

Palladium Books® Presents:

THE

RIFTER®

Your Guide to the Megaverse®

Inside this Issue...

Heroes Unlimited™: Expanded Mega-Heroes

Splicers® Official Material: Great House Shiva

Rifts®: The RCSG & The Devil's Gate

Rifts® Fiction: Family Business

The Hammer of the Forge™

News, Product Info & More

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The Rifter® Number 37

Your guide to the Palladium Megaverse®!

First Printing – January, 2007

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Palladium Books® Presents:



#37

Sourcebook and Guide to the Palladium Megaverse®

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

Contents – The Rifter® #37 – January, 2007

Page 6 – Art

This is a page of art from *Rifts® Sourcebook One, Expanded* and offers a little hint about the secret organization known as *the Republicans*. The artwork is by the indomitable *Michael Wilson*.

Oh, and you can count on seeing more of Mike (and other great artists) in the books to come in 2007.

Page 7 – From the Desk of Kevin Siembieda

The year 2006 was one of contrast, starting with betrayal and staring into the face of doom, followed by resounding love, kindness and hope. Kevin thanks the thousands of Palladium fans/friends who helped us through the dark times and talks about the promise of a *brighter future* starting now, 2007. We think you'll like what we have planned.

Page 8 – Palladium News

The *Rifts® movie option* to be developed by Jerry Bruckheimer has been extended, Palladium plans to offer original, *downloadable source material* and adventures from the Palladium website, the *Palladium Open House* (May 5 & 6) is going to be better and more fun than even last year, Palladium freelance writer, Jeff Hansen, may have figured out what happened to *Jimmy Hoffa*, and Palladium has big plans for 2007. Read all about it.

Art by Apollo Okamura.

Page 11 – Coming in 2007

Reprints of old favorites and plenty of new game releases are planned for 2007.

Rifts® Sourcebook One, Expanded is gonna be epic. *D-Bees of North America™* will be comprehensive and fun (with 30+ new D-Bees and twice as many old faves). *Hades: Pits of Hell™* and *Dyval: Hell Unleashed™* launch the Minion War™ saga with crossovers into the worlds of *Heroes Unlimited™* and *Rifts®*. Plus Palladium is working on getting the *Robotech®* license and hopes to release *Warpath: Urban Jungle™* all by Spring. And that's just half of it. We have sourcebooks planned for all our game lines, *Phase World®*, *Rifts®*, *Heroes Unlimited™*, *Nightbane®*, *Palladium Fantasy RPG®*, and *Rifts® Chaos Earth™!* This section offers all the juicy details. And get all the latest news, commentary and info from our web site at www.palladiumbooks.com.

Page 16 – The Rifter® Super-Subscription Offer

The price of *The Rifter®* is going up, but you can get the book for \$7.95 each plus a free gift by subscribing now! Here's how.

Page 17 – Heroes Unlimited™

The Expanded Mega-Hero

Optional source material and ideas for playing Mega-Heroes in *Heroes Unlimited™* by Greg Diaczyk. Includes super ability power increases, new Mega-Powers, new Achilles' Heels (weaknesses), Power Category-Specific Mega-Heroes, Dual Classes, plus Secret Base Creation Rules and ideas galore!

Special Mega-Powers, page 18.

New Achilles' Heels, page 23.

Powers by Category, page 27.

Mega-Hero Alternatives, page 32.

Secret Base Creation Rules, page 35.

Artwork is by Mega-Heroes Brian and Allen Manning.

Page 40 – Great House Shiva

Official source material

and adventure ideas for Splicers®

Todd Yoho presents the Great House Shiva. The history behind House Shiva, its government, goals, dreams, and war machine. Also includes notable non-player characters, a pair of new O.C.C.s, the *Naga Dancer* and *Pariah* (aka the Betrayer), plus the host armor of the new O.C.C.s and a few new weapons. New War Mounts will appear in *The Rifter® #38*.

Art by Brian and Alan Manning.

Page 58 – Abernathy Pass™

A town and adventure setting for Rifts® New West™

Zachary Houghton outlines the New West Boomtown of Abernathy Pass and suggests adventure. What happens when a two-bot town strikes silver? Boomtown. But will the town last or fade away when the silver ends?

