiff for most applications. The Cliff Diver's bones are also sometimes used to make Mega-Damage arrowheads, needles and small tools by some Native Americans (requires an M.D. laser torch or other Mega-Damage tool to fashion them).

Alignment: Animal; considered Anarchist.

Attributes: I.Q. 1D4 (very low animal intelligence), M.E. 1D4+2, M.A. 1D4+4, P.S. 1D6+4, P.E. 1D6+10, P.P. 1D4+4, P.B. 1D4+2, Spd 1D4+4 climbing or walking, up to roughly 45 mph (72 km) in a free fall.

M.D.C.: P.E. attribute number +3D4.

Horror Factor: Not applicable.

Size: Average of 3 feet (0.9 m) long, plus a 2 foot (0.6 m) long tail.

Weight: Average of 50-70 lbs (22.5 to 31.5 kg).

Average Life Span: 5 to 6 years.

P.P.E.: 1D4+1

Natural Abilities: Climbing (85%), rappelling (75%), swimming (35%), nightvision 200 feet (61 m), directional rudder located in the tail, and a Mega-Damage body designed to resist impacts.

Attacks per Melee: Two.

Damage: 2D6 S.D.C. from a bite, or 2D4 S.D.C./H.P. damage from a claw attack.

Bonuses: +4 to roll with impact, +3 to save vs poison and is impervious to sun and heat.

Penalties: After a fall of greater than 100 feet (30.5 m), the Cliff Diver is momentarily stunned. Reduce speed and at-

tacks per melee by half for 1D4 melee rounds, +1 melee round of recovery time for each additional 100 feet (6.1 m) of the fall. The creature's M.D.C. body takes no physical damage from falls less than 1,000 feet (305 m), and takes 1D4 M.D. for each 1000 feet (305 m) beyond that.

Magic: None.

Psionics: None.

Allies: None. Tends to ignore their own kind except when mating or squabbling over the same food.

Enemies: Humanoid hunters kill the Cliff Divers for their meat, and they are sometimes hunted for their M.D.C. hide and bones.

Value: A single creature, killed and cleaned, is worth an average of 20-30 credits in the New West for meat and bones, but can net triple that amount back east, where the critter is considered exotic.

Habitat: The cliffs, canyons, and ravines of the New West.

Cliff Eagle

One of the most majestic and beautiful creatures on Rifts Earth, the Cliff Eagle (also known as the Giant Eagle) makes its nest in the cliff walls of canyons throughout northern Arizona and southern Utah. How many of these incredible animals exist, nobody knows for sure, but they are believed to be as few as one hundred.

The Cliff Eagle is huge, with a standing height of 15-20 feet (4.6 to 6.1 m) and a wingspan of 50-60 feet (15.2 to 18.3 m). It has red and bronze-colored feathers, and gigantic talons capable of breaking the back of a dinosaur or shredding Mega-Damage power armor to scrap. The giant bird can easily fly 100-500 miles (160 to 800 km) to hunt, though most stay within 300 miles (480 km) of their nest.

The first travelers to head west after the Great Cataclysm were greeted by the sight of these giant birds, soaring high above them hunting dinosaurs, wild horses, and buffalo. While they would occasionally swoop down on a lone humanoid, the giant eagles preferred large prey, including combative targets such as Leatherwing, Desert Sleepers, Grigleapers, Ostrosaurus, Raptors, large serpents and even young Rhino-Buffalo and Tri-Tops. Since humans have begun to settle parts of the New West, Cliff Eagles have a hard time resisting easy prey in the form of livestock, especially cattle and horses. This is just part of their predatory nature. Fortunately, the great birds tend to target larger animals for prey, and there are so many dinosaurs out west that they prey mostly on them rather than people or their livestock. Leatherwing are a much more common threat to livestock in the New West than the Cliff Eagle.

Cliff Eagles look very much like the North American Golden Eagle, and may, in fact, be some kind of mutations of the indigenous species. However such a dramatic change into such an immense size and Mega-Damage hide must certainly have its roots in magic or dimensional energies to create such a mutant in a short span of 200-300 years. This has led some scholars and scientist to believe that though the Cliff Eagle may look very similar to the indigenous Golden Eagle, it is really a creature from another world. Perhaps even an alternate Earth where ev-

everything is giant. Another theory is that it is a creature of magic tied to the Traditionalist Indian belief of *totem*. And another is that someone (or something) deliberately altered the genes of the Golden Eagle to create this monstrous version. (Could Gene-Splicers, commonly sighted in Africa and Europe, have once visited North America?) Regardless of the giant eagle's origin, the creatures are revered by most Native Americans, and sometimes used in their sacred fetishes, and are coveted as riding animals by the Simvan Monster Riders.

Cliff Eagles roost in hollows and caves in the walls of the great canyons of the Southwest, and sometimes the buttes as well, where they constantly compete with the hundreds of thousands of Leatherwing that flood the skies along the Rocky Mountains. Cliff Eagles always fly solo, and do not seem to ever mate or bear young, though there are both male and female Cliff Eagles, and they must mate to perpetuate the species. There are believed to be no more than 100 of these creatures, though the nest locations of only 12 are known to local scientists. It is really impossible to tell how many exist on Rifts Earth simply because there is so much unexplored territory. The one thing everyone agrees on is that the creatures are rare and beautiful gems of the Southwest.

Cliff Eagle – Also known as the Giant Eagle and Giant Desert Eagle.

Alignment: Animal; considered Unprincipled.

Attributes: I.Q. 1D4+4; high animal intelligence. M.E. 1D4+8, M.A. 1D4+16, P.S. 1D6+17 (Supernatural), P.P. 1D4+14, P.E. 1D4+14, P.B. 1D6+19, Spd 1D4+6 walking/hopping on the ground, but is 1D4x10+100 flying (75-95 mph/120 to 152 km). Maximum speed is doubled when diving and in short bursts of speed lasting 2D4 minutes. Supernatural P.S. and P.E.

Mega-Damage: 2D4x10+100

Horror/Awe Factor: 12

Size: 15-20 feet (4.6 to 6.1 m) tall; wingspan averaging 50-60 feet (15.2 to 18.3 m).

Weight: 300-600 lbs (135 to 270 kg).

Average Life Span: Unknown. Many scientists believe the 30-50 year range should be right for a creature such as this. However, based on personal observations and legend, the Cliff Eagle may live for 100-200 years, and many, including Traditionalist Native Americans, believe the creature to be from the spirit world and immortal unless slain.

P.P.E.: 4D6

Natural Abilities: Fly, exceptional vision (5 miles/8 km), perfect nightvision, prowl in flight/silent flight 55% (+15% when gliding), and track by sight 85%. Supernatural P.S. and P.E.

Attacks per Melee: Five.

Damage: Bite: 3D6 M.D.

Beak Peck or Head Butt: 1D4 M.D.

Talons/Clawed Feet (raking attack/restrained) 2D6+1 M.D.

Talons/Clawed Feet (full strength): 5D6 M.D.

Dive Attacks with Talons do double damage or 1D6x10 M.D., but count as two attacks. Dives are often surprise at-

tacks (with a successful Prowl roll), and generally the first attack of the melee round.

Bonuses (in addition to possible attribute bonuses): +2 on initiative, +6 to strike, +2 to disarm, +3 to pull punch (restrained damage from any attack), +4 to dodge while in the air, +2 to save vs poison and disease, +5 to save vs Horror Factor, +4 to save vs possession and mind control.

No combat bonuses on land.

Magic: None, but its feathers are sometimes used in the creation of rare Native American, Legendary Fetishes.

1. Lord of the Eagles Fetish (Legendary): The bearer of this rare and powerful Indian talisman has nearly complete control over all birds, which seem to accept the bearer as master and willingly obey his or her every whim. The item itself must be made from two of the *primary feathers* of the Cliff Eagle (the longest ones at the end of the wing), which are roughly six feet (1.8 m) long. The feathers are adorned with beads and ritualistically painted, and must be carried to be invoked. When activated, all manner of normal, mortal birds will respond to the user's call, understand his words, and the user can understand the language of the birds. This means the Lord of the Eagles can command 2D6+10 birds per level of his experience.

The willing avian minions can be told to attack a foe, scout ahead and report back, hunt for food, search for a missing person, seek out water, or do any other task that is *in their nature*. This means that a sparrow will not hunt rabbits and a buzzard won't play the piano; the birds only do what is natural and comfortable for them to do. This power may be activated only once per day, but lasts for 30 minutes per level of the user's experience.

Supernatural and bird-like creatures like Thunderbirds, Drakin, Plumed Serpents, etc. are not affected, nor are Cliff Eagles, although they will never attack a person with this fetish and will let said individual ride upon their back once, any time from sunrise to sunset, and take him anywhere, but only that person bearing the legendary fetish. The ride stops the moment the rider gets off the great bird, or at sunset or upon reaching the designated destination, whichever comes first. A Cliff Eagle cannot be summoned, however, so the prospective rider must come across the creature on his own.

2. Spirit Eagle Weapon Fetish (Legendary Eagle Tomahawk): This weapon is made from one of the Cliff Eagle's talons (or beak), with the hooked appendage functioning as the blade/chopping part of the Tomahawk. Three small or medium-sized feathers are attached to the handle. **Damage:** 4D6 S.D.C. against mortal opponents, 4D6 M.D. against mortal Mega-Damage opponents (including people in M.D.C. body armor), and 1D6x10 M.D. against *supernatural creatures* and *spirits* (including Entities). Does 1D6x10 Hit Point damage against vampires and other types of undead; double damage to Vampire Intelligences. **Range:** Can be thrown accurately up to 300 feet (91.5 m); the character's usual bonuses apply.

3. Metamorphosis Great Eagle Fetish (Legendary): This fetish is a headdress, scarf or mask made of or covered with at least 20 down feathers and one small, regular feather of the Cliff Eagle.

When the user calls upon its magic, he turns into a flock of blackbirds or quail; 20 of them to be precise. The flock cannot separate, they must all fly together, and the Metamorphosis Great Eagle Fetish seems to vanish along with the user's clothing and possessions – all reappear when the character turns back into a man. Special abilities while a flock of birds: The character can fly 30 mph (48 km), can look in 20 different directions, but must remain clustered in a tight flock; has keen, eagle eyesight, and may fly, walk or hang around unrecognized by most mortal and supernatural beings as anything but a flock of birds.

Hit Points and S.D.C. are divided equally among each bird in the flock. If 1-4 of the birds are killed, the character feels no pain and has no wound, but loses those H.P./S.D.C. when he reforms. Killing 5 or more instantly causes the character to transform into his human shape, minus any damage inflicted.

Attacking as a flock does only 3D6 S.D.C./Hit Point damage and the character gets no bonuses to attack. However, the character is +6 to dodge as a flock.

Can NOT speak in bird form, nor cast spells, nor use psionics. The character cannot use this ability at night, and automatically resumes human form when the sun sets.

Psionics: None.

Allies: No allies, but the Cliff Eagles only attack humanoids when they are threatened or attacked first. Prefers to prey on large animals and monsters.

Enemies: Prey upon dinosaurs and large animals. Compete heavily with Leatherwing for resources and perches in the canyons; they are natural enemies, with the Cliff Eagle usually winning in a fight.

Value: None, except to Native Americans and maybe Simvan, but neither would deliberately kill the great bird for food, sport or spite. Its feathers are sometimes sought for the making of fetishes, as above.

Habitat: Cliff Eagles are known to exist in very small numbers in the canyons of northern Arizona and southern Utah.

Dart Fly

Flying among the herds of dinosaurs and other large creatures of the Southwest are the infamous and deadly Dart Flies. A Dart Fly is similar to a mosquito, complete with a long, pointed "needle-nose" that it uses to suck the blood out of any animal. At about the size of a robin, these large insects have the unique ability to pierce the Mega-Damage hides of most creatures wandering the New West.

Multi-faceted eyes easily see the body heat of both warm-blooded creatures and cold-blooded animals. Prior to an attack, the Dart Fly makes an unmistakable, high-pitched humming sound as it hovers and uses a unique sort of vocal chord to bring its iron-like needle into resonance, creating an energy field similar to that of a Vibro-Blade. With a burst of speed it then fires itself toward its prey like a dart, piercing the tough hide of its Mega-Damage prey or the soft flesh of S.D.C. creatures.

Animals and monsters with furry, leathery, or scale-covered hides like Tri-Tops, Duckbilled Honkers, Rhino Buffalo, and

others are all potential victims of the Dart Fly. Creatures with *armored hides* such as the Ankylosaurus, Mammoth Brontodon, and even humanoids clad in full, modern Mega-Damage armor are far too tough to pierce. Not all body armor is protective, however. Armor made from M.D.C. leather, soft plastics, or partial armor can be overcome by the Dart Fly's attack. Likewise, if the fly smells blood and thinks it can bypass the armor (strike in a soft joint or breach in the armor), it will attack.

Once a successful attack is made, the Dart Fly injects a toxin that prevents clotting as it sucks the blood of the prey. A hungry Dart Fly can take half a pint of blood in a single sitting, approximately one melee round. While this amount is nothing for the larger animals, to a human it can be very harmful. The sudden loss of blood can make a human very woozy, and the attack of several Dart Flies can kill unprepared adventurers. The giant bugs can cause serious injury or death, so they are often killed on sight.

Dart Fly also known as the Armored Fly.

Alignment: Animal; considered Anarchist.

Attributes: I.Q. 1D4; simple animal intelligence. M.E. 1D4+2, M.A. 1D4, P.S. 1D4+4, P.P. 1D6+14, P.E. 1D4+10, P.B. 1D4, Spd 3D6+60 flying; an average flying speed of 70 (47.7 mph/76.3 km).

Hit Points: Equal to the P.E. attribute.

S.D.C.: 2D6

Horror Factor: None for a lone Dart Fly; H.F. of 11 for a swarm of 10-20; H.F. of 15 for a flock of 30 or more, but typically, encounters are with 1D6.

Size: 8-12 inch (20-30.5 cm) long body, with a 5 inch (12.7 cm) needle-nose.

Weight: 10 ounces (0.3 kg).

Average Life Span: 18 months.

P.P.E.: 1D4

Natural Abilities: Excellent flyer with great maneuverability like that of a dragonfly or hummingbird, and can see body heat equal to thermal optics (100 feet/30.5 m).

Attacks per Melee: Three.

Damage: 1D4 S.D.C. from a stabbing attack, one point from a body slam. One M.D. point to penetrate M.D.C. armor and Mega-Damage hides via the Dart Fly's diving stab attack (counts as two attacks), plus the loss of blood. Penetrates most M.D.C. hides with a strike roll of 12 or higher.

Bonuses (in addition to possible attribute bonuses): +1 on initiative, +3 to strike, +7 to automatic dodge, +4 to roll with impact.

Magic: None.

Psionics: None.

Allies: None.

Enemies: None.

Value: None of note.

Habitat: Limited to the Southwest, west coast and Mexico. God only knows where they come from or how they got here (probably through a Rift). Only occasionally found in the Southeast (Mississippi, Louisiana, Georgia, Florida), and never more than 1D8 at a time.



Mad Machiavelli

Official TW items, source material and adventure ideas for Rifts® World Book 28:

Arzno – Vampire Incursion™

By Jason Richards

Introduction

My recently-published book, *Rifts® World Book 28: Arzno - Vampire Incursion™*, got its humble start in the very earliest days of *The Rifter®*. Arzno was slowly introduced to Palladium fans through Techno-Wizard inventions, a mercenary outfit, and the enemies they faced. Now that it's come all the way from this publication and into its own, I felt it appropriate that it once again give a nod to the fans out there in these pages. What follows here is a bonus expansion on some material found in the World Book, written exclusively for *The Rifter®*. Enjoy.

This article is dedicated to the fans who help to make Palladium's settings so rich through your writing and gaming, particularly those of you who aspire to see your material printed in the pages of *The Rifter®*. A special nod is warranted for my good friends and colleagues of the old RPG Think Tank, who can create the most amazing things, even in their sleep.

– Jason Richards, April 2006

The Machiavelli Mystery

The Mad Scientist of Arzno

Arzno is a city full of wonder and intrigue. On its streets one can see any number of humanoid and alien beings walking in and out of an amazing variety of shops, restaurants, and other establishments. Hardened mercenaries brush shoulders with enlightened men of learning, and shrewd businessmen haggle prices with mages of extraordinary power. No two beings seem to be the same in any way and at times the city can be a cacophony of diversity of thought, purpose, and motive.

But every so often, all of these different entities have on their lips a single name: "Mad" Machiavelli. It's as if the mention of this phrase is enough to pique the interest of each and every unique set of ears across the city, region, and even much of the Western Wilderness. Little is known of this once-great inventor-turned-hermit aside from his great reputation as a genius creator of Techno-Wizard items, his apparent fall into insanity, and his recent resurrection as a bringer of ever-stranger wonders. The average citizen of Arzno could tell you little more than that about Eman Machiavelli, and just as little about his home and work.