Art by Ramon Perez.

Page 61 The RCGS, Ft. Laredo, and the East St. Louis Rift™

Optional setting and adventure for Rifts® and the CS

Matthew Olfson provides optional source material and adventure ideas involving the St. Louis Rift, better known as the *Devil's Gate*, and the Coalition Army outpost that guards it. This dimensional portal is a constant source of trouble for the CS and is responsible for unleashing many of the D-Bees and demons found in North America. Includes notable player characters, history of the Rift, Fort Laredo, and ideas for adventure.

Artwork by Apollo Okamura.

Page 83 – Family Business

Fiction story in the Rifts® setting

A touching, short story by Jason Marker about Dog Boys and the hardship of life on Rifts Earth.

Artwork by Apollo Okamura.

Page 91 – Rifts® Phase World®

The Hammer of the Forge™

Chapter 37: A for Vendetta, the latest of James M.G. Cannon's popular, ongoing saga. Read and enjoy.

Artwork by Apollo Okamura.

Page 96 – Palladium Open House

Some more details about the Palladium Open House.

The Theme for Issue 37

Heroes, hardship, fighting monsters and the use of special powers to make the world a better place (or not). This issue focuses on *Heroes Unlimited™*, *Splicers®* and *Rifts®*. We hope you enjoy it as much as we did putting it all together.

Another fun-filled issue designed to provoke your imagination, and inspire and motivate players and Game Masters alike to try new ideas and expand their gaming Megaverse®.

The Cover

The cover is a Mega-Hero trying to protect innocent bystanders from giant hunks of debris. It is by *Tyler Walpole*, who has done some black and white artwork for the *Palladium Fantasy RPG®* and various other game lines.

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® #38

We should have concrete Robotech® news and a tentative release schedule, other news, and a peak of what's coming down the pipeline, along with the usual source material and fun from across the Palladium Megaverse.

- **More for *Splicers®* – War Mounts.**
- **An adventure for *Heroes Unlimited™* set in *Century Station*.**
- **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

CHROMIUM GUARDIAN III

HEAD PROFILE UPDATE

HEAD PROFILE FORWARD

MULTI-SPECTRAL
IMAGING SOURCE

am 8.09.3

BODY PROFILE

REAR QUARTER

FRONT QUARTER

2.7 METERS
112.33 kg

88.2544

FORWARD 1.

From the Desk of Kevin Siembieda

A New Year Full of Promise

Palladium ain't dead yet. In fact, we're getting stronger every day.

The New Year is full of promise, that's how all of us at Palladium Books see 2007.

Thanks to the friendship and support of thousands of Palladium fans, friends and well-wishers, 2006 turned into a surprisingly successful year. Successful, in that *a) Palladium Books survived* the skullduggery of a trusted friend/employee, *b) we seem to have averted going out of business* (at least for now), *c) we appear to be getting stronger every day*, and *d) we are full of amazing ideas for books and products you are going to love in the year to come!*

Surviving wasn't easy. I know the Palladium crew and I have worked harder and put in longer hours than ever, so it's nice to see the tons of hard work, long hours and sacrifices seem like they are starting to pay off. And you, our fans, should revel in this first victory with us, because we could not have done it without you. Yeah, we're still buried under a bunch of debt and we're still struggling to get new product released, but *Palladium's future* seems bright. The outpouring of support from thousands of Palladium fans helped us pay off crushing debt and catch our breath, and most importantly, kept our spirits buoyed and our energy high.

The road to recovery. This bought me the time I needed to rebuild the foundation of the company, formulate new business strategies, arrange for new lending, and hustle to do whatever it took to keep Palladium going. Some of those efforts included engaging in talks with two different electronic game companies about doing a **Rifts Massively Multi-Player Online Game (MMOG)**, but in one case the company could not arrange the financing they needed to do the game, and the other (and most promising) simply faded away (we suspect they are not doing as well financially as they had imagined).