The Machiavelli Residence

The Machiavelli residence, surrounded by the houses of many of Arzno's wealthy and elite, was once one of the finest homes in Arzno. This three-story mansion has fallen into a serious state of disrepair, however. Several years ago, Eman Machiavelli closed himself off from the outside world entirely. After a year living alone in his home, he abandoned the mansion altogether in favor of the servants' quarters behind the house. He now leaves only once or twice a year to briefly reopen his store to sell amazing inventions beyond the dreams of any wizard, only to slink back into seclusion when his limited stock sells out.

Despite spending three years as a hermit, Eman has not been idle. Strange lights and noises come from his shack at all hours of the day and night. The locals whisper that he has gone insane and have labeled him "Mad Machiavelli," and give his home a wide berth.

Machiavelli's Marvels

He sells his wares out of a small TW shop in the Merc Market known as Machiavelli's Marvels. On the rare occasion that it opens it contains inventions so amazing that they are beyond the average Techno-Wizard's wildest dreams! Supplies and variety are very limited, but interest and prices are always high.

When the shop is open, people flock to it hoping to catch a glimpse of some bizarre new creation. In the past it has included odd flying machines that are worn on the user's back like giant wings, armor that changes shape, color, and substance, a device that allows the wearer to travel through solid walls, extravagant children's toys that seem to be alive, and more wonders that other Techno-Wizards have been unable to duplicate. All of Machiavelli's inventions are extraordinarily expensive, and many of them costly to operate, but demand is always high when the old man opens the door to his shop.

The Mystery

So who is this man, really? Why the rapid succession of behavioral changes, matched only by the increasing innovation and uniqueness of his inventions? What does he do in that lab alone at all hours of the day and night? These are the great questions that drive the many citizens of Arzno to wonder, "What will 'Mad' Machiavelli do next?"

Eman Machiavelli

Arzno's Local Techno-Wizard Mad Scientist

"Oh, sure, Mack has always been a good friend of mine; we had a regular Sunday backgammon game for years. He stunk, but played me anyway!

"No, no, he cut me off along with everyone else. I feel bad for him... people say such terrible things about a fella when he's a little down. I'm sure he's not crazy like they say, though. Rest

assured, he's cookin' up somethin' there in that house of his. He was always the one of us in town with the best imagination."

— Dr. Resmin Dawson, *TW Bionicist*

Eman Machiavelli was not always a self-styled hermit and eccentric. In his early days in Arzno before the founding of the Arzno Mercenary Corps or Arzno Weapons Manufacturing, back as far as 88 P.A., Eman was the top Techno-Wizard within 50 miles (80 km) of what was then a small town. Not only that, but he was probably the best there was west of the Magic Zone. Only in the past three years has he locked himself away behind boarded-up doors and windows in self-imposed isolation. For those same three years, his workshop has become a strange display of lights and sounds that has granted him the label of "Mad" Machiavelli.

Eman is a third-generation Techno-Wizard from a family known for their independence. His grandfather was a TW revolutionary in the Magic Zone, as the art entered a great renaissance and expansion following the bloody wars between the Federation of Magic and the fledgling state of Chi-Town. Eman's father spent most of his life in the Ohio River Valley, but in his later years took his family and headed westward to settle down for a quiet life in the Colorado Baronies. Thus, Eman received his earliest training in the magic center of North America, then came of age in the Barony of Testament. He became a bold and inventive Techno-Wizard in the proud tradition of his forefathers, and moved his shop to Arzno just before the city hit its first boom when Onra and his companions discovered the town. By then, Eman was 29 years old and surpassing everything achieved by his relatives.

Eman's mind is incredibly imaginative and distinctly suited to the creative process of Techno-Wizardry. He has an uncanny ability to "see" the TW process and know how to milk the most out of his designs. He was fusing magic and technology for members of the A.M.C. in extraordinary ways long before Lanis Nemesio ever established Arzno Weapons Manufacturing. When A.W.M. was founded, Eman became one of its great pioneers and teachers, educating dozens of young apprentices over the first nine years of its operation. In 102 P.A. he retired to tend to personal projects and to his own shop in the Merc Market.

Early into his return to independence, Eman started to recognize that he was having something of a creative block. He simply couldn't think up any new remarkable designs. He was only 42 years old. It didn't seem right to him that his mind should be slipping. No matter how he tried, he simply couldn't come up with his next great invention. Depression quickly followed as he spent several years doing basic design and repair work during the day and staring blankly at his design table at night. The loss of his creative spark might have ended his career, were it not for a sudden realization.

Even through this agonizing period of doubt and melancholy, Machiavelli still had one place where his mind was sharp: in his dreams! Every morning he would wake up with some fresh concept half-focused in his head and make a grab for the notebook by his bedside, but it was no use. He could never get his ideas down on paper before they dissipated like a smoke ring on the breeze.

It was in a moment of absolute despair that inspiration finally struck the Techno-Wizard. If he couldn't come up with his next

great invention while working at it in his lab, he would have to capture his imaginative ideas while he slept. Once past the initial hurdle, the designs for the forms and function of the basic components flowed easily. A sensory deprivation chamber to guarantee good sleep. Stimulus for his brain and psyche to ensure vivid dreams. A recording device to capture his visions and thoughts in a way that could be accessed later. He spent a year planning and slowly stockpiling the supplies that he would need for his device, which would easily be his most ambitious project.

The machine was more difficult and costly to construct than he first imagined. Eventually, he closed his shop in Little Merctown, Machiavelli's **Marvels** (#62 on the Arzno city map), entirely and moved from his mansion home into the servants' quarters in the rear of the house to work full-time on his plans. His isolation made former friends and neighbors begin to talk, but "Mad" Machiavelli paid them no mind, because he knew that once he completed his device they would all remember his remarkable contributions and forget the rest.

Machiavelli has now come through it all with flying colors and has once again begun to recapture the confidence of the city's TW-using population, none of whom can imagine where his new, bizarre inventions are coming from, or how they are tied to his unusual behavior of the past few years. For the time being, "Mad" Machiavelli is content to let them wonder.

Eman Machiavelli

Real Name: Eman Machiavelli.

Aliases: Many in town refer to him as "Mad" Machiavelli or some variation of such. His long-time friend, Dr. Resmin Dawson, calls him "Mack," but is the only person who does; it seems to be some sort of long-standing joke between the two.

Race: Human.

Alignment: Scrupulous, with some Unprincipled leanings.

Attributes: I.Q. 15, M.E. 13, M.A. 13, P.S. 8, P.P. 12, P.E. 11, P.B. 12, Spd 8.

Height: 6 feet (1.8 m). **Weight:** 191 lbs (86 kg).

Age: 49

Hit Points: 43. **S.D.C.:** 24.

P.P.E.: 175. **I.S.P.:** 73.

Experience Level: 13th level Techno-Wizard.

Description: Eman is an attractive, older man with wise blue eyes and thin white hair with only a hint of its original brown color. Even as he has aged, Machiavelli is almost as tall as he was in his youth, and still stands straight with his square chin held high with pride. He is always well-dressed when in public and prefers to wear a western-style suit and wire-framed glasses. In his lab he can most often be found in comfortable clothes topped off by a lab coat, or blue coveralls if in the middle of messy work.

Disposition: Despite his recently-won reputation, Machiavelli's sanity is in fine shape. Over the past decade or so, his memory has begun to slip a little bit, as has his eyesight (hence the glasses). Since his self-imposed isolation, it's hard to say that he's cheerful or friendly, but that's only because he is consumed with his work. Eman is a wonderful conversation-



alist and host. His overall demeanor is that of a professor and scientist.

Skills of Note:

O.C.C. Skills: Literacy: American (98%), Language: American (98%), Language: Dragonese/Elven (91%), Language: Spanish (91%), Radio: Basic (98%), Computer Operation (98%), Computer Programming (95%), Computer Repair (98%), Basic Electronics (98%), Mechanical Engineer (98%), Techno-Wizard Construction (98%), Sensory Equipment (98%), Mathematics: Basic (98%), Land Navigation (89%), Pilot: Automobile (89%), and Pilot: Hover Craft (Ground, 98%).

Electrical and Mechanical Skills: Basic Mechanics (98%), Electrical Engineer (98%), Electricity Generation (98%), Weapons Engineer (55%), and Locksmith (45%).

Other Assorted O.C.C. Related Skills: Gemology (95%), Mathematics: Advanced (98%), Recycling (98%), Salvage (98%), Language: Techno-Can (85%), Literacy: Techno-Can (90%), Navigation (80%), Recognize Weapon Quality (60%), Optic Systems (60%), and Electronic Countermeasures (45%).

Secondary Skills: Appraise Goods (90%), Barter (78%), Literacy: Spanish (90%), Research (98%), Wardrobe & Grooming (98%), Lore: Demons & Monsters (70%), and Automotive Mechanics (30%).

Weapon Proficiencies: W.P. Knife and W.P. Energy Pistol at 13th level of experience, and W.P. Handguns at 6th level of experience.

Special Abilities: Eman has all of the special abilities common to Techno-Wizards as found in the *Rifts*® RPG. He can pilot Ley Line Vehicles at 98% efficiency.

Psionics: Major psionic, requires a 12 to save vs psionics. Machine Ghost (12), Mind Block (4), Object Read (6), Speed Reading (2), Telemechanics (10), and Total Recall (2).

Magic Knowledge: Spell Strength of 15.

Level One: Blinding Flash (1), Globe of Daylight (2), Lantern Light (1), See Aura (6), See the Invisible (4), Sense Evil (2), and Sense Magic (4).

Level Two: Aura of Power (4), Befuddle (6), Chameleon (6), Cleanse (6), Cloak of Darkness (6), Levitation (5), Manipulate Objects (2+), and Mystic Alarm (5).

Level Three: Armor of Ithan (10), Breathe Without Air (5), Create Wood (10-20), Energy Bolt (5), Float in Air (5), Fuel Flame (5), Ignite Fire (6), Impervious to Fire (5), Invisibility: Simple (6), Light Target (6), Magic Shield (6), Telekinesis (8), and Wave of Frost (6).

Level Four: Blind (6), Carpet of Adhesion (10), Charismatic Aura (10), Chromatic Protection (10), Deflect (10), Electric Arc (8), Energy Field (10), Fireblast (8), Fire Bolt (7), Ley Line Transmission (30), Magic Net (7), Seal (7), Shadow Meld (10), and Trance (10).

Level Five: Charm (12), Circle of Flame (10), Distant Voice (10), Domination (10), Energy Disruption (12), Eyes of Thoth (8), Featherlight (10), Fly (15), Implosion Neutralizer (12), Influence the Beast (12), Instill Knowledge (15),

Lifeblast (15), Mental Blast (15), Sleep (10), Superhuman Speed (10), Superhuman Strength (10), and Sustain (12).

Level Six: Apparition (20), Call Lightning (15), Create Water (15), Energize Spell (12+), Fire Ball (10), Frequency Jamming (15), Ice (15), Impervious to Energy (20), Memory Bank (12), Power Bolt (20), Reduce Self (20), Teleport: Lesser (15), Tongues (12), and Words of Truth (15).

Level Seven: Fly as the Eagle (25), Globe of Silence (20), Invisibility: Superior (20), Invulnerability (25), Lightblade (20), Negate Mechanics (20), Second Sight (20), and Sub-Particle Acceleration (20).

Level Eight: Forcebonds (25), Hallucination (30), Ley Line Tendril Bolts (26), Ley Line Time Capsule (15), Lightning Arc (30), Negate Magic (30), Power Weapon (35), Winged Flight (35), and Wisps of Confusion (40).

Level Nine: Create Steel (68), Dragon Fire (40), Illusion Manipulation (25-60), Purge Self (70), Tame Beast (60), and Water to Wine (40).

Level Ten: Giant (80), Mystic Portal (60), and Purge Other (100).

Level Eleven: Energy Sphere (120), Rift Teleportation (200), and See in Magic Darkness (125).

Level Twelve: Ironwood (50+).

Level Thirteen: Talisman (500).

Level Fourteen: Annihilate (600).

Combat Training: None.

Attacks Per Melee: 3, or 6 non-combat "actions."

Combat Modifiers: +1 to dodge.

Other Combat Info: None.

Other Modifiers: +2 to save vs possession, +2 to save vs mind control, +4 to save vs magic, +2 to save vs Horror Factor, and +3 to Perception Rolls that involve magic or machines or their combination.

Weapons of Note: Eman dislikes physical confrontation; even the devices that he builds tend not to be instruments of violence. He is, however, competent in the use of a knife and both energy and conventional pistols. He rarely carries a weapon, but keeps a TW-converted energy pistol stashed in his home, and another in his workshop.

Extra Ammo: None.

Body Armor: Machiavelli has a very old suit of basic A.W.M. armor that he wears if traveling outside of the city, or if in some dangerous situation. The armor is a very early model and not up to the current standards, though he long ago outfitted it with a few TW modifications. Even for TW-modified armor it is strange-looking, as its helmet is covered in a crown of flash bulbs, copper wiring webs over the body of the suit and terminates at small diamonds embedded in the armor, and the hip, knee, and ankle joints are all heavily reinforced and sprouting hydraulics and pistons. **M.D.C.:** Main Body: 25, Arms: 10 each, Legs: 10 each, and Head/Helmet: 20 M.D.C. **Penalties:** None; extremely lightweight and flexible. **TW Modifications:** Chromatic Protection (10), Invulnerability (25), and Superhuman Speed (10); all function at 9th level of experience.

Other Equipment: Eman has the most sophisticated private TW lab in the Western Wilderness, all contained in the ser-

vants' quarters behind his huge home. A vast array of tools, machines, computers, and a small fortune in gems, precious metals, and spare parts can all be found within. Of course, the most important item in the lab is his miraculous Think Tank.

Vehicle: There are bits and pieces of a TW-converted hovercraft scattered around the workshop, but it no longer functions as it has been gutted for parts over recent months.

Cybernetics: None.

Adventure Notes

Eman Machiavelli's recent strange activity has turned a great many heads, not all of them friendly. Further, his periodic emergence into public to auction off a handful of unique, one-of-a-kind items could potentially draw the wrong sort of attention. For a party of mercenaries, adventurers, or villains, there could be any number of adventure angles.

Adventure Note #1: Mercenary Payday

When a message soliciting their services finds the characters, it starts off as any a normal day. However, this message allegedly comes from *the* "Mad" Machiavelli, famed Techno-Wizard and recluse. He hasn't seen anyone in years aside from potential buyers when he occasionally opens his shop, but the invitation clearly states that he wants to visit with the characters in his home, and that they are not to discuss it with anyone! Maybe the characters are employed by the A.M.C., or are independent contractors, or simply adventurers with a reputation (good or bad). Whether a clean job or an under-the-table and off-the-books deal, Eman Machiavelli has chosen to ask the player characters for help.

The characters meet with the mad scientist of Arzno in his workshop, but every piece of equipment is locked up or draped in thick sheets so that the characters don't see so much as a socket wrench out in plain view. It seems that Eman has a major invention that he intends to take to his shop within the week to sell off, but a friend has tipped him off as to the plans of some local miscreants to steal it. They can't possibly even know what it is, but his past inventions have sold for enough to gain some notoriety in the city, apparently including its undesirable elements.

Eman may want the party to act as bodyguards, or to actively track down and eliminate the crooks before they can commit the crime (tasks probably vary with the characters' affiliations and reputation). In any case, he has to hold off the event for another week or so before he can get the last missing component delivered to his shop and installed.

Adventure Note #2: An Adventurer's Quest

The player characters, a party of adventurers with plenty of worldly knowledge, find themselves traveling westward into the wilderness in an effort to seek fame, fortune, and excitement. To

help pay the way, they came into the job of delivering a package (or a number of packages) from some vendors in the Federation of Magic, Chi-Town 'Burbs, Merctown, or some other major location to a city far into the New West known as Arzno.

Such a nice arrangement is never without its hiccups. In this case, the problem is that the item was acquired through less than legitimate channels and is now hot, hot, hot! When the contact is made and the goods delivered into the characters' waiting hands, they learn that the item is a Techno-Wizard component bound for the eccentric Arzno citizen, "Mad" Machiavelli, but the characters are none the wiser about the questionable means of its acquisition. The pursuit could be from agents of the Coalition States, Stormspire, or any one of a dozen groups (possibly an old adversary of the party?). All that the characters know is that Machiavelli needs the item and that he has paid them to deliver it. What the component is for, what it does, or why it is so precious is something for the Game Master to determine and the players to figure out, along with their next move.

Adventure Note #3: The Villain's Opportunity

People in the characters' line of work don't ask questions. They take orders. In this case, the order is to track down some Techno-Wizard doohickey that the guy who pays the bills wants. Was it stolen from him? Is it dangerous? Is it valuable? Hey... what did we just discuss about questions?

The characters may be bad guys, or they may be do-good paties who don't know who they're really working for, or they might be forced into their situation. One way or another, they have to get this thing and take it back to the guy calling the shots. All that they know is that it will exchange hands at a certain place at a certain time, and will then go on to someplace out in the New West to some guy named Machiavelli. When they snatch it is up to the player characters, but the sooner they get it back, the better. All that they can hope for is that the couriers are suckers, or that the old Techno-Wizard's security isn't too tight.

"Mad" Machiavelli's Think Tank

The truth behind the Machiavelli mystery

Eman Machiavelli's greatest invention is one that he hopes will never see the light of day. Faced with a gradually aging mind and a lack of creative spark, the famous wizard devised a device that would capture the amazing creations of his sleeping mind. Through his incredible skill, Eman built a machine that would give him a restful night's sleep in only a couple of hours, all the while stimulating his mind to produce vivid dreams that are then captured to be retrieved during the waking hours and turned into new TW inventions. It has become so much the source of his inspiration and regained success that he fears it will be discovered and duplicated, ruining his reputation as the most imaginative Techno-Wizard in the New West.

The device itself is as unique in appearance as it is in function. The largest portion of it is a huge, sarcophagus-like sensory deprivation tank made of iron and copper. It stands over 8

feet (2.4 m) tall overall, and is roughly 3 feet (0.9 m) wide, with the front half opening on giant motorized hinges. All manner of wires, antennas, and doodads protrude from the coffin at odd angles for unimaginable purposes. This is where Machiavelli sleeps, the TW marvel magically removing sensation and sinking him into a deep sleep while simultaneously stimulating his brain and recording his dreams.

Attached to the tank is a large computer the size of a desk that appears to have been gutted of its meaningful components and rebuilt using gemstones, gold and silver wire, and a series of whirring and clicking instruments. Dials, sliders, and buttons cover the top surface of this machine that is responsible for the collection, organization, and storage of Eman's dreams.

For the final stage of the process, there is a helmet that sits on a stand alongside the computer when not in use. From the outside it doesn't look like a mystical device at all with the exception of the data cord connecting it to the TW computer. There are no gems or wires or any of the oddities normally associated with a Techno-Wizard creation visible on the outside. Inside, however, there are dozens of lights and a vast web of golden wire that runs throughout. The helmet covers the entire head all the way down to the chin, submerging the user in the blinking lights. When the machine is activated, it accesses the user's brain and directly replays the dreams recorded by the Think Tank into the wizard's psyche, and projects images from the dream onto a small screen just inches from the wearer's eyes. The process takes an average of thirty to forty minutes (1D4x10+10 minutes) and totally reacquaints Eman with his lost dreams. He can then remember them well enough to get them down on paper so as to turn them into workable plans for his inventions.

The Think Tank is less than perfect, or more precisely, relying on dreams is a less than perfect creative method. Even though the Think Tank is built to inspire his creative mind, sometimes Eman simply doesn't have any good ideas in his dreams, or the ideas that he has aren't workable. He typically uses the machine a dozen or so times over the course of a week, and then takes the best concept or two and attempts to develop a prototype. Sure, it's a lot more work than simply coming up with new ideas while sitting at the design table, but "Mad" Machiavelli finds that this works well for him, and believes that his most recent inventions are the best of his distinguished career. As he continues to tweak the design of his Think Tank, there is no telling what other advances he may come up with.

Device Construction Data

The Think Tank is one construction that utilizes three very different functions in concert with one another. The three main components do operate independently, however, and could be built separately and independent of the other devices. Complete construction stats for each of the three functions follow.

Function 1:

Sensory Deprivation Chamber

Device Level: 12

P.P.E. Construction Cost: 1,008

Primary Spell: Sleep (10).

Secondary Spells: Blind (6), Energy Field (10), Levitation (5), Globe of Silence (20), and Sustain (12).

Physical Requirements: The device requires 7.5 carats of andradite, and 1 carat each of amber, purple garnet, black pearl, ruby quartz, and tiger eye, totaling nearly 15,000 credits. Additional equipment, including the appropriate wiring, antennas, gadgets, and the chamber itself total at least 121,000 credits.

Construction Time: 1,200 hours or more.

Duration of Charge: The sensory deprivation chamber will keep the user asleep for exactly two hours, after which he will feel completely refreshed.

Activation Cost: It requires 50 P.P.E. per activation of the sensory deprivation chamber; it has no built-in batteries or P.P.E. reserve.

Function 2: Dream Inducer

Device Level: 10

P.P.E. Construction Cost: 1,000

Primary Spell: Hallucination (30).

Secondary Spells: Energy Bolt (5), Illusion Booster (15), and Mental Blast (15).

Physical Requirements: The device requires 6.5 carats of pink sapphire, and 1 carat each of tiger eye, gold zircon, and red zircon, totaling 110,000 credits. Other physical components include a variety of neural contacts, an advanced imaging processor, silver wiring, and other materials totaling at least 100,000 credits.

Construction Time: 1,000 hours or more.

Duration of Charge: The dream inducer will stimulate the mind into dreaming for an extended period of half an hour. However, without the deep, forced sleep achieved by the sensory deprivation chamber, it is unlikely that the dreamer would remain asleep for that long a duration. Machiavelli's device is rigged to activate one hour into the sleep cycle induced by the deprivation tank.

Activation Cost: 50 P.P.E. will activate the dream inducer for a 30 minute cycle.

Function 3:

Dream Recorder and Playback

Device Level: 6

P.P.E. Construction Cost: 405

Primary Spell: Memory Bank (12).

Secondary Spells: Distant Voice (10), Energy Bolt (5), Reflection (7), and Second Sight (20).

Physical Requirements: The device requires 9 carats of fire agate, and 1 carat each of blue garnet, malachite, and red zircon totaling 6,250 credits. Other physical components, including the computer used for storage and the helmet apparatus for reviewing recorded dreams, total 25,000 credits.

Construction Time: Roughly 250 hours.

Duration of Charge: The device will store a dream for as long as 18 months, but can only store one at a time; if activated again, it

will overwrite old recordings with new. It records over the 30 minute duration that the dream inducer is activated.

Activation Cost: 20 P.P.E. will activate the recorder. There is no cost for retrieving the recorded dream.

Total

P.P.E. Construction Cost: 2,413

Gem Cost: 131,250 credits, minimum.

Physical Component Cost: 246,000 credits, minimum.

Construction Time: 2,450 hours, minimum.

Activation Cost: 120 P.P.E. will run all three functions of the device for a single activation.

Products of the Think Tank

Eman Machiavelli has been using his Think Tank to come up with ideas for some time now, periodically emerging from his seclusion to sell a handful of new, one-of-a-kind devices in his store in the Merc Market. Such inventions are always the talk of the town, and hundreds upon hundreds of people come by to see what "Mad" Machiavelli has thought up whenever his door opens. When Eman has new devices to sell, he opens his shop for a week or two to drum up interest (and show off his wares) before holding an auction, each device going to the highest bidder. In the past, some of his devices have been bought by other Techno-Wizards to be reverse-engineered and possibly offered to market on a larger scale.

The current crop of available inventions is small, but as original and far-out as always. Four of the most notable are devices that have come to be known as the Flat-Footed Bounder, the Freezing Hand, Machiavelli's Charisma Suit, and the Mount Modifier.

Flat-Footed Bounder

Techno-Wizard personal transportation device

If Machiavelli has a trademark creation genre, it is strange constructions of the vehicular persuasion. Prior to his creative block, he was responsible for creating such bizarre conveyances as a TW hot air balloon, a device that made the user fly by flapping gigantic metallic wings, an underground transit device that burrowed like a mole, and a large environmental bubble operated by pedaling a unicycle in what looked like a giant hamster ball.

One vehicle spawned by his Think Tank so far is what has become known as the Flat-Footed Bounder. The machine looks and operates almost like a big metal animal and is ridden as such, complete with a saddle. The Bounder has three multi-jointed legs, each of which ends in a large, round metal disk that acts as a foot. The saddle sits on an extension that sticks out behind the machine like a tail. The legs articulate with ball-joint hips, knees, and ankles that can move in any direction, allowing the Bounder to walk just as easily left, right, forward, or backward. It gets its name due to the fact that to move at high speed, it runs with its back legs both sweeping forward simultaneously and pushing off of the ground like a three-legged rabbit.

Thus it bounds when moving faster than at a walking pace, pulling the operator behind at full speed.

The design has been praised for its innovation, but also on its utility. Its large-footed design makes it well-suited for moving across the sand as well as on roads through town. The design is simple, but elegant, and feels more like riding an animal than a machine. Its chief disadvantage is that it isn't an all-terrain vehicle, having trouble negotiating rocky areas.

The Bounder isn't a complicated device. Its only visible equipment is located in the middle of the vehicle where the three legs and the "tail" meet. Here at this central hub is the magical power source and all of the mechanical equipment. The power lines, mechanical locomotion components, and other machinery that runs to the extremities are contained inside the legs themselves except for where they are exposed at the joints of the legs. The Bounder is operated by a pair of joysticks jutting up from the saddle where the saddle horn should be. These same control devices have golden contacts that are built to allow the user to pump additional P.P.E. into the vehicle to power it.

Vehicle Type: Personal Transport.

Crew: One pilot only; modification would be required to accommodate passengers.

M.D.C. by Location:

*Central Power Unit – 25

"Tail" Section and Saddle – 35

Back Legs (2) – 35 each

Front Leg – 45

**Main Body – 95

* The item marked by an asterisk is a small and/or difficult target to strike. An attacker must make a "Called Shot" to hit and even then is -3 to strike.

** Depleting the main body destroys the vehicle, making it useless.

Speed: 10 mph (16 km) top speed when walking, or up to 75 mph (120 km) "bounding" across most surfaces. The conveyance is designed for everyday use on the roads of Arzno or the surrounding prairie and desert of the region, and does not perform well on extremely rocky or otherwise unstable surfaces.

Statistical Data:

Height: 5 feet, 3 inches (1.6 m) standing upright.

Width: 6 feet (1.8 m).

Length: 14 feet (4.3 m), including the 5 foot (1.5 m) "tail" on which the rider's saddle rests.

Weight: 1,650 pounds (743 kg).

Cargo: Designed to carry only an operator, and has no cargo room beyond what can fit in a pair of saddlebags. Additional cargo capacity can be achieved by adding to the structure in some way, but none is included in Eman's prototype.

Power Systems: Techno-Wizardry; 25 P.P.E. or 50 I.S.P. will power the vehicle for an hour.

P.P.E. Battery: The battery reserve holds 100 P.P.E., enough for 4 hours of continuous use. Once depleted, the battery can be recharged by a Techno-Wizard, or the device may be run directly by the operator's own P.P.E. or I.S.P.

Weapon Systems: None, though some TW or conventional systems could conceivably be added.

Techno-Wizard Features: None, other than the power system. Additional features could be added at the owner's expense, but this prototype is extremely bare-bones.

The Freezing Hand

Techno-Wizard weapon, defense, & tool

Those in the community who have seen this device are torn on what to call it, exactly, but the front-runner seems to be "The Freezing Hand." Other popular names are "Icy Touch," "Gauntlet of Cold," and "The Hand of Algor." Whatever it is called, all are equally descriptive. This device is a large, metal gauntlet that can create large quantities of ice out of thin air. By itself, that isn't so spectacular, but more specifically it is designed to generate ice to cover mundane objects to several ends. A simple length of pipe, a knife, a stick, or pretty much any object can be covered almost instantly in ice to create a Mega-Damage weapon. A wooden buckler, garbage can lid, or the seat of a bar stool can be covered in ice and used as an M.D.C. shield. Small areas such as windows or a small section of floor can be iced over to create an obstacle or obstruction. The wearer can even attempt to encase an opponent's limb, head, or a weapon in ice as an attack. The device would be versatile and lethal in the right hands. Specifics of its various functions follow. Only one function can be used at a time.

Ice Weapon: The glove can quickly cover a hand-held weapon in several inches of ice to turn it into a magical weapon capable of absorbing or dealing out Mega-Damage. The object is only covered in a few inches of the magically created ice, so a knife remains a knife, a blunt object blunt, and a sword a sword. Damage is always the same, but use the appropriate Weapon Proficiency to determine bonuses to strike and parry. The weapon can't be put down, thrown, or given away because it is actually frozen to the glove until the magic expires, or is cancelled.

Ice Shield: Like the function above, a shield or something close to it may be covered in a few inches of ice to allow it to absorb Mega-Damage. Normal bonuses to parry still apply, and an attack with the shield does Mega-Damage due largely to the numbing, magical cold, but is less damaging than the Ice Weapon. The shield can't leave the user's hand while the magic is in effect, as above.

Ice Obstacle: Rather than icing over an object held in the hand, the wearer may place the palm of the gauntlet on a surface and sheet it in ice, be it a door, a window, or even an area of floor. This will put several inches of ice over an area 6 feet (1.8 m) around the gauntlet. This area can't be controlled, and always ices over the whole radius. Again, while this is in effect the user is effectively stuck to the object he or she is freezing until the duration ends or the magic is cancelled. Once inactive, the magic holding the ice together quickly dissipates, the ice almost instantly melting away.

Encase in Ice: Similar to the other functions, the glove may be used to encase an object in several inches of ice, incapacitating whatever it may be. This could be the arm, leg, or head of an opponent, or an enemy's weapon, or some precious (but sturdy)

item that must be protected at all costs. Again, the gauntlet is frozen to whatever is being encased, which can cause problems in the middle of combat or other sticky situations.

Creation Stats:

Device Level: 1

P.P.E. Construction Cost: 269

Primary Spell: Ice (15).

Secondary Spells: Create Water (15), Energize Spell (12), Frostblade (15), Invulnerability (25), Magic Shield (6), and Orb of Cold (6).

Physical Requirements: A 3.5 carat blue garnet is installed in the palm of the gauntlet, and is linked with silver wire to one carat blue garnet, amethyst, aquamarine, and red zircon stones that are built into the four fingertips of the device. A one carat diamond is built into a band of gold encircling the wrist. Total gem cost is at least 24,000 credits, with other materials costing around 2,700 credits.

Construction Time: 27 hours.

Weapon Stats:

Range: Touch.

Duration: 5 minutes, after which the ice loses its mystical properties and quickly melts away. Duration may be extended by continuing to pump P.P.E. into the device at the end of each five minute period. Double the duration in below-freezing temperatures, and cut it in half in extremely hot, arid conditions.

Mega-Damage: 4D6 M.D. for the Ice Weapon, or half that if coming into contact with the Ice Shield, Ice Obstacle, etc; encasing an object in ice does 2D6 M.D. per melee round from the cold. Beings vulnerable to cold may suffer additional damage.

M.D.C.: 50; fire and heat-based attacks do double damage.

Activation Cost: 15 P.P.E. for the initial five minutes. An additional 30 P.P.E. expended as the spell effects are about to expire will extend the duration for another five minutes, but will not add any additional M.D.C. to the ice. The duration may be extended indefinitely by expending 30 P.P.E. every five minutes until no more P.P.E. is available, or the M.D.C. of the ice manifested is expended.

Machiavelli's Charisma Suit

Also known as Machiavelli's New Clothes

If there was ever a reason that Techno-Wizards don't generally double as tailors, it is evident in Eman Machiavelli's Charisma Suit. Like most of his recent inventions, this melding of unusual form with useful function is bizarre in the extreme.

The device looks like a set of metal athletic shoulder pads, attached at the neck to a bucket-style helmet that covers the head, except for a large opening in the front and a pair of holes in the sides, near the ears. Atop the helmet is a 6 inch (15 cm) diameter dish antenna that rotates one revolution every 15 seconds. Along the sides of the helmet and around the front, back, and top of the shoulder pads are a dozen smaller antennas mounted on articulated arms that constantly swivel and pivot about.

To watch someone try to wear it is truly a sight to see. The "helm" and the attached shoulder mounts aren't articulated in

any way, so the wearer can't turn his head more than a few degrees either way inside the helmet, and has virtually no peripheral vision. It is not only stiff, but heavy and awkward. Inside the helmet portion are a series of blunt-ended metal contacts that rest against the head of the wearer and become increasingly uncomfortable the longer the device is worn.

Though awkward, uncomfortable, clumsy, and all-around ridiculous, the function of the device is useful. The effects are two-fold. First, the large dish rotating atop the helmet manipulates magical and electromagnetic energies to exude an air of charisma and general likeability. Those who succumb to its subtle effects find it easy to admire and get along with the wearer, no matter how ridiculous he or she may look.

The second effect stems from the dozen smaller antennas mounted about the head and shoulders. Each independently projects a more powerful charisma signal at a single person within the effective range, affecting up to 12 individuals at once. Those who fail to save against the effects are totally transfixed; charmed by the wearer to the point of suggestion.