Unrealized potential. I've also spent the last four months working with my agent, attorneys and the Disney and Bruckheimer people to keep the potential for a **Rifts® Movie** alive. Our film option was to end in October, but talks and negotiations have kept the *potential* for a Rifts Movie alive, and the option has been extended. The renewal is NOT a guarantee the film will *EVER* be made (although it sure shows how interested they are in the property), so don't get too excited. And this is just one aspect of Palladium's potential. **Rifts®, Beyond the Supernatural™, Palladium Fantasy®, Nightbane®** and all our RPG lines would make great films and videogames and on-line games, miniature games and toys, heck, the possibilities are endless.

In fact, all you Palladium fans in the videogame industry and other markets, tell your supervisor, boss or creative people about our games/settings/worlds and how they'd make a great intellec-

tual property to license. You never know what could happen. And yes, we would love to see videogames, card games and all kinds of stuff based on our games, but you need the right connection/contact to make that a reality. It is not as easy as it may sound.

One thing we have learned in recent years is to believe in ourselves, trust our instincts and count only on what *we* can do here at Palladium. Anything else, like a movie or MMOG or videogame, is exciting and promising, but it's all a question mark. Maybe things will break your way and be big, maybe they won't. There is never a guarantee with such third party ventures, even when dealing with big guns like *Nokia, Disney* and *Bruckheimer*. The way we see it, such *possibilities* must be explored, but never counted upon. If they should come to fruition, it's all frosting on the cake.

Palladium's plans for 2007

We feel energized and have a ton of ideas for products we think will *knock your socks off*.

We want to wow and floor you with books and new games that will get people talking, playing and looking for more from Palladium Books. We plan to push the envelope, surprise, shock and thrill you every chance we get. **Rifts® Sourcebook One, Expanded** should be the first to do just that. Followed by **D-Bees of North America™**, which should please players, giving them more cool nonhuman characters to play, and Game Masters looking to make their Rifts campaign more exotic or surprise their players with a new D-Bee adversary. **Dimension Books 10 & 11, Hades and Dyval™**, actually make *Hell* your playground, and set the stage for *Minion War* – when Hades invades Dyval their war spills across the Megaverse. That means Dimension Book 12 (Part Three of *Minion War*) takes place at **Phase World® in Dimensional Outbreak™**, and Part Four on the Earth of **Heroes Unlimited!** Part Five, cascades where else, but **Rifts Earth**. Author, *Carl Gleba*, is fast at work finishing Book Four so there will be no six month or year long wait between books, and the covers and artwork for *Hades, Dyval* and *Dimensional Outbreak* are in the process of being finished even as you read this. We want not only to survive, but to get people talking about role-playing games again.

And that is just the beginning. With any luck we'll have the first of several new **Robotech®** role-playing games and sourcebooks out by Spring and Summer. Followed by Jeffry Scott Hansen's **Warpath: Urban Jungle™ RPG**, a gritty game of conspiracy, secrets, terrorism, crime, and modern combat that takes place in the shadowy, dark underworld of our modern cities.

We plan to do 2-4 sourcebooks for ALL our lines too, including **The Palladium Fantasy RPG®**, **Heroes Unlimited™**, **Nightbane®**, **Beyond the Supernatural™**, **Chaos Earth™**, and maybe others – not just **Rifts®**. Check out the Coming Attractions for the entire lowdown, but you'd better be sitting down, because it's our most ambitious schedule yet! We've been quietly setting the groundwork for a myriad of books and projects.

All we ask of you is to continue supporting Palladium Books by purchasing books, games, and products that you find appealing, and that you spread the word to others about the Palladium Experience.

– Kevin Siembieda, December 2006

Palladium News

Rifts® Movie

Option is Extended

For those of you who have been living in isolation these past few years, Palladium Books had signed an option with **Walt Disney Pictures** to have **Jerry Bruckheimer Films** to develop a *live action movie* based on the **Rifts®** role-playing game. That option has recently been extended another year.

Jerry Bruckheimer is one of the most influential film and television producers in the world, with such films as **Pirates of the Carribean**, **National Treasure**, **Top Gun**, and **The Rock**, and TV powerhouse shows including the **CSI** franchise, **Without a Trace** and **The Amazing Race**, among others. Disney is . . . well, Disney, 'nuff said.