Clearly this design is not popular with the magical elite of Arzno, most of whom are too resistant to magic to fall under its spell, but find the idea of mass-hypnotizing everyone into liking one's self to be impolite, at best. The device would be far more useful in more common circles, however, as "average" citizens will be more likely to fall to its charming effects.

Device Level: 10

P.P.E. Construction Cost: 692

Primary Spell: Charismatic Aura (10).

Secondary Spells: Charm (12 each, utilized a total of twelve times), Energy Field (10), and Globe of Daylight (2).

Physical Requirements: The gem requirements for this device are substantial, so it took Eman months to stockpile them all. First, the main dish atop the helmet utilizes 24 one-carat blue sapphires in its construction. Further, each of the small antennas placed around the device ends in a 1/3 carat blue ruby. The only other gems used in the device are one-carat clear and ruby quartz joined by silver wire and planted squarely in the middle of the forehead of the helmet, though the use of precious metals in the antennas and wiring throughout is extensive. Total gem cost is in the neighborhood of 460,000 credits, plus another 70,000 credits in miscellaneous materials. *Note:* Failure to use the large number of gems required in this device will result in reduced effects and a higher activation cost.

Construction Time: 692 hours.

Range: 60 foot (18.3 m) radius for the general Charismatic Aura effects, or a 15 foot (4.6 m) radius for the Charm effects. The Charismatic Aura affects the entire area, while the Charm effects target the twelve individuals closest to the wearer.

Duration: One activation lasts for 30 minutes, but victims within the effective range get an opportunity to save versus the effects (of Charismatic Aura and Charm) for every 10 minutes of exposure to the device's influence. The save versus magic in both cases is standard.

Activation Cost: 35 P.P.E. activates the Charismatic Aura and Charm features on the device for the duration.

The Mount Modifier

A modular system for equine enhancement

The Mount Modifier is a piece of equipment that can bring a horse under the operator's command and enhance the endurance of the animal. Beyond that, the device is expandable to include many other more fantastic augmentations for a mount.

Truth be told, the device isn't just one machine, but several modular ones that are integrated together and can be used or not at the rider's discretion. They could also be made for non-equine animals and monsters, but like all Think Tank innovations, this is a one-of-a-kind item that will have to be reverse-engineered and duplicated by another Techno-Wizard to see such variants.

The different components are tied together into a central control mechanism and power supply built into a custom-designed saddle. The components included in the item for sale are:

Function 1: The Docilator

This "horse helmet" temporarily alters the animal's interpretation of its neural pathways, convincing it that the person wielding the control device is its master. This low-level mind control allows a rider to give commands to the horse that are always accepted unless far beyond the creature's normal behavior. To control the animal, the user must give vocal commands through a special headset that sends the appropriate signals to the mount.

Device Level: 2

P.P.E. Construction Cost: 240

Primary Spell: Influence the Beast (12).

Secondary Spells: Distant Voice (10), Domination (10), and Energy Field (10).

Physical Requirements: A 3.5 carat alexandrite is built into the helmet unit worn by the horse. One carat blue garnet, blue ruby, and ruby quartz gems are built into the headset worn by the user. Gem cost is roughly 30,000 credits, with another 4,800 credits to construct the headset along with the helmet worn by the horse, complete with neural contacts and speakers tied to the headset.

Construction Time: 48 hours.

Range: Touch; only the horse wearing the device may be controlled.

Duration: 30 minutes per activation.

Activation Cost: 12 P.P.E. activates the Docilator. The horse gets a standard save versus the control, but as a simple animal is -4 to do so. If the Docilator, Super Legs, or any other expansions of the Mount Modifier are activated simultaneously, only one save need be made.

Function 2: Super Legs

These TW leg braces act like exoskeleton muscles for the horse, allowing it to run at top speed for incredible lengths of time. The principle is no different from power armor that is powered and controlled by the user's normal running motion to enhanced effect. Pistons run from the saddle down the lengths of

the horse's legs, ending in what resemble knee braces covered in gears and pulleys, assisting the horse's leg motion to prevent fatigue.

Device Level: 1

P.P.E. Construction Cost: 200

Primary Spell: Superhuman Endurance (12).

Secondary Spells: Telekinesis (8).

Physical Requirements: Each brace apparatus requires one carat of pink opal and black pearl, totaling 6,500 credits. The various gears and pistons, as well as the cables that run to the saddle where the devices are powered, cost 2,000 credits each.

Construction Time: 20 hours.

Range: Touch; affects only the horse wearing the device.

Duration: 2 hours per activation.

Activation Cost: 10 P.P.E. will activate all of the leg braces to attain the effects of the Techno-Wizardry. The horse gets a standard save versus the control, but like all simple animals is -4 to do so. If the Docilator, Super Legs, or any other expansions of the Mount Modifier are activated simultaneously, only one save need be made.

The available prototype is outfitted for further devices and expansion, as well as P.P.E. Battery capacity. While he won't say what the additional modules are, he has several in the planning stages that should be ready in a few months. They include (the names that follow are Machiavelli's personal working names):

Experimental Function A: The Pegasus Module: This addition does exactly what one would guess. By attaching a device above the shoulders of the horse, ectoplasmic wings can be formed to give the horse flight. This would be of chief advantage for a large, strong horse, since airborne speed would be tied to the strength of the animal. It has even greater potential should a similar device be made for a Mega-Damage monster with enhanced or supernatural strength.

Experimental Function B: The Dragonfire Module: The Dragonfire attachment would add an offensive nature to a traditional mount, affixing a flamethrower of sorts below the head of the horse to be operated by the rider. Eman has a very early prototype of this device, but hesitated to put it to market because of problems with the targeting (the rider would have to instruct the horse where to look to fire the weapon) and the thought that a horse's natural aversion and vulnerability to fire might make a more conventional magical energy weapon more suitable.

Experimental Function C: The Colossus Module: This device is in only its very earliest stages of development, and would likely require an entirely new saddle system to be made. Eman is convinced that he can imbue a device with the ability to make a horse grow to ten times its natural size, making it a Mega-Damage terror on the battlefield while still under the command of a seated rider. This concept has especially magnificent potential if used on a Tiger Claw Raptor, Rhino-Buffalo, or other predator when used as a mount or under some other form of mind control.

ON PATROL

Hook, Line & Sinker™ Adventures for Rifts®

By Paul Carr

The following are several (6 total) quick Hook, Line & Sinkers designed to be used as fillers between a larger campaign. They may fit into any campaign, however they work better when the player characters are part of a larger force like the Coalition, or a mercenary company like Braddock's Bad Boys or Larsen's Brigade. Each Hook, Line & Sinker is designed to be used by the Game Master as a mini adventure where the player characters are sent out on patrol. A party comprised of six to eight characters in regular body armor or two to three characters in power armor works the best. The adventures are best suited to take place in North America, but could take place anywhere with a few modifications. There is no specific order in which the adventures should be run and Game Masters should feel free to use as many as they deem fit for their campaign.

Here are a few samples of parties that I have found work very well.

Coalition Ground Infantry Patrol

- 1 – Military Specialist or Technical Officer (Ranking Officer).
- 1 – Special Forces, Commando or CS Ranger.
- 1 – CS Juicer or 'Borg.
- 3-5 – Grunts.

Coalition Samas Patrol

- 1 – Special Forces Striker, Sea Samas or Terror Trooper.
- 1-2 – Death's Head Samas or Smiling Jacks (Sky Cycles can also be used).

Mercenary Ground Infantry Patrol

- 1 – Special Forces or Wilderness Scout.
- 1 – Juicer, Crazy or 'Borg.
- 1-2 – Headhunters or Cyber-Knights.
- 4-5 – Vagabonds, City Rats, Bounty Hunters, Thief, Rogue Scientist or other S.D.C. character.

Mercenary Power Armor Patrol

- 1 – Glitter Boy or Ulti-Max.
- 1-2 – Terrain Hopper, Predator, Nomad Scout or similar power armor.

Following the Hook, Line & Sinkers, I've listed a Coalition Company that could be used as the organization to which the player characters belong. I would have included a mercenary company, but I saw no need since there are already several well created ones in *Rifts® Mercenaries* that could be used.

Damsel In Distress

Hook: While on patrol, the player characters discover a lone, blind, human woman. She has no equipment and is wearing damaged light body armor (10-20 M.D.C. left). She appears to be searching for something or someone as she does her best to follow a road heading south.

Line: The woman speaks American and will plead with the player characters to help her find her friends. She tells them that she was separated from her friends while traveling south to visit her family. She says that she and her friends were attacked by something, she does not know what because she did not see it. The woman believes that if her friends survived, they would be found south of here at her family's house. She begs the player characters to help her travel south and find her family and friends, and offers them any reasonable reward for helping her.

Sinker: In reality, she is a Blind Warrior Woman who has become separated from her Slaver. She has a general idea where the Slaver is located and will try to lure the player characters to it. Unless the player characters have met a Blind Warrior Woman before, they should have no reason to expect anything. The Game Master should role-play the woman as a defenseless, blind woman in very real need of help.

After a few hours, travel the party should stumble across the Slaver. The Blind Warrior Woman will rush forth to take her place on the barge and help the Slaver attack the player characters.

For Splugorth Slaver stats, see *Rifts® Atlantis*, pages 49-50.

The Slaver may have already captured some locals who could be used as a link to future adventures.

Game Master Note: The Blind Warrior Woman was actually sent out by the Slaver to locate possible slave stock when she ran into a Rhino-Buffalo and was nearly killed. The Rhino-Buffalo trampled her and destroyed most of her equipment. It is still on the prowl and could be discovered soon after the encounter with the Slaver or saved for a later encounter. Rhino-Buffalo stats can also be found in *Rifts® Sourcebook One*, pages 109-110.

Cattle Bane

Hook: While on patrol on the outskirts of a farming village, the player characters stumble across a field of dead cattle. Further investigation reveals that several ranches have suffered severe cattle losses. At least half of the cattle population has been lost over the past two months.

Line: The locals (farmers and ranchers) believe it to be the work of a demon that they nicknamed Cattle Bane. The locals have very little in the way of M.D.C. weapons and all attempts to locate and destroy the demon have failed. Several villagers (4-10) are also missing and believed to be dead. They also believe that the demon only hunts at night and kills for pleasure as much as it does for food. The locals offer to give the player characters a combined total of 8,000 credits worth of goods (like food rations, tools, S.D.C. weapons, and so on) if they will eliminate the demon.

Sinker: The demon is really a Spiny Ravager and has taken up residence in a burrow it dug near the village. During the day,

it sleeps underground, then at night it comes out to hunt. It will take a player character with good tracking abilities to locate the beast's lair (taking at least two nights, and during the first more cattle die). Once the lair is found, the player characters can wait on the beast to return (setting up an ambush if smart) and kill it. The Ravager has an I.Q. of 8 and will not fall for simple traps, and unless a player character has Sixth Sense, it most likely will gain a surprise attack on at least one character.

For information on the Spiny Ravager, see *Rifts® World Book 11: Coalition War Campaign*.

Game Master Note: If played in succession with Damsel in Distress, the Slaver barge will contain a rancher from this village and the player characters could be seeing him or her safely home when discovering the dead cattle.

Snake Bite

Hook: While on patrol, the player characters find an empty suit of M.D.C. body armor (any type will work) beside a small lake, pond or stream. The armor has a fist-sized hole in its leg; otherwise it is in perfect condition. The former owner's equipment lies scattered beside it and could include any item the Game Master sees fit to allow the players to find, but should include some fishing equipment.

Line: Searching the area reveals another suit of M.D.C. armor like the first (equipment and all) except it is missing its glove or gauntlet.

Sinker: The water is actually the home of a creature called a Phase Snake that was accidentally Rifted to Rifts Earth during a Ley Line Storm. Six of these snakes live in the water and will attack the player characters instantly if they disturb the water; otherwise, they wait until a character strays away from the others.

Phase Snake

Appearance: Looks like a 6-8 foot (1.8-2.4 m), blue rubber worm that's semi-transparent. Ability scores of note include: I.Q. 5 (animal), P.S. 10 (Supernatural), Spd 10 (30 swimming). M.D.C. 1D10+2.

I.S.P. 1D4X10+20. **P.P.E.** 2D6. 2 attacks per melee (Physical or Psionic).

Combat Bonuses (Land): +3 to initiative, +3 to strike, +1 to dodge.

Combat Bonuses (Water): +5 to initiative, +5 to strike, +4 to dodge.

The Phase Snake has no combat bonuses in daylight, can see underwater and has nightvision 60 feet (18.3 m).

The Phase Snake can bite for 1D4 M.D.C. Once attached to a victim, the snake will actually "phase out" that section of armor (if the victim is wearing armor) and inject its poison into the flesh underneath. The poison is considered lethal poison for saving throw purposes (save vs 12), and does 3D8 damage directly to Hit Points every round, plus the victim loses half his attacks, is -30% on skills and -9 to strike, parry, dodge, and roll. If the poison save was made, the poison does only an initial 3D4 points of damage (still directly to Hit Points).

Phase Snakes are completely immune to all poisons and have the following powers:

Psionics: See the Invisible and Bio-Manipulation (Stun or Paralysis only).

Phase Powers: D-Phase (see *Rifts® Dimension Book Two: Phase World®*, page 32, or *Rifts® England*, page 74).

History: These aquatic snakes come from underground lakes on the planet Phase World. Their fangs work as natural phase weapons while their Psionics and Phase Power are used to catch prey. They are nocturnal animals used to living at the bottom of lakes, but can venture forth on land up to three miles (4.8 km) to look for food. Their digestive system will allow them to (by phasing a victim) swallow prey as large as a human. Once they attach to their prey, they begin to phase it out (taking 2D4 rounds) and turn it into a mushy, organic goo that resembles a transparent version of its original form, allowing the snake to swallow it. They can swallow rabbit-sized or smaller prey without phasing it out.

The Silver Scorpion (or Bitten by the Silver Bug)

Hook: While on patrol, one of the player characters notices something under a bush reflecting the sunlight. As the character gets closer to it, it scuttles away, trying to avoid detection.

Line: The creature in question is a Silver Scorpion. The bug looks just like a regular Emperor scorpion except instead of being black, it is shiny silver. The bug is sure to be worth something to someone.

Sinker: Whenever the scorpion is touched, the person doing the touching must make a saving throw vs magic as the S.D.C. bug does its best to penetrate the character's body armor. The saving throw, if failed, makes the victim obsessed with the scorpion and unwilling to part with it. He will want to hold it in his bare hands so that he can feel its silver surface, completely forgetting that it will sting him. Of course, once so exposed, the scorpion will sting that person and deliver its poison and charm. Once it delivers its sting, it dies in 1D4 hours by slowly hardening into a miniature scorpion of pure silver. It cannot be resurrected or changed back once it dies. It can be made into a charm, pendant and so on, just so long as it remains intact.

The Poison: Victim gets no saving throw to avoid or reduce the effects. The victim becomes severely sick for 1D4+3 days, bedridden for four of those days, and all combat abilities and skills are halved for the rest.

The Charm: This is actually helpful. So long as he keeps the scorpion's body, the victim gains the following bonuses: Prowl at 40% or plus 10%, Sense of Balance 60% (or +15%), +2 to roll with punch, and add one point to Physical Prowess (P.P.).

Stats on a regular scorpion can be found in *Monsters & Animals™, 2nd Edition*, pages 195-196.

Strange Brew Two (or Fading Away)

Hook: While on a night patrol, the player characters run across a small village (population 100-200) that rests no less than 100 yards from a ley line nexus. The bright blue magical

energy gives the village an eerie look. The village seems to be in the middle of a celebration or party, because almost every towns person is at the saloon.

Line: As the characters enter the village, they are all invited to join in on the fun. Characters are handed mugs full of a delicious brew, their "town specialty," on the house!

Sinker: This village is a Fade Town. The following morning, the entire village, both buildings and inhabitants, will "fade out," becoming ghost-like beings who can only communicate or combat through psionics, and cannot leave the village (see *Rifts® World Book 16: Federation of Magic™*, pages 46-47). But not only the village residents are affected; they will be joined by anyone who drank so much as a sip of their special brew! The next night, they will become solid again, but still unable to leave the village. To be able to stop fading away and leave, a person must quit drinking the "Strange Brew" for one entire week; seven straight nights of nothing to drink. The townspeople drink every night, because the strange brew stops all aging so long as the drinker keeps drinking and stays in the village! The kegs from which the town taps their brew are now enchanted due to the nexus and refill every night with the magical liquid. However, if the kegs are removed to a distance of a mile (1.6 km) or greater from any ley line or nexus, they will slowly lose their powers (taking 3-4 weeks).

The Candy Man

Hook: About sunset, the player characters discover a Mountaineer ATV (*Rifts® Ultimate Edition*, pages 266-267), apparently abandoned in a remote part of the forest. The ATV appears to be in excellent condition (has all its M.D.C.), contains a 50 mile (80 km) range radio, an electric engine, but no weapon additions. The interesting thing is that the doors to the cabin are locked but the cargo area is not. The cargo area is actually full of various wines and candies.

Line: There are several dozen bottles of wine and boxes of candy bars just waiting for the taking. The total cargo is worth 50,000+, depending on the buyer.

Sinker: The ATV belongs to a traveling merchant who struck a deal with the local Faerie Folk to trade wine and candy for Faerie Food, which he then sells to traveling wizards, Stormspire, and the Federation of Magic. The merchant leaves the goods for the Fairies in his ATV overnight and returns the next day to find his cargo area full of Faerie Food. He has been doing this routine for going on two years now. The Faerie Folk (which include 6D6 Bogies and 12 Common Pixies) watch the characters from nearby trees and will not take kindly to their goods being messed with (especially the drinking of their wine), and will do their best to scare the characters away. They will only engage in physical combat if attacked, and then only long enough to allow most of them to escape. They hid their supply of Faerie Food once they realized that the characters were not the merchant. If the player characters chase away or kill all the Fairies, they might find the hidden Faerie Food (hidden in a hollow stump) and can take as much as they want. The Game Master should decide which Faerie Food is available. Also remember, the merchant will arrive the next day around sunrise and expect to find his goods already traded. If the player characters are really powerful, the merchant might also be a Ley Line

Walker, Warlock, or other mage type character that could give the characters a challenge. For more information on Faerie Folk, Faerie Weapons and Faerie Food, see *Rifts® Conversion Book One, Revised*, page 110.

Coalition Seek & Destroy Company 21-1053

Total Personnel – 160 (5 Platoons)

Officers:

Commissioned – 14

Non-Commissioned – 15

Infantry:

Grunts – 59

Dog Boys – 40

Skelebots – 32

Vehicles:

(1) Mark V APC

(1) Mark IX EPC

(1) CR-004 Scout Spider Walker

(1) Mark VII Slayer

(2) UAR-1 Enforcers

(2) IAR-2 Abolishers

(12) SAMAS, which includes:

(4) Death's Head

(5) Smiling Jack

(1) Super SAMAS

(1) Sea SAMAS

(1) Special Forces SAMAS

The five platoons are set up as follows:

Platoon A – Command

This platoon contains the Mark V APC, Mark IX EPC, the Scout Spider Walker and six of the SAMAS. This platoon also contains most of the officers and eight of the Dog Boys (levels 2-5).

Platoon B – Skelebots

This platoon contains the 32 Skelebots (all walking).

Platoon C – Dog Pack

The other 32 Dog Boys (levels 1-3) are in this platoon (they all ride in the Mark VII in Platoon E).

Platoon D – Infantry

32 of the Grunts (levels 1-2) are in this platoon (20 ride in the Mark V APC and 12 ride in the Mark VII Slayer).

Platoon E – Mechanized

This platoon contains the Mark VII Slayer, the (2) Enforcers, (2) Abolishers, and the other six SAMAS.

The rest of the officers are found in this platoon.

The commander of the company is Colonel Jack Talbeit (Military Specialist, Level 12).

The rest of the officers (including non-commissioned) look something like this:

- (2) Military Specialists – Levels 6-7
- (5) Communications Officers – Levels 1-6
- (2) Commandos – Levels 5-6

- (2) Special Forces – Levels 5-6
- (2) Nautical Commando Specialists (SEALs)
- (2) PSI-Battalion Advisors
- (9) Elite RPA SAMAS – Levels 1-4
- (6) Others, including (1) CS Ranger, (1) Technical Officer, and (2) RPA Fly Boy Aces.

The Hammer of the Forge

Chapter Thirty-Four

World of the Dead

By James M.G. Cannon

Red lightning flashed across a dark and cloudy sky, illuminating a broad plaza surrounded by towering buildings of black stone, carved with frightening and lewd imagery.

In the center of the plaza stood a squad of Atlantean Undead Slayers, led by Kassiopeia Acherean. Thirteen Atlantean warriors in dark armor, incised with magical runes, brandished weapons both arcane and technological as an army closed in on them. Above them hovered the winged android warrior, Joriel, his psychic weapon casting a blue glow across his grim visage. Joriel's maroon eyes focused on the two members of their party separated from the group: Doctor Abbot and Arwen of the Celestial Brotherhood.

Doctor Abbot was a being of pure shadow, nearly invisible in the darkness save for the twin orange lights of his eyes. A battered fedora and duster gave him definition, stark against the backdrop of the vampires closing in. Arwen, normally green-skinned and blue-haired, was turned a darker shade by the violet aura of light and energy that surrounded her.

Beyond the small patch of bare flagstones upon which Abbot and Arwen stood massed a vast army of vampires. Pale fleshed, red eyed, with slavering jaws and curving claws, the great horde shifted and moved like a living thing, drawing ever closer to the duo. In a moment, the vampires would pounce and devour them all like a school of undead piranha. It didn't matter how many of the vampires would perish in the battle, their sheer numbers could not fail to destroy them all.

Joriel gritted his teeth. His feathered wings moved slowly, almost involuntarily, while the gravitic drive in his chest kept him aloft. The only saving grace he saw in this situation was that not a single one of the people here would rise in a few days as the living dead. The Atlanteans were proof against transformation, Abbot was composed of shadow rather than flesh, and Joriel was an artificial being. Come to think of it, maybe Arwen was in trouble.

Orun, Joriel thought, swearing in Kreeghor. *This is bad.*

He had deserted his position in the S'hree Vek Confederacy to join Kassy and Abbot and their friends on their crusade to fight evil in the Three Galaxies. All because of some residual

guilt over being part of a plot to kill Abbot – and, of course, the genuine attraction he felt for Kassy. His creators had not reckoned with him developing either a conscience or the capacity to care about anyone other than his masters. There were days when he wished they had been right. This looked like it was going to be one of them.

There wasn't much he could do against vampires. Their supernatural origin protected them from all harm, except for a bare handful of supposedly potent natural forces: wood or silver could place a vampire into a state of suspended animation, certain herbs or religious symbols could hold them at bay, and running water or sunlight could destroy them. Nothing else could do more than slow them down, not physical force, psionic energy, nor magical might. While Joriel was nearly as strong and fast as a Cosmo-Knight, was proficient in any number of armed or unarmed fighting styles, and capable of generating a psionic weapon, the blue-white blazer shining in his right hand, he didn't have a chance against a vampire. Let alone thousands of them.

For a moment he wished Kassy hadn't told him about the undead. But both of them were warriors-born, and not terribly good at "pillow talk." Old conquests of the martial kind were what they discussed in their quiet moments together, comparing notes and trying to impress each other. It didn't take long for Joriel to realize that he was entirely outclassed by the Atlantean woman he loved. He had been activated barely twenty cycles before, and though Kassy didn't look much older, the Atlanteans were a long-lived people. She had explored much of the Three Galaxies with her friends, Doctor Abbot and Lothar of Motherhome, and she had fought many foes. Giants, dragons, despots, warlords, demons, immortals, and, of course, the undead.

Joriel's reverie was interrupted as a hundred or more vampires suddenly transformed into bats and flew directly at him. He was subsumed under a cloud of screeching, leather-winged rodents, whose sharp teeth scraped against his armor and wings and exposed flesh. Joriel slashed at them with his blazer. As expected, no effect.

On the ground, Doctor Abbot adjusted the brim of his hat and regarded the massed vampires coolly. Beside him, Arwen bounced on the balls of her feet, sucking her lower lip under her teeth, eager to test her mettle against the vampires. The vampires edged closer and Arwen immediately folded into a fighting stance. They hesitated, clearly fazed by Arwen's lack of fear. These Wild Vampires were barely sentient, ruled by their insa-



tiabie hunger for blood, but it was clear that even they could be unbalanced by a woman like Arwen.

Abbot took advantage of the moment and used the bottom of his cane to inscribe a circle in the air over Arwen and himself. A glimmering ball of yellow light formed there, casting out soft and warm rays that made Abbot, mostly shadow himself, feel weak and lightheaded. More importantly, it set the vampires to shrieking and sent them spilling backwards away from the small circle of light around Abbot and Arwen. It wasn't real daylight, but it would serve to keep the bloodsuckers at bay.

Arwen began to move towards the vampires. "Not another step," Abbot said sharply.

The young woman paused and looked back at Abbot. "I can take 'em," she said with a pout.

"No, my dear, you cannot. Trust me. All we can do is sit tight and wait for Kassy to rescue us." He risked a glance upward. "Though she may take the time to rescue her boyfriend first."

Red lightning crashed across the sky, illuminating the plaza for a brief moment. Thousands of vampires clogged the plaza. More streamed in from the exits, or swarmed across the buildings with jerky, spider-like movements. Perhaps there was nothing left alive on this planet, nothing except for the vampires, and the scent of warm blood in the air was drawing this world's entire dead population to this spot.

Kassiopaia Acherean didn't allow herself to think too deeply on that point. She had always hoped that Vampire Worlds were a myth, but she and her companions had passed through Doctor Abbot's Rift into a nightmare reality. As soon as Kassy had realized what was going on, she had touched the tattoo on her left wrist, a stylized heart with a stake driven through it. Her left hand brushed her right wrist, summoning up a silver sword wreathed in blue fire. One of those actions would be helpful against the ravaging undead horde, while the other merely made her feel better.

The two Undead Slayers flanking her, Odin and Jocasta, mirrored her gestures, summoning up a black mace wreathed in green flames and a scimitar of crimson fire respectively. The rest of her squad was scattered around the plaza, stationed to secure the perimeter, cut off from one another by the swiftly moving vampire mob. But they were Undead Slayers all, and Kassy didn't need to check on them to know they were fine. A Master Vampire or one of the dreaded Vampire Intelligences might have been cause for concern, but this was just an unruly rabble of the wild variety. Nothing too strenuous for a squad of Atlantean slayers.

There was a ley line here, knifing across the plaza invisibly, the anchor for Abbot's Rift. Its power would be enough to fuel a summoning that normally would have given Kassy pause. One of her most expensive and taxing tattoos was placed at the nape

of her neck, a curlicue of water, ice blue edged in white. It would take nearly a third of her psychic energy to activate the tattoo, but the ley line would ease the burden considerably. She knew everyone else in the squad had similar “last ditch” tattoos, secret weapons to be used against the undead.

Vampires surged forward, clawing at Kassy, and she beat them back with sword and fist and knees and feet. Their claws tore jagged shreds in her Atlantean armor and almost scored the flesh beneath, but Kassy was a canny fighter and she kept them at bay. Odin’s mace swung through the air near her ear and knocked a vampire back into a dozen more with enough force to send them all crashing to the plaza’s flagstones. They found their feet in an instant and swarmed towards their prey once more. Odin grunted in displeasure.

Kassy reached behind her ear and touched the nape of her neck. There was a flash of blue light, and a fleeting feeling of exhaustion as her life force fueled the tattoo’s magic, and then she was herself again.

And standing on the flagstones beside Kassy was a swirling tower of cold blue water. Near the apex of the tower a pair of silver eyes calmly surveyed the scene. A huge, toothless maw opened beneath the eyes, and the Water Elemental loosed a soundless roar as the tower expanded into a wall ten feet high and began to advance on the vampires.

The vampires eyed the new arrival with uncertainty. Perhaps some level of awareness, some hint of fear, had penetrated past their hunger-induced madness. Immortal, invulnerable, undead killing machines faced their own mortality for the first time and found themselves hesitating. Then the Elemental was moving, an incandescent wave of roaring, roiling water, washing over the vampires. Wherever their pale necrotic flesh touched water, it dissolved as if doused with acid. The vampires screamed, a blood-curdling cry from a thousand throats.

Near Kassy, a green-scaled Ukt Water Serpent manifested, summoned by Odin. A sudden rainstorm rippled into sight around the coils of the serpent, and the vampires on that side began to melt as well. Jocasta called to life a gigantic tree with red bark and leaves, the limbs of which twisted and curled like living things. The limbs uncurled and shot branches like missiles. Dozens shattered harmlessly on the flagstones or against hard vampiric flesh, but many slammed home into the unprotected chests of the vampires, driven with unnatural strength and speed, stopping them in their tracks. The vampires weren’t destroyed, but they were neutralized as a threat.

Around the plaza, the other Undead Slayers brought to life their own special anti-vampire tattoos. The south end of the square erupted in a blaze of light as Diomedes activated the fragment of sunlight he kept on the back of his hand. Vampires erupted like pyres, shining like candles at noon. A hurricane manifested in the north, where Keres and her brother had stationed themselves, an explosion of wind and water that shredded vampires like tissue paper. In the east, a green-skinned giant with a sword of water appeared, Atlas’ pet, and began to slash at the horde, destroying dozens with each swipe. In the west, Geb sent hundreds of vampires sprawling with an impromptu earthquake, while Gwydion conjured up a living river that hovered over the shaking earth and disintegrated the unbalanced undead.

It was over in moments. The vampires really never stood a chance.

Kassy picked her way across the flagstones, stepping carefully to avoid the ooze and ash left behind by the vampires, and approached the bobbing globe of daylight that hung over Abbot and Arwen.

“That was awesome!” Arwen said.

Abbot leaned on his cane, orange eyes twinkling in his version of a smile. “A timely rescue, my dear.”

Kassy nodded. “I thought you knew every spell in the Megaverse, Doc. Couldn’t you whip up some Elemental magic to help out?”

“I decided to leave the clean-up to the experts,” the wizard said. “Besides, I had my hands full keeping our adolescent martial artist from biting off more than she could chew.”

“You never let me have any fun,” Arwen complained.

Joriel landed lightly at Kassy’s side, soaked to the bone but grinning widely. “I don’t know what I was worried about,” he said. He had a few cuts and scrapes on his exposed flesh, but his self-repair systems were already hard at work sealing the rents.

“Indeed,” Abbot said, “I do not believe there is anything in the Three Galaxies more dangerous than a dozen Atlantean Undead Slayers.”

The other Atlanteans converged on their position, tattooed summonings winking out of existence. All of them were clad in black body armor, etched in Atlantean runes, and weapons bristled all over. Odin scratched his goatee and grinned lopsidedly at them all. “Nice workout, I guess, but I was expecting a Shoggoth on the other side of that Rift.”

“We’ll find it shortly,” Kassy promised. The sixteen of them had crossed through a Rift conjured by Abbot in pursuit of a Shoggoth, a servant of the hated Splugorth, which had kidnapped an entire town from the pastoral world of Adumar. All because of the fractured, acquisitive mind of a Splugorth named Rynncryll which believed it could capture the Cosmic Forge, and the prophecy of the pastoralists of Adumar, who believed that a psychic born of their line would one day track down the Forge. It was a cosmic comedy of errors, and Kassy would have laughed if so many lives weren’t on the line.

“Doc, can you still track the thing?” Kassy asked.

Abbot nodded. “I’ll need a moment to get my bearings. You’ve just released a great deal of magic here – not that I’m complaining – but it will take a moment to sift through the background noise and spot the trail.”

“We may not have that long,” Odin said pointedly. “We eliminated the welcome party, but there are bound to be more bloodsuckers in this city. I saw most of them flee the carnage, and you can bet there’s at least one Intelligence around here that’s going to be interested in our presence.”

“He’s right,” Kassy told Abbot. “We did well against a few thousand of the beasts, but we can’t fight off a whole world. We need to get moving, and quickly.”

“The Shoggoth is a servant of the Splugorth,” Abbot reminded them. “Not of the vampires. This dimension, this world, was not its destination. This was just a stopping off point, to shake off any possible pursuers. I will need time to prepare another Rift, to follow it on to the next dimension.”

“Next dimension?” Joriel asked.

“Yes, I’m afraid so,” Abbot said. “There’s no telling how many of these little stops the Shoggoth may have made.”

"That doesn't fill me with joy, Doc," Joriel said.

"On the contrary, my dear Celestine. It may work to our advantage; with any luck, the Shoggoth hasn't made it to Rynncryll's court yet. It may give us the time we need to save the villagers."

Something large and loud loosed a high-pitched scream somewhere in the city. It wasn't close. Yet.

"Do what you have to do, Abbot," Kassy said. She looked to her squad. "We will too."

The Atlanteans made a rough circle around the wizard as he went into a trance. Another scream echoed in the city, closer this time, and more throats answered the cry. Joriel muttered something under his breath and adjusted his wings. Arwen looked around, standing on her toes to see over the shoulders of the Atlanteans.

Kassy kept close watch on Abbot, leaving Odin and Jocasta to keep the troops in line. Suddenly, Abbot looked up. "I've got it," he said, just as Jocasta nudged Kassy's elbow.