Will there be a **Rifts Movie**? Only time will tell, but we sure hope so. Stay tuned to the pages of **The Rifter®** and *Palladium's website* (www.palladiumbooks.com) for news and updates.

Downloadable RPG adventures & other products from Palladium

By February we hope to start offering downloadable adventures and other tools as downloadable purchases.

For example, a fully fleshed out, 15-40 page adventure with descriptions, villains, monsters, maps, etc., available for download for the low price of \$1-\$4. You know, stuff like you find in the pages of **The Rifter®** only "official." Adventures for *all* our game lines, too – **Heroes Unlimited™**, **Palladium Fantasy®**, **Beyond the Supernatural™**, **Splicers®**, **Nightbane®**, **Rifts®**, and so on.

Other downloadable products may include other source material, special maps, character sheets and G.M. aids/tools.



Who will be writing this stuff? Palladium's top Game Masters, Universal Legionaries, freelancers like Carl Gleba, Todd Yoho, James Brown, Jason Marker, Josh Sinsapaugh, Megaversal Ambassadors, and *maybe* even gents like Kevin Siembieda, Julius Rosenstein, Carmen Bellaire and other Palladium stalwarts.

In addition to the obvious, this official material will serve as a nice bridge between new products and provide gamers and G.M.s with online content that fills a need for adventures and other support. We think you're gonna love it.

Palladium Gaming Convention, May 2007

We call it the **Palladium Open House** because the May event is held at the *offices and warehouse* of Palladium Books, and because the event is unlike any convention you have ever attended.

How so?

Let me count the ways:

1. It is held at Palladium Books. The entire event is held at Palladium's 20,000 square feet of office and warehouse. This is where we create the books you love, so you get a completely different feel than conventions held at a hotel or convention center.

2. Half the games are run by the people who created them! Yeah, guys like me, *Kevin Siembieda, Erick Wujcik, Julius Rosenstein, Carmen Bellaire, Carl Gleba, Todd Yoho, Jason Richards, Brandon Aten, Josh Sinsapaugh, John Philpott, Jason Marker, Brian Manning,* and a host of others.

The other half are run by Palladium's friends, play testers, artists, and members of the Megaversal Ambassadors – all outstanding and experienced Game Masters and personalities like *James Brown, Jeff Ruiz (aka NMI), Levi Johnstone,* and others.

3. Largest gathering of Palladium creators anywhere in the world! Meet dozens of other Palladium creators, more than 40 in all. Folks like my Dad, *Henry Siembieda,* editors *Wayne Smith* and *Alex Marciniszyn,* freelance writers by the truck load, and artists *John Zeleznik, Scott Johnson, Mark Evans, Apollo Okamura, Ramon Perez, Mark Dudley, Kent Burles, Brian Manning, Alan Manning,* and many others.

Not to mention online buddies like NMI, Zachary the First, Subjugator, Killer Cyborg, Citizen Lazlo and many, many others. In fact, we have people coming from every corner of the USA, Canada and from around the world! *We have a gent coming all the way from Australia!* He attended last year's event too, so you know this must be a pretty fun event!!!!

And everybody is there for YOU, to chat and game and sign autographs for hours on end. There is nothing like it!

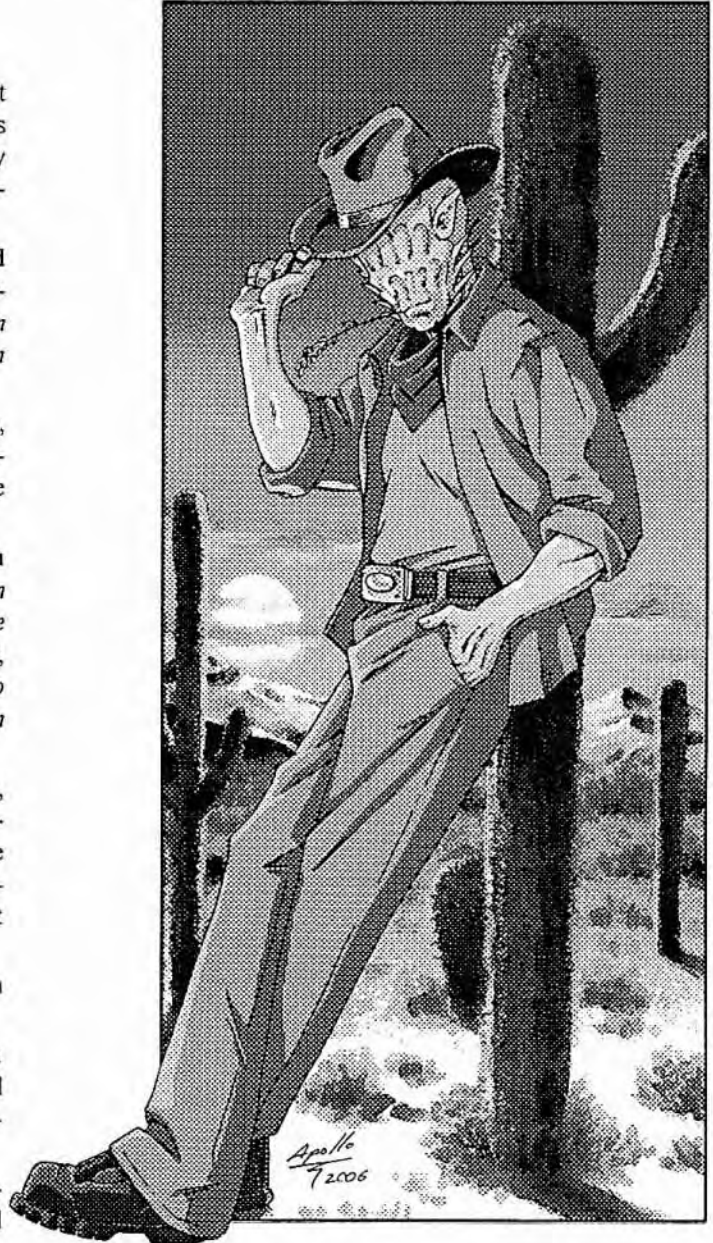
4. Nothing but role-playing games are run, and Palladium RPGs at that. Yeah, gaming event after gaming event dedicated to all of our first loves, *role-playing games.* You can lose yourself in two to three days of non-stop role-playing.

5. FREE game events and panel talks! There is no additional charge for games, only the admission fee for the day. All games are available, on site, on a first come, first served basis.

6. Big dealer's area to get Palladium back stock, specialty items, rare collectibles, original artwork, uncut covers, toys, minis, food, snacks, and much more. Ample parking.

7. You are welcomed friends invited into our home and I, Kevin Siembieda and the Palladium Crew, are your hosts. We have to admit, this awesome aspect surprised us too. Everybody who attended last year's Open House felt like they were "family" visiting a favorite uncle for a family reunion where everyone was happy to see one another. It was amazing and *EVERYBODY* was talking about it.

Our theory for this unique feeling is the fact that everyone at Palladium is like family and we think of our *fans* and fellow gamers as part of our extended family! We appreciate our fans and (surprise, surprise) actually like spending time with them. It doesn't hurt that we are also big nerds who love what we do, love talking about gaming, enjoy running games and are generally fan boys of RPGs, comic books, movies, TV, science fiction, fantasy and art just like YOU.



**So please, come on over and join the fun. May 5 & 6, 2007
– Palladium Books – Taylor, Michigan.**

More details about the Palladium Open House can be found elsewhere in this issue and on the Palladium Website — www.palladiumbooks.com — or call 734-946-1156. This is just my personal pitch on why you should join the fun.

Erick Wujcik back to the USA

The good news for all of us who miss Erick when he's living and working in China, is that his new gig will be here in the USA. Erick will continue to work in the videogame field on the West Coast. That means easier access to our pal and increased odds that Erick will be at the *Palladium Open House, May 5 & 6 weekend, 2007*, running games and hosting panel talks.