Kassy turned to see a number of huge, misshapen bat-things lumber into the plaza. On their heels came another army of vampires. "Abbot, get that Rift open." She sighed, as her left hand moved towards the elemental on her neck once more. At this rate, when they finally caught up with the Shoggoth, they would be too weak to give it any trouble.

Abbot began to chant as the plaza once more erupted in violence.

* * *

It was good to be back in the desert. Caleb Vulcan grew up in a lot of places, typical for an army brat, but mostly in Arizona. And while he now made his living in the Three Galaxies, policing the spaceways as a servant of the Cosmic Forge, he had accidentally found his way back to Earth. It was a much changed Earth, home to giants and monsters and worse, and his companions included a hulking 'Borg named Wagner, a spellcaster called the Soothsayer, the Mind Melter Stephanie Sawyer, a Crazy with a John Wayne fetish who answered to the handle "Marshal," and an enigmatic man called Hart. They were all hard-bitten, rough-edged men and women, born into a world ravaged by an apocalypse that fundamentally altered the basic reality of the Earth, making it a haven for predators from beyond space and time.

They had led Caleb and his charge, the Kreeghor Geryon, south from the Dakotas and into Texas, across the vast and verdant American plains. They faced threats every step of the way, from giants hidden by magic, to fleets of draconic creatures looking for an easy meal, bands of creatures called Psi-Stalkers who devoured psychic energy, Coalition patrols, walking trees that didn't care for the group camping near their water source, bandits in power armor, overgrown insects with telekinetic guns, and a host of other dangers. Hart used stealth whenever possible, negotiated safe passage if unable to avoid them, and resorted to violence only when necessary. Caleb knew that Hart's reluctance to use force had more to do with the effort and ammunition expended in such an endeavor, rather than any moral qualms about using violence. Which was why, for all the assorted powers and abilities of his new companions, it was Hart, the "ordinary man," who made Caleb feel most uneasy.

Caleb didn't care for this transformed Earth. Too much death, too much hopelessness, too much despair. The only viable response to the Rifts and their inhuman spawn that the planet's natives had so far been able to produce was a trumped up Nazism called "the Coalition," which danced around in skull masks and slaughtered anything that didn't look human enough. Caleb had seen some of their handiwork on the trip south, too — entire towns and villages transformed into burned out husks, corpses thrown onto huge pyres. It made Caleb sick to think about it.

But some of his negativity was softened when the rolling Midwestern plains turned into the Texas desert, as grasslands turned to badlands, and the desolate beauty of the American Southwest opened up before them. Once in a while the vista would be marred by something that looked like a huge metal skull with spider-legs, rusting against a dune, but mostly Caleb just saw unbroken wilderness, untouched by the hand of man. Or alien.

Big skies so blue they hurt the eyes, decorated with a light dusting of white clouds. The earth decorated with a palette of browns and reds and tans, accented with scrub and cactus.

There was trouble here as well; vampires, Psi-Stalkers, mutants, bandits. They skirted the edges of the Coalition State of Lone Star, but still had to duck their heads whenever a black skull appeared on the horizon. Geryon tried to escape twice, but Caleb recaptured him handily enough, with a little help from Hart's people.

Then they passed through some kind of invisible border, and the others visibly relaxed. The next group of bandits who approached them Hart waved down, rather than trying to sneak past them, and they had a little conference. The huge Simvan leader of the bandits clapped Hart on the back and shared a smoke with him. Caleb eyed the band of monstrous humanoids dubiously. They were heavily armed and armored, riding an assortment of vehicles and animals.

"We're in Pecos territory now," the hulking 'Borg, Wagner, informed Caleb. "Horuvex and his boys here aren't exactly friends, but they're not enemies. That counts for a lot around here."

"What are they discussing?" Caleb asked. "The best places to raid, rape, and slaughter?"

Wagner frowned. It was one of the few facial expressions he ever showed; half his face was hidden by the helm bolted to his cybernetic head. "We're not all killers without conscience, Caleb. But sometimes we have to make deals with those who are, just to survive. From what I've gathered, your own home isn't quite as savage and unforgiving. I envy you that, but I don't make apologies for what we do in order to make it from day to day."

Caleb was more shocked by the speech than its content. Wagner was not a talker. "Fair enough," he said. "I'm trying not to judge, but I admit it's hard. I was born on this planet, long before the Rifts came. Seeing everything changed is... unsettling, to say the least."

Moments later, Horuvex and Hart parted ways. The bandits rode north, while Caleb and his companions continued south.

"What's the good word, sarge?" Sawyer asked Hart.

"Macklin's mobilized his troops, planning to hit Asgarth."

Sawyer blinked hard and stared straight ahead. "We're too late, then."

"No," Hart said. "Not yet. Horuvex says that Solo still lives. It's the only reason why Macklin hasn't razed Asgarth to the ground." Hart looked over his shoulder at Caleb. "We have time to set things right."

"Even after all this time, you're still playing your cards close to your chest," Caleb said. "Now you're throwing around names and significant looks and I'm beginning to get really irritated. I said I would help, didn't I?"

"He has a point, Hart," Wagner said.

Hart grimaced. "I still think this story should be Solo's to tell. But Vulcan has more than proved himself on this trip. I guess it won't hurt none."

Hart focused on Caleb. "We serve a woman called Solo. She's immortal, a goddess of sorts, and she's carved a safe haven for people of all kinds out of a little corner of the Pecos Empire. People that don't want anything to do with the Coalition, the Vampire Kingdoms, or the raiders all find a home in Asgarth. It's sort of neutral territory, protected largely by Solo's power and reputation. But there are people who envy her that power, and her reputation. One of those is a cold-hearted snake called Victor Macklin, a self-styled bandit lord with delusions of megalomania. He wants to rule the Pecos Empire, and he sees Solo as standing in his way.

"Recently, Solo fell ill. She's never been sick a day in her long life, but now she's dying. Poisoned, it turns out, by one of Macklin's agents. We discovered that too late. The Soothsayer divined that the poison was a pre-Rifts artifact, that no cure exists on Earth, and that the only person who can save her is the red knight from beyond. You, in other words, Caleb Vulcan."

Caleb frowned. "I'm not sure how I can do that. The Cosmic Forge gave me many abilities, but healing isn't one of them."

"Perhaps it's not what you are capable of doing, but something you will do. Perhaps you can find an antidote."

"Maybe," Caleb said. He kept his own counsel after that, but now felt more uncertain than ever.

It took another day and a half to reach Asgarth. It was the size of a large town, with a twenty foot high wall encircling it completely. It looked like adobe, but Hart assured Caleb that it was camouflaged megasteel. Gun emplacements peaked out from strategic points in the wall, but all the buildings were hidden behind the wall's lip. It was somewhat medieval, ignoring aerial attack or bombardment, but perhaps it kept out monsters. A patrol consisting of a pair of bikers flanking an armored ATV met them a few miles from the city. The guards all wore armor that reminded Caleb of football pads, which was strangely appropriate since all four of them were built like linebackers. The only discordant element to the picture were the strange tubes snaking along the guards' limbs and the slightly manic look in their eyes.

"Welcome back," said one of the bikers. His hair was cut into a multicolored mohawk and a thick pair of goggles protected his eyes from the sun and dust. "Did you find what you were looking for?"

Hart jerked a thumb at Caleb and Geryon and the guard loosed a low whistle. "That's a pretty ugly D-Bee, I'll give you that," the guard said. "He really gonna save Solo?"

Geryon sneered. "Simple, stupid humans."

Caleb shot the Kreeghor a look which Geryon ignored. "Sorry, buddy, but it looks like I'm the hero of the day."

The guard shrugged. "A vagabond? He don't look like much, Hart."

"Neither did Audie Murphy," Caleb said. The guard gave him a blank look. "Never mind."



The guards escorted the small company back to town and through the walls. They negotiated the elaborate checkpoint at the gate with ease. Hart and his friends were local celebrities, and grim faces brightened at their arrival. There were more of those football-guards, as well as more conventional soldiers in more complete suits of armor. Everyone seemed to be heavily armed, with large guns and Vibro-weapons and more esoteric devices. The populace appeared to be mostly human, but there was a sizable alien minority. Caleb saw Simvan, Psi-Stalkers, Elves and Dwarves, even a four-armed giant woman leaning on a massive spear. It was hardly as cosmopolitan as Center or even Garouk-9, but there existed a wide variety of beings in this town. Peacefully, it looked, and even profitably.

Asgarth's lifeblood was trade. Surrounded on all sides by bandit kingdoms, the town earned its keep by purchasing, trading, and refitting stolen merchandise. The center of the town was a huge marketplace, bustling with activity. Strange sights and sounds and smells assaulted Caleb's senses. Everywhere armed soldiers walked, but the populace was armed as well. Caleb had a feeling that even the kids knew what to do with a gun, and he found himself feeling unsettled again.

Voices and faces came out of the crowd, well-wishers and concerned citizens, welcoming the heroes home. They were curious about Caleb and Geryon, shouted warnings about Macklin, and asked after the health of Hart and his people. Hart and the others answered what they could, shouted greetings back, and slapped palms, but moved economically in the direction of the largest home in town, a delicate-looking structure that made up most of a block.

A gleaming, silver humanoid with handsomely sculpted, frozen features met them at the edge of the property. So used to seeing strange organic beings, it took Caleb a moment to realize that this figure was a robot. "You're late," it said to Hart. The voice was effusive, incongruent with the frozen face.

"Couldn't be helped," Hart said. "We're here now. She well enough to receive visitors?"

The robot nodded. "Only you folks, and only because of your guest. You did find what she sent you to look for, didn't you?"

Hart brushed his way past the robot. "We'll find out in a few moments, Phineas."

Inside, Caleb discovered the most refined and immaculate dwelling he had so far encountered in this post-apocalyptic world. It had the look and feel of an antebellum home from the South, with white walls and hanging plants. Works of art adorned the halls and rooms, and burnished wood floors creaked under Caleb's feet as he walked through the house. It seemed almost sacrilegious that Hart and his mercenary friends would tromp through here in their armor and weapons.

Hart led them to the second floor, to a tastefully appointed bedroom with a four poster bed, and heavy shades drawn across all the windows. A delicate form lay beneath the counterpane, pale and sickly but still eerily beautiful. Solo was an albino, with white skin and hair, and pale pink eyes that blinked uncertainly as Hart and his people entered the room. She struggled to sit up as Hart approached, and the laconic mercenary helped her.

"You have returned," she observed needlessly. "And with little time to spare. I feel the sickness within me, coiling like a serpent around my heart. Days yet remain before I pass forever beyond the veil of death."

"That fate will be avoided," Hart promised her. "Allow me to introduce Caleb Vulcan. He is a Cosmo-Knight, a warrior of great power. He will be our deliverance."

Solo's pink eyes moved from Hart to Caleb. "Leave us, please. I would speak to Mr. Vulcan alone."

Hart rose and moved his people out of the room with his eyes. Wagner grabbed Geryon and made to drag him out with them, but Caleb forestalled him. "I'll keep an eye on him for you, Vulcan. Talk to Solo. Do what you can to save her." The huge 'Borg paused for a moment. "Please."

Caleb clucked his tongue against his teeth, for once at a loss for words. He turned to regard the dying immortal. "Come closer," she said, beckoning him.

Despite himself, Caleb did as she asked. He ran a hand nervously through his red hair. "So you're Solo," he said, just to say something. It sounded even more stupid out loud than it did in his head. "I've, uh, heard a lot about you."

Solo considered him. Caleb felt a presence emanating from the small woman, moving through the air to examine him from head to toe. Hart had said something about "power," and Caleb

was getting his first experience with the strange woman's abilities. It wasn't an attack, that much he was certain, so he allowed it to continue, though it made him uncomfortable.

"I sense great power within you," Solo said at last, "as well as great virtue. I thank you for agreeing to see me, and for offering your help. Do you know the circumstances that have brought you to Asgarth?"

"Hart said something about a bad guy named Macklin, that he poisoned you, that your magic decided I was the only guy who could save you. I have to admit, though, I've no idea how. I'm no doctor."

"The time for doctors is long past. I am an immortal, of a kind, Caleb Vulcan. I was born in the year 1980 A.D., a date which may mean nothing to you, though I sense it may. I was alive when the nations of the world allowed themselves to be tricked into war, when the first nuclear bombs fell and the devastation and death that followed cracked open the walls of reality. My own abilities awakened in that dark time and I found myself becoming a leader, more out of necessity than desire. In the intervening centuries, I was able to carve out this small space here in the Pecos Empire, a quiet kingdom where people of all species and creeds are free to live as they wish, without fear of outside interference or threat.

"My reputation for fairness towards friends and ruthlessness towards enemies, as well as knowledge of my admittedly prodigious psychic abilities, kept out the worst of our possible foes. The Einherier, the Juicers and other soldiers, are capable enough to act as a police force and general peacekeepers, but it is I and I alone who has managed to keep Asgarth safe from the genuine dangers out there. Men like Macklin, or Lasar, or the Coalition.

"Now I am dying. I do not fear death for myself. I have lived longer than I ever hoped to and experienced more horror than anyone should have a right to. I would not say no to a rest which I believe is well deserved. But... were I to die today, this town and all its inhabitants would be wiped out tomorrow. Everything we have built will be destroyed. I cannot allow that to happen. I will not.

"So you have been summoned to help, so that this community will continue to live and, God willing, thrive. Do you understand the stakes, Caleb Vulcan?"

"Lady, I'm a Cosmo-Knight. I'd try to save you even if your people could live without you. It's what I do."

Solo closed her eyes and leaned against her pillows, breathing slowly. For a moment, Caleb thought she had gone to sleep, but the eyes opened once more. "Thank you," she said. "The task before you is perilous, but you are the only person in North America, perhaps the world, who can carry it out. The antidote to the poison killing me is being held in a space station orbiting the Earth."

"Huh," Caleb said.

"Yes. Humanity has focussed inward since the coming of the Rifts. The technology they have developed is designed to fight the terrors surrounding us, not to climb into the skies and explore space. Even if they did, though, the k-sats seeded around the Earth by the pre-Rifts governments would destroy any who would dare to reach beyond the atmosphere. Only you, a Cosmo-Knight, at home in the vacuum of space as a salmon is in the sea, could hope to reach the space station and retrieve the antidote."

"Seems simple enough," Caleb agreed. "What's the catch?"

Solo smiled without humor. "Besides the deadly killer satellites, our divinations have revealed that the space stations between Earth and the Moon are still inhabited. The inhabitants may not care to share their bounty with you."

"Okay. I've faced worse odds. I can be there and back by dinner. How's that sound?"

Solo reached out a pale hand to touch Caleb's. "Thank you," she said sincerely.

"All in a day's work, ma'am."

Tabletop Terrain

Using Terrain in Your Tabletop Games

By Leslie Furness

In the games my brother and I run, we tend to use miniatures and a lot of terrain pieces. These pieces represent trees, shrubs, and structures. People ask me to build the terrain they need. Then it hit me! Why don't I write a small article on terrain building for gaming?

Yes, I know there are other books and magazines that tell of building these things. However, there are some people who either can't afford these books or need step-by-step instructions. It is for these people that I am writing this article.

What do you need?

What do you need to build terrain for games? First you have to consider the size of the gaming table you are using. There can be such a thing as too much terrain.

The largest pieces of terrain we have ever used in a game were two cardboard spaceships each six feet (1.8 m) long and a total of four feet (1.2 m) wide (both ships side by side). That left us only six inches (15 cm) all around to roll the dice and place our character sheets. Though they were fun to play on. However, carting the ships to and from the gaming sites was a real pain in the behind.

There is also such a thing as too little terrain as well. At a convention once, there was a game table that had only six pieces of terrain representing a jungle. Normally, this would not matter except that the G.M. was inconsistent about line of sight around the jungle during the game.

The general rule of thumb when running an RPG with terrain is to take into account the area needed for the dice and papers. Using the remaining area in the center, plan out what you will need.

For example, the standard playing table is usually a dinner table, say, about seven feet (2.1 m) long and five feet (1.5 m) wide. Subtract about one foot (0.3 m) all around the edge, which will leave a playing area about five feet (1.5 m) long and three feet (0.9 m) wide, more than enough to play on.

Now that I have my playing area I will build what I need accordingly. For instance, the players have to infiltrate a Xiticix

hive. This means that the walls will not be straight and will change as they move through the hive. And possibly some pieces to represent rooms.

For the game the pieces I need to represent this will be as follows:

1. Two door-like openings, one large (about eight inches/20 cm) and one small (about four inches/10 cm).

2. Eight wall sections about eight inches (20 cm) long, three inches (7.6 cm) wide with edges that will fit together.

3. Three rooms generally circular in shape, one large (about 12 inches/30.5 cm) and two small (about 6 inches/15 cm). The rooms should have at least one door.

4. Any other random pieces that may be things of interest in the mound. Eggs, equipment from the last party, the last party all wound up in resin, etc.

In example 1, you can see how these pieces can be used to build corridors in the Xiticix hive. The two circles show the scale of one-inch (2.5 cm) base miniatures (like two SAMAS) to the rest of the playing area. This can put to rest a lot of questions about where objectives, Xiticix and player characters are in relation to each other. Any G.M. can tell you that this helps immensely in running the game.

What do I need to build terrain?

This is where it gets a little tricky. The tricky part is not in building the terrain pieces; it is in how much do you have for a budget. Most people don't have a lot to put into building terrain for gaming. With this in mind, I will tell you how to build it on a shoestring budget.

Here is the list of supplies you will need to build Xiticix terrain:

1. The best thing to use in making tabletop terrain can be summed up in one word. Cardboard! Cardboard is about the most useful thing you will ever use in making terrain. You can get it anywhere. Stores throw it out, and if you ask nicely they usually will give you as much as you need. Clean, rigid cardboard is the best to work with. Cost: free.

2. White glue. Use the real stuff like Elmer's all-purpose glue. Elmer's school glue and most knock-off brands are too thin and take a long time to dry. Cost: about \$2.00.

3. Scissors, preferably a good, strong, sharp pair will do. I have had cheap brands shatter in my hands. I was cutting one thin piece of cardboard, the cheap scissors broke and I spent the rest of the day digging plastic out of my skin. Go to the craft department in a reputable store. Cost: about \$2.00.

4. Matte knife. These are the blades that slide in and out of the handle. These are also the ones you break off at pre-cut notches to sharpen. Make sure you get replacement blades when you buy the knife. It is a real pain to stop what you are doing and go to the store to get new blades. Cost: about \$2.00 plus another \$2.00 for the replacement blades.

5. An X-Acto craft knife. These are the knives with the thin handle and the changeable blades. You will use them a lot. Make sure you get replacement blades when you buy the knife. Cost: about \$2.00 plus another \$2.50 for the replacement blades.

6. Newsprint paper. Next to cardboard this stuff is awesome to use. You can do almost anything with it. Like cardboard you can get it anywhere. People throw it out, and if you ask nicely they usually will give you as much as you need. Clean newsprint paper is easier and better to work with. Cost: free.

7. Masking tape. This is the paper tape used in painting and sealing boxes to ship. This can be acquired at any hardware or department store. Cost: about \$2.00.

8. Common pins. These are used to hold your masterpieces in place while the glue dries. These can be acquired at any department store. Cost: about \$2.00.

9. Paint. When painting the pieces please use acrylic water-based paints. They are cheap, easy to use and easy to clean up. Purchase the color you want plus black and white. These are also the same paints used in painting miniatures. This can be acquired at any hardware or department store. Cost: about \$1.00 each.

10. Paintbrushes. Generally a one-inch brush and a half-inch brush. These can be acquired at any hardware or department store. Cost: about \$1.00.

11. Spray sealer. You will need this when you are all done to protect the surface of your pieces. This can be acquired at any hardware or department store. Cost: about \$2.00.

12. Sand or very fine gravel. This is used to give your pieces texture. The texture will enhance the appearance and make it look better on the table. You can buy sand or get it beside the road. When I get it beside the road I wash it in a bucket with soap and water and then carefully pour out the water so I don't lose the sand. Then set it on a series of newsprint sheets to let it dry. Cost: about \$5.00, or free beside the road.

13. Sandpaper. One sheet of 200 grit sandpaper and one sheet of 400 grit sandpaper. This can be acquired at any hardware or department store. Cost: about \$0.50 each.

14. Super glue. Needed to attach parts and pieces securely for the next step. Cost: about \$2.00.

15. A good light source. There is no such thing as too much light when working on terrain, assembling models or painting miniatures. You don't have to go out and buy a lamp; any good lamp from home will do. Sometimes the bargain stores do carry a fairly sturdy clip-on lamp for a dollar and good 60-watt bulbs for a dollar as well. Just keep looking.

16. Paper towels or tissues. These are needed to clean your tools and yourself. Anything like this around the house will do.

The total cost so far is about \$21.00. Most of this can be used in building other terrain pieces so you won't have to go out and get more right away. It is very cost effective in the long run.

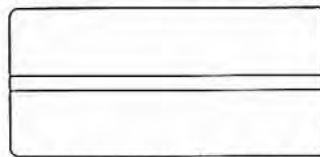
Note: To keep from having to buy new equipment each week, clean your brushes with soap and water after each process. Wipe down the tools. This keeps paint and glue from messing things up.

Section One: Making the Bases

Step 1: On a sheet of paper, draw out the exact size of the pieces such as height, width and length. You will refer to this often. Then make sure you have all you need handy.

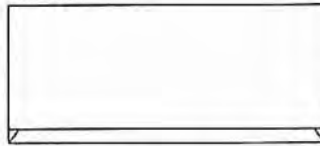
Bases, Walls And Chambers

Top View



Walls are two inches high, eight inches long and two inches wide.

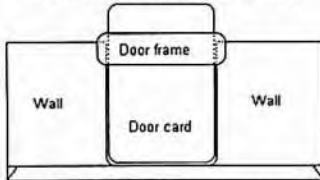
Side view



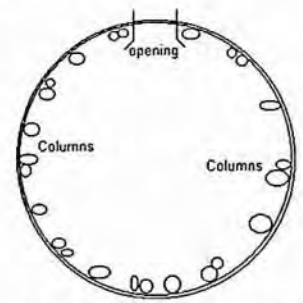
Large entrance is four inches high, eight inches long and four inches wide.
Small entrance is two inches high, four inches long and two inches wide.



The dotted area is cut out for the opening



Door frame is glued on both sides of the wall
The door card should slide freely when in place.



The small chamber is eight inches across and the large chamber is twelve inches across.

The small chamber has two inch high walls, the large chamber has two inch high walls as well.

The small chamber has a two inch wide opening and the large chamber has a three inch wide opening

Door on chamber is optional

Note: Make sure the opening has top edge to represent that it is a tunnel.

Chambers will have columns along the walls for support and hiding spots.

Make objectives and cover for the inside of the halls and chambers.

Objective ideas:

- Egg pods
- Pools of water
- Vertical shaft openings
- Gear resined into a wall

Cover ideas:

- Columns
- Stalmites
- Raised ledges
- Pits with rock edges

Base color:

- Sandy Brown
- Standard shadow and highlight
- Black and white

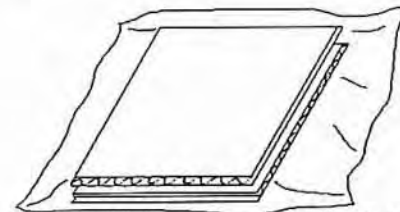
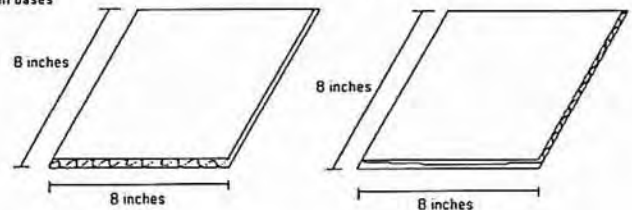
Optional washes:

- Yellow, red, orange, purple and green

Step 2: Using the white glue, secure the two layers together, making sure the "grain" of the cardboard sheets is crossing each other. This will add strength to the base. The glue will tend to make the cardboard curl a little. So place them under a sheet of plastic with a heavy book on them. Let the cardboard sheets dry fully.

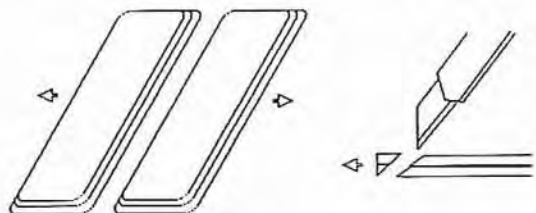
Cut a series of panels out of the cardboard approximately 8 inches square.

Making terrain bases



Glue the two sheets of cardboard together cross grained to each other.

Then place a sheet of plastic over the glued panels and place a weight on the top. A stack of books is best. This will keep the base from curling while it dries.



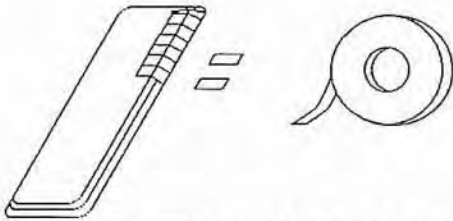
With the mattek knife, cut the dried cardboard base into two parts. These will be used as wall sections. Next with the mattek knife, carefully cut the sides and corners at an angle to tilt the edges

Repeat this step until you have all the wall sections you need. Note it is good to make at least two extra bases just in case. Any extra bases can always be used for something new.

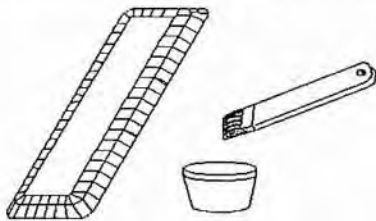
Step 3: Out of the cardboard, cut a series of general shapes based on your drawing and its measurements. For a suggestion, make the corners rounded for nature and square for streets. Using the X-Acto and the sandpaper, bevel the top edge. To use the sandpaper easier, wrap it around a small piece of wood for support. The work goes better.

Making terrain bases

Cut small pieces off the masking tape with the scissors and place them on the cardboard's open edges. This makes the edges cleaner and easier to work with when it comes time to paint and texture.



When you are finished the entire edge should be sealed with no holes or spaces showing.



The next step is to paint the edges of the base that are covered in the masking tape with glue. This will seal the tape and make sure it is bonded to the cardboard. Paint the top first and let dry. Then the sides and bottom. Let dry fully. Use thin coats of the glue, it will dry faster and minimize curling. After it is fully dried you are ready to put your walls on.

Step 4: To close up the sides of the cardboard, use small pieces of masking tape. However, the tape must be painted with white glue to hold it over time. Layer them from the top over the holes and then wrapped around the bottom edge. Again to keep the base from curling, place them under a sheet of plastic with a heavy book on them.

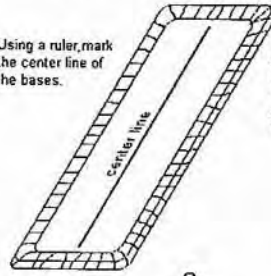
Section Two: Making the Walls and Entrances

Here is where the fun begins. The difficulty in building any terrain is how fancy and detailed do you want to make it. I found the simpler it is the easier it is to build and the longer it lasts. The next section is how to make the walls to the Xiticix hive.

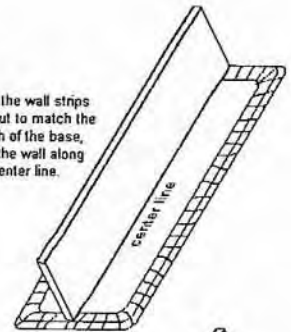
Step 1: Refer to your drawing. Make sure of what you want to make. Here is where you adjust your measurements to fit your base. A wall generally is either equal to or plus one half its base width in height. For example, if I have a three-inch (7.6 cm) wide base the highest wall I can put on it and have it stand up fairly well will be between 3 and 4 1/2 inches (7.6-11.4 cm) high.

Making walls

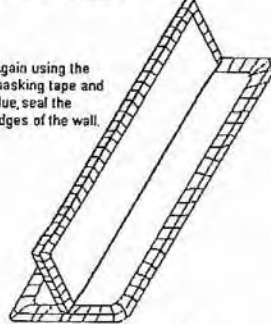
Using a ruler, mark the center line of the bases.



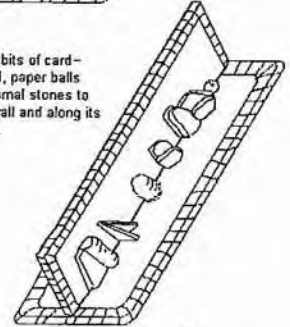
After the wall strips are cut to match the length of the base, glue the wall along the center line.



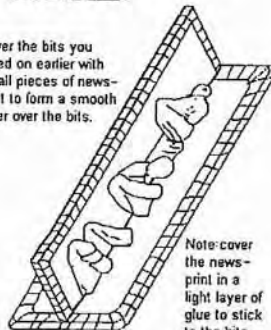
Again using the masking tape and glue, seal the edges of the wall.



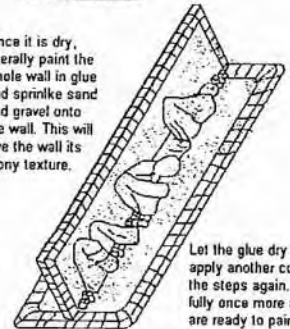
Glue bits of cardboard, paper balls and small stones to the wall and along its base.



Cover the bits you glued on earlier with small pieces of newsprint to form a smooth layer over the bits.



Once it is dry, liberally paint the whole wall in glue and sprinkle sand and gravel onto the wall. This will give the wall its stony texture.



Note: cover the newsprint in a light layer of glue to stick to the bits.

Let the glue dry fully and apply another coat doing the steps again. Let dry fully once more and you are ready to paint.

Step 2: I decided to use a 2-inch (5 cm) high wall so even if they are set close together, players can still move their minis. I have eight bases to make eight wall sections as per my diagram. I have to prep the bases for the walls. Using a ruler, mark the center of the base from one end to the other down the length.

Now I cut eight wall strips. The strips are 2 inches (5 cm) wide and 8 inches (20 cm) long. Once the pieces are cut, glue the strips down the center of the base. Line the ends up with the base ends.

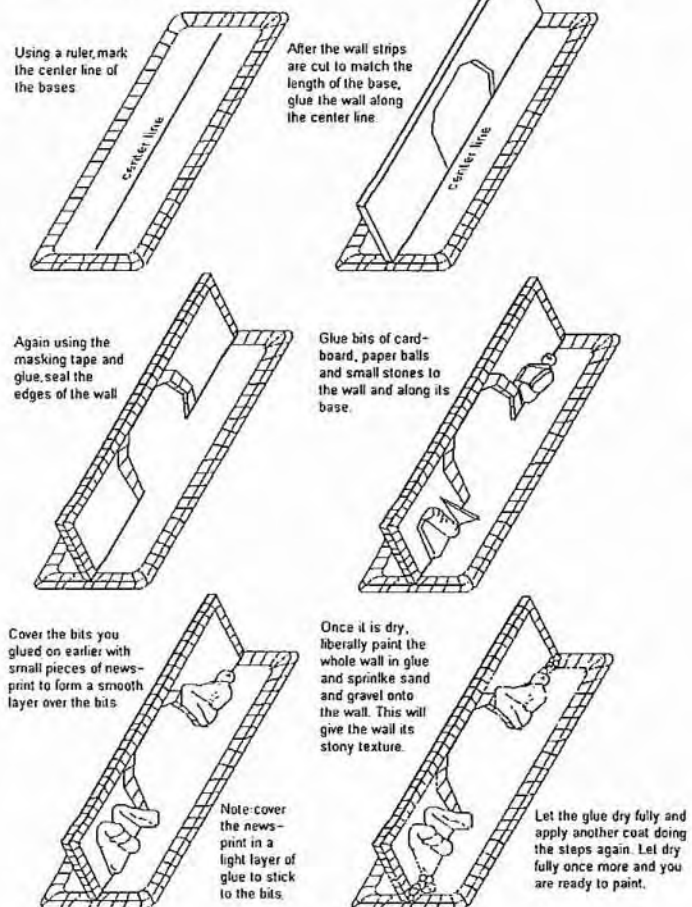
Using the small pieces of tape, again carefully hide the edges of the cardboard. Paint the tape with white glue and let dry fully.

Step 3: Making the walls look like something other than cardboard can be fun. Take small pieces of cardboard triangles and white glue them on with one edge touching the wall and one edge touching the base. Using the white glue, glue a small paper ball (about 1/2 inch/13 mm) to another spot. Using the super glue, secure a small rock (about 1/2 inch/13 mm) to the base. With a little practice you can get really creative. Feel free to make little nooks and crannies for critters and players to hide in.

The next part is to cover these bits you have glued to the terrain with newsprint paper that has a light layer of white glue on it. Completely cover these bits and make it look smooth and organic. Let the glue dry fully.

Step 4: To texture the walls, simply paint the wall and the top of the base only with white glue using the 1-inch brush and sprinkle sand and gravel on it while the glue is still wet. Let the glue dry and repeat the process. Let it dry again. Hopefully, at this point the wall should look nothing like the cardboard.