A growing mountain of Christmas cards

As of the writing of this column (December 14, 2006), we are being inundated with Christmas cards from fans all around the world, wishing us a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. We must have close to 50 of them already and Christmas is still a couple weeks away! Many include notes, brief letters and well wishes for the year to come.

I just wanted to thank everyone who thought of us and took the time to send a card. Thank you. Like I've always said, Palladium fans are the best!

2006 Christmas Grab Bags

Palladium's annual Christmas Surprise Packages (i.e., Grab Bags) are a smash hit for something like their seventh year in a row. It's our way of saying thanks to our fans. We've been packing them full of autographed books, trinkets and fun that have been delighting fans of all ages for several weeks now. In fact, we probably went a little overboard this year, but so many people helped us in our hour of need, we wanted to do something special to say, "thank you, you are appreciated." We hope that we were able to put a smile on your faces and make your Christmas a little bit brighter.

Price increase for The Rifter®

Starting with the issue you are holding in your hand, **The Rifter®** is going up in price one dollar, from \$9.95 to \$10.95 retail. A 96 page sourcebook for \$10.95 is still a steal.

Ah, but you can still get **The Rifter®** for less if you take advantage of **The Rifter® Super-Subscription Offer** detailed elsewhere in this issue. And for those of you whose subscription starts later in the year, you can indicate which issue you want your subscription renewals to start with. Thus, you can add to your subscription now to save later.

Palladium freelancer solves Jimmy Hoffa disappearance

It's quite possible.

We couldn't say anything this summer, but the real reason why the **Warpath: Urban Jungle™** RPG was rescheduled for release next year is because **Jeffry Scott Hansen** was busy on another project of historical significance – digging through records and gathering info to support his theory about the disappearance of Teamster leader, **Jimmy Hoffa**.

Jeff's ideas convinced Palladium's Publisher, Kevin Siembieda, on his theory back in 2005, so when Jeff asked if Palladium would reschedule his RPG work so he could spend time investigating the Hoffa matter with renowned author, *Charlie Brandt*, Kevin was quick to give Jeff the go ahead.

"What an amazing opportunity for Jeff," said Kevin Siembieda. "How could I not reschedule **Warpath: Urban Jungle™**, so he could investigate this Hoffa thing? I think it's awesome that someone associated with Palladium Books may have figured out what happened to Jimmy Hoffa. Being a native Detroit, this has tremendous relevance and importance to me and others at Palladium."

An online statement from *Spectre Publishing* says it all. It is repeated here with permission from the Publisher.

Hoffa mystery solved?

Back in 2004, author *Charles Brandt* released the book, **I Heard You Paint Houses**, detailing the murder of Teamsters boss *Jimmy Hoffa*. The book was a *confession* by *Frank Sheeran*, a Teamsters official and friend of Hoffa's. Sheeran was a prime FBI suspect from the day Hoffa disappeared.

The book was the first in history to give what seems to be the most accurate account of Hoffa's 'last ride' and the location of his murder at a northwest Detroit home.

One of the biggest mysteries of the past 30 years was seemingly solved by Mr. Brandt and the information he provided in the book gained international recognition. The questions, *who* killed Jimmy Hoffa, *where*, and *how* were answered, but the question everyone still always asked was – *Where is Jimmy Hoffa's body?*

That's where **Jeff Hansen** comes into the story. Jeff, who grew up a *mile away* from the location of the Hoffa murder, read Brandt's book. He knew the area like the back of his hand and when a revised edition of the book came out, it was revealed that a *funeral home* may have been involved in helping dispose of the body *by way of cremation*. Jeff Hansen immediately thought of the **Grand Lawn Cemetery**, which happens to be *two minutes from the murder location* and equipped with cremation ovens. Jeff shared his theory with Detroit Newspaper reporter *Dave Ashenfelter* and the **FBI**.

That was in August of 2005.

In **May of 2006**, instead of looking at the evidence that Charles Brandt's book presented, the FBI also ignored Jeff's theory.

Instead, they dug up a horse farm in Milford on the word of a convicted marijuana smuggler.

In a way it was good that the FBI decided to dig for nothing, because it got Jeff's attention and encouraged him to email Dave Ashenfelter once more in the hope that he would put him in contact with *Charles Brandt*.

In **early June, 2006**, Jeffry Hansen was contacted by Charles Brandt, who was then told the theory of the *Grand Lawn Cemetery*.

After several months of correspondence, *Charles Brandt* flew to Detroit and met with Jeffry Hansen, and the two began to look into the cremation and cemetery business in the Detroit area, especially in 1975.

What they discovered will shock you.

Mr. Brandt was interviewed recently by KLAS TV Las Vegas. The station aired a 3-part story on the *new findings* just this past November, 2006.

The investigation is *not over* and *more information* will come to light in the near future. The puzzle pieces are falling into place rapidly every day.

Note: Jeffry Scott Hansen is the author of the novel, **Warpath**, and is co-developing and writing the **Warpath: Urban Jungle™ RPG** with Kevin Siembieda for Palladium Books. The RPG is expected to see release Spring or Summer, 2007. See the description elsewhere in this book.

Prices Going Up – Just a Little

As noted months ago in **The Rifter®**, Palladium will be raising its prices slightly. Typically a buck or two, still giving Palladium fans more bang for their buck on RPG products. In fact, Palladium titles are \$5-\$15 less than comparable products from most other RPG companies.

Note: Price changes on existing titles will come into effect with their next printing. For example, **Rifts® World Book One: Vampire Kingdoms™** will soon increase to \$18.95 retail.

As always, Palladium will try to offer more bang for your buck than any other role-playing game company.

Coming in 2007

The following is the most comprehensive listing of books Palladium has ever revealed so early in advance. We feel confident in doing so because most are already in the process of being written even as you read this.

We plan to offer a little something for everyone this year by supporting all our major lines. While **Rifts®** will still see the greatest number of sourcebooks, we plan to have 2-4 titles for each of our other games lines – **Palladium Fantasy RPG®**, **Heroes Unlimited™**, **Chaos Earth™**, **Beyond the Supernatural™** and even **Nightbane®** – as well as a few new RPG titles like **Warpath: Urban Jungle™** and, hopefully, the return of **Robotech®**.

Not all titles planned for 2007 are listed, and the books for non-Rifts titles are particularly absent mainly because they are works in progress and do not have a final title yet.

With a little luck and hard work, this will be Palladium's big comeback year. We're doing this massive push for all game lines because you, our fans, insist you want them and will buy them if they are available. Please don't let us down.

– Kevin Siembieda, Publisher

Back in Print – Now!

Rifts® Chaos Earth™ RPG – back in print – 160 pages, \$19.95 retail.

Rifts® Adventure Guide – back in print – 192 pages, \$22.95 retail.

Rifts® World Book 11: Coalition War Campaign™ – back in print – 224 pages, \$22.95 retail.

January, 2007

The Rifter® #37 – NEW – Cat. No. 135, 96 pages, \$10.95 retail. In your hands.

Rifts® Sourcebook One, Expanded – NEW – Cat. No. 801, 160 pages, \$18.95 retail. In production.

Rifts® D-Bees of North America™ – NEW – Cat. No. 874, 192 pages, \$22.95 retail. In production.

Rifts® Ultimate Edition – back in print – Cat. No. 800HC, 372 pages, \$35.95 retail. At the printers.

February 2007

Rifts® Dimension Book 10: Hades, Pits of Hell™ – NEW – Cat. No. 872, 192 pages, \$22.95 retail – expanded page count and increased price. In production right now.

Note: Reprints or other titles may be added to February releases.

March, 2007

Rifts® Dimension Book 11: Dyval, Hell Unleashed™ – NEW – Cat. No. 873, 192 pages, \$22.95 retail – expanded page count and increased price. IN production right now.