Making An Entrance

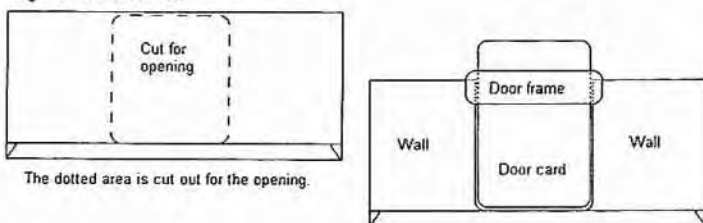


Entrances

Entrances are made the same as a wall. The only difference is that a section is removed for the opening itself. The large opening should be on a wider base, as it is higher than the rest. I chose a 4-inch (10 cm) wide base to match a 4-inch wide door and a 4-inch high entrance wall. For the small entrance I chose a 2-inch (5 cm) wide base to match a 2-inch wide door and a 2-inch high entrance wall. The entrances are detailed and textured just like the walls.

Note: To make a doorframe that can use a card to represent an open or closed door, simply glue small strips along the top of the opening from one side of the opening to the other on both sides of the wall. This will allow a card to be slid in and out for a door.

Large entrance is four inches high, eight inches long and four inches wide.
Small entrance is two inches high, four inches long and two inches wide.



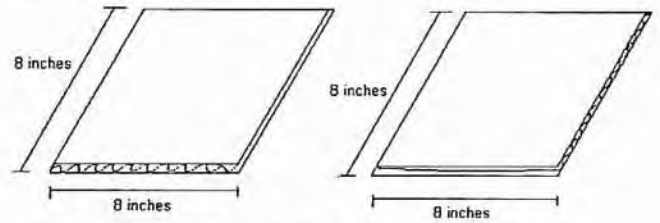
Section Three: Making the Round Chambers

The Bases

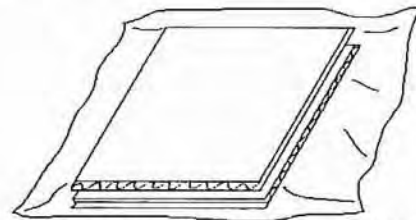
As in the previous section, we have to make the terrain bases fit the chambers. The following steps are to make the round chamber bases.

Step 1: Refer to the drawing with your measurements. Then make sure you have all you need handy. Again, make sure of the exact size of the pieces such as height, width and length.

Making terrain bases

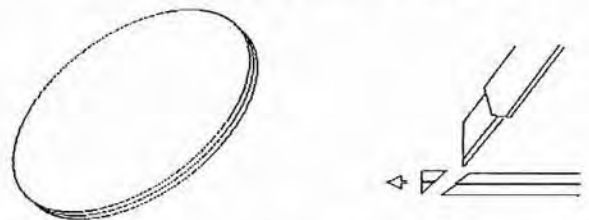


Cut a series of panels out of the cardboard approximately 8 inches square.



Glue the two sheets of cardboard together cross grained to each other.

Then place a sheet of plastic over the glued panels and place a weight on the top. A stack of books is best. This will keep the base from curling while it dries.



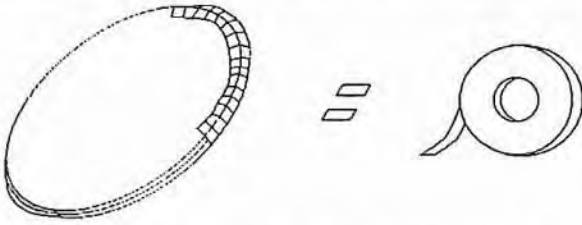
With the mat knife, cut the dried cardboard base into a circle, this will be the chamber floor. Next with the mat knife, carefully cut the sides and corners at an angle to tilt the edges. Repeat this process for the 12 inch base.

Step 2: Out of the cardboard, cut a series of general shapes based on your drawing and its measurements. For the two round rooms cut out four sheets of cardboard. The first set, two 8 x 8 inch (20 x 20 cm) sheets. And the next set, two 12 x 12 inch (30.5 x 30.5 sheets). Using the white glue, secure the two layers together, making sure the "grain" of the cardboard sheets is crossing each other. Then place them under a sheet of plastic with a heavy book on them. Let the cardboard sheets dry fully.

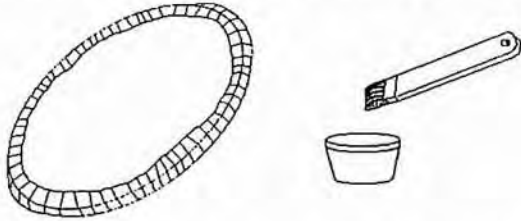
Step 3: Using the X-Acto knife, cut an 8-inch (20 cm) circle out of the 8-inch by 8-inch sheets. Cut a 12-inch (30.5 cm) circle out of the 12-inch by 12-inch sheets. Again, using the X-Acto knife and the sandpaper, bevel the top edge. To use the sandpaper easier, wrap around a small piece of wood for support. The work goes better.

Making terrain bases

Cut small pieces of the masking tape with the scissors and place them on the cardboard's open edge. This makes the edges cleaner and easier to work with when it comes time to paint and texture.



When you are finished the entire edge should be sealed with no holes or spaces showing



The next step is to paint the edges of the base that are covered in the masking tape with glue. This will seal the tape and make sure it is bonded to the cardboard. Paint the top first and let dry. Then the sides and bottom. Let dry fully. Use thin coats of the glue, it will dry faster and minimize curling. After it is fully dried you are ready to put your walls on.

Step 4: To close up the sides of the cardboard use small pieces of masking tape. However, the tape must be painted with white glue to hold it over time. Layer them from the top over the holes and then wrapped around the bottom edge. Again to keep the base from curling, place them under a sheet of plastic with a heavy book on them.

The Chamber Walls

The round chambers are made much like the walls. The only difference is that there will be a door and the walls can be a little higher to infer a larger area. **Important Note:** Make sure that the walls are not too high or you and your friends cannot reach into them and move miniatures. With the bases cut, edged, glue sealed and fully dry we move on.

Step 1: Refer to your drawing. Make sure of what you want to make and adjust your measurements to fit your base. The chamber wall generally is equal to one quarter the width of the base.

For example, if I have an 8-inch (20 cm) base, I can have a 2-inch (5 cm) high chamber wall without running into difficulties when playing. With a 12-inch (30.5 cm) base, I can have a 3-inch (7.6 cm) high chamber wall.

Step 2: I decide to use a 2-inch high wall so even if they are set close together with other pieces the players can still move their minis. Now I have to prep the bases for the walls. Using a ruler mark a circle 1/8-inch from the edge all the way around both bases.

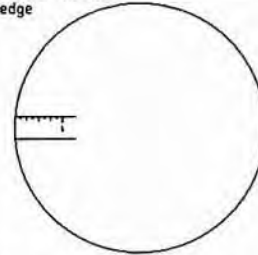
Now I cut the walls strips. The strips are 2 inches wide and any length you want. Once the pieces are cut glue the strips along the inside of the edge line. Line the next strip end up with the end of the previous strip. Don't worry if they are not perfect that can be covered with paper and glue.

Note: Remember to leave an open space for the door and if you would like, use the slot doorframe to make an opening and closing door.

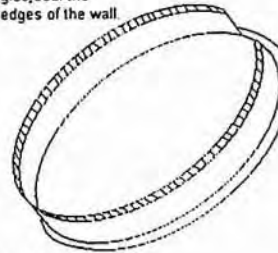
As before use the small pieces of tape and carefully hide the edges of the cardboard. Paint the tape with white glue and let dry fully.

Making walls

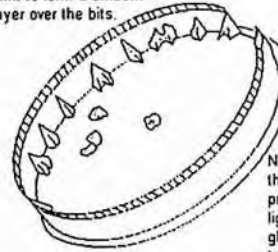
Using a ruler and pen, mark the edge of the circle 1/8 of an inch from the edge



Again using the masking tape and glue, seal the edges of the wall

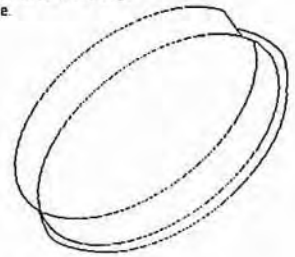


Cover the bits you glued on earlier with small pieces of newsprint to form a smooth layer over the bits.

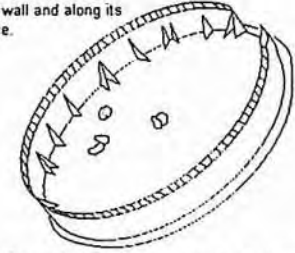


Note: cover the newsprint in a light layer of glue to stick to the bits.

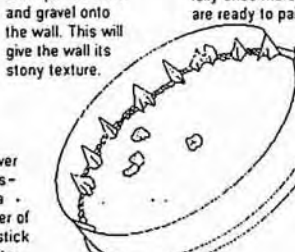
Cut the strips to any length and glue along the inside of the edge line.



Glue bits of cardboard, paper balls and small stones to the wall and along its base.



Once it is dry, liberally paint the whole wall in glue and sprinkle sand and gravel onto the wall. This will give the wall its stony texture.



Let the glue dry fully and apply another coat, doing the steps again. Let dry fully once more and you are ready to paint.

Step 3: Much like the walls making the chamber walls look like something other than cardboard can be fun. As before take small pieces of cardboard triangles and white glue them on with one edge touching the wall and one edge touching the base, glue a small paper balls (about 1/2 inch) to another spot, super glue small rocks (about 1/2 inch) to the base. Feel free to go wild and make little nooks and crannies in here. This is generally where most of the action will take place.

As with the walls, cover these bits you have glued to the terrain with newsprint paper that has a light layer of white glue on it. Completely cover these bits and make it look smooth and organic. Let the glue dry fully.

Step 4: Once again, texture the chamber interior by painting the wall and the top of the base only with white glue using the 1-inch brush and sprinkle sand and gravel on it while the glue is still wet. Let the glue dry and repeat the process. Let it dry again. The room should look very alien at this point.

Now with all the parts completed and dry, onto the last steps.

Painting the Terrain

This is probably the easiest part of assembling terrain and the most challenging. I will admit there are many people who are better at this than I and that there are more tricks to make your terrain look better. However, this is a barebones, how to build it article.

Painting the walls A

To paint the walls.

Base Coat

Simply completely paint the terrain walls the color you want them, i.e. sandy brown paint. Let it dry fully.

Shadow Wash

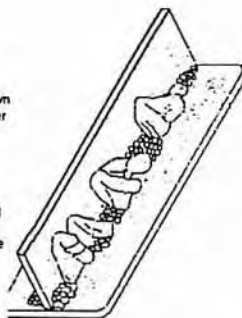
Then mix one part black paint with two parts sandy brown paint. Thin it down with water so that it flows like ink. With the 1/4 inch wide brush, paint the lower wall and base with this thinned paint. Let dry fully. The thinned paint will bring out the pebbly texture for the next layer.

Highlight

Again mix one part white paint and two parts sandy brown paint. Do not thin down this paint. Instead we are going to drybrush with it. Dry brushing is putting paint on a brush, taking a paper towel and squeezing out all the water, then applying the paint in a very light layer. This will now contrast the base coat mixed with black and make the walls look more like an organic structure. Such as a termite mound.

Final Sealing Coat

After the base coat, ink wash and drybrush are done, let the wall dry fully. Then spray with the acrylic sealer. Let dry fully once more and you are done with that wall section. Repeat for all the wall sections.

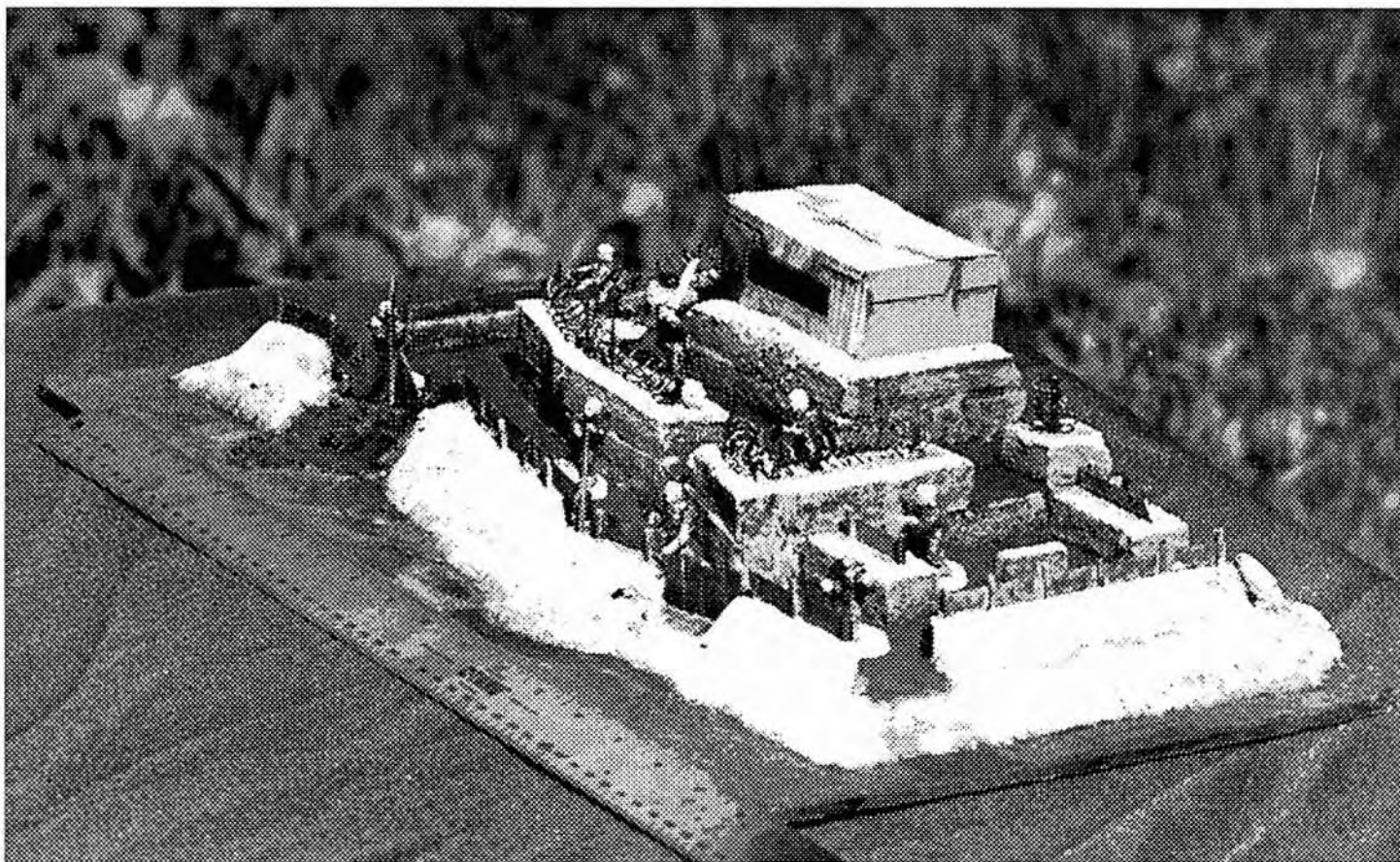


Step 1: Base Coat: Paint ALL the terrain pieces with the color you want. For example, the acrylic craft paint sandy brown. Completely cover all the pieces, every little bit, including the bottom. This keeps the pieces from curling and warping. Allow all the pieces to dry fully. This is important for it prevents the shadow wash from penetrating the pieces and turning them into a twisted mess.

Step 2: Shadow Wash: Mix 1-part acrylic black paint with 2-parts acrylic base color (sandy brown). Thin the paint until it flows like ink. Liberally paint only the walls and the top of the bases. Let dry fully.

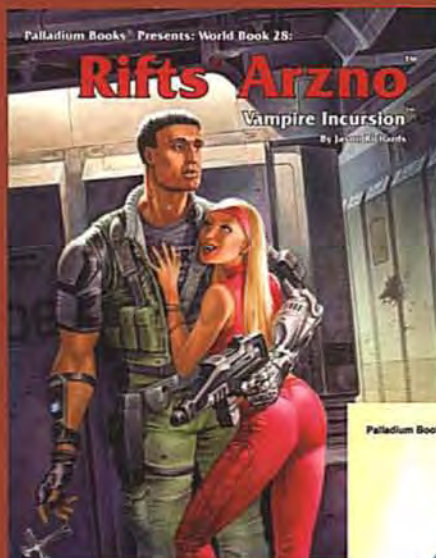
Step 3: Highlight Dry-Brush: Mix 1-part acrylic white paint with 2-parts acrylic base color (sandy brown). Using the 1/2-inch brush, dab a small amount of paint on the tip only. Using a tissue or paper towel, gently squeeze the water out of the paint. Now paint the walls from the top to the bottom. This will make the tops lighter than the bottom.

Unfortunately, I have no pictures of the pieces described above and I have sold off almost all of my terrain to make way for the new pieces under construction. I will enclose a photograph of one of the pieces I made, played on and sold. It was an objective in a game in which the characters had to infiltrate and capture a trench emplacement.



I hope you will enjoy making and using terrain in your games as much as I do.

Les F.



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