Also Coming in 2007

- **Robotech® RPG** – March or April 2007 – That's the plan. With sourcebooks to follow quickly.
- **Phase World®/Minion War™ 3: Dimensional Outbreak™** takes place at Phase World®. April or May, 2007.
- **Heroes Unlimited™/Minion War™ 4: Armageddon Unlimited™** carries the adventure to the **Heroes Unlimited™** setting – Spring, 2007.
- **Rifts® Minion War™ 5: Megaverse® in Flames™** goes to **Rifts Earth**, and Carl's thinking about a possible sixth book in the series. June or July, 2007.

- **Rifts® Delta Blues™/Deep South** – Early 2007.
 - **Rifts® Dark Woods™** – Summer, 2007.
 - **Rifts® Triax™ 2** – Summer, 2007.
 - **Phase World® Spacecraft** – Spring or Summer 2007.
 - **Rifts® Voodoo** – Summer 2007.
 - **Rifts® Sovietski™** – Fall 2007.
 - **Rifts® Black Market** – tentative.
 - **Rifts® Northern Gun Sourcebook** – tentative.
 - **Rifts® Shemarrian Sourcebook** – tentative.
- **Rifts® Secret Project Number One:** A storyline and setting that will blow your mind! Spring or Summer, 2007.
 - **Rifts® Secret Project Number Two:** *Todd Yoho*, author of the two **Rifts® Dinosaur Swamp™** Books, is working on a pair of **Rifts® World** books set outside of North America.
- **Chaos Earth™ sourcebook** by *Jason Richards*, followed by at least two others for **Chaos Earth™**. Note: The popular **Rifts® Chaos Earth™ RPG** is back in print as of late December.
- **Chaos Earth™: NEMA™ Mission Book One** – *Siembieda* – tentative.
 - **Chaos Earth™: Psychic Storm™** – *Siembieda* – tentative.
 - **Warpath: Urban Jungle™** – a new RPG – Spring or Summer 2007.
 - **Nightbane® sourcebooks** are being developed even as you read this.
 - **Heroes Unlimited™ – The Atorian Sourcebook™** – Written by *Wayne Breaux Jr.* – Spring or Summer 2007. We hope to add one or two additional HU2 titles to our 2007 schedule.
 - **Palladium Fantasy RPG® – Magic & Monsters** – Summer, 2007.
 - **Palladium Fantasy RPG® – Mysteries of Magic** – Summer, 2007. We are waiting for the updated and retooled manuscript.
 - **Beyond the Supernatural™ Sourcebooks – Tome Grotesque™ and Beyond Arcanum™**, *Kevin Siembieda* is committed to doing these and hopes to finally write the next two **BTS-2** core books in 2007.
 - **Beyond the Supernatural™ Sourcebook – The Longest Road™** an adventure for **BTS-2™** written by a freelancer – Fall, 2007.

- **The Rifter® #38** – April, 2007.
- **The Rifter® #39** – July 2007 – Another “swimsuit issue?”
- **The Rifter® #40** – October, 2007 – Horror special.

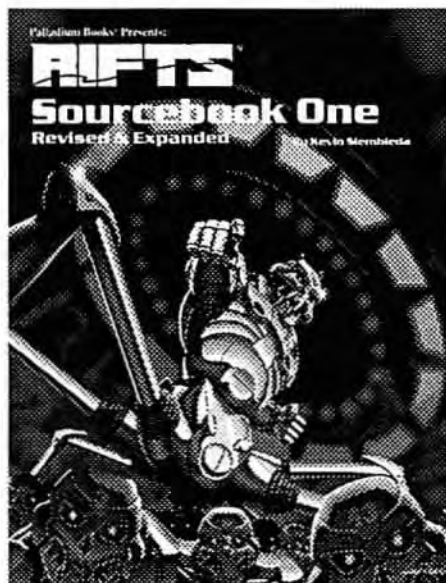
Release Descriptions

Rifts® Ultimate Edition

Second Printing – January, 2007

Rifts® Ultimate Edition is just about sold out. The Second Printing is at the printers and will be available sometime in January. There are no major changes in the 2nd printing, only minor ones and clean up. The one big change is the **Nokia** advertisement pages in the third color section being replaced with two pages of artwork (which was always our intention with the second printing).

Note Price Increase: The second printing will see a modest price increase of two dollars, going from \$33.95 to \$35.95 retail.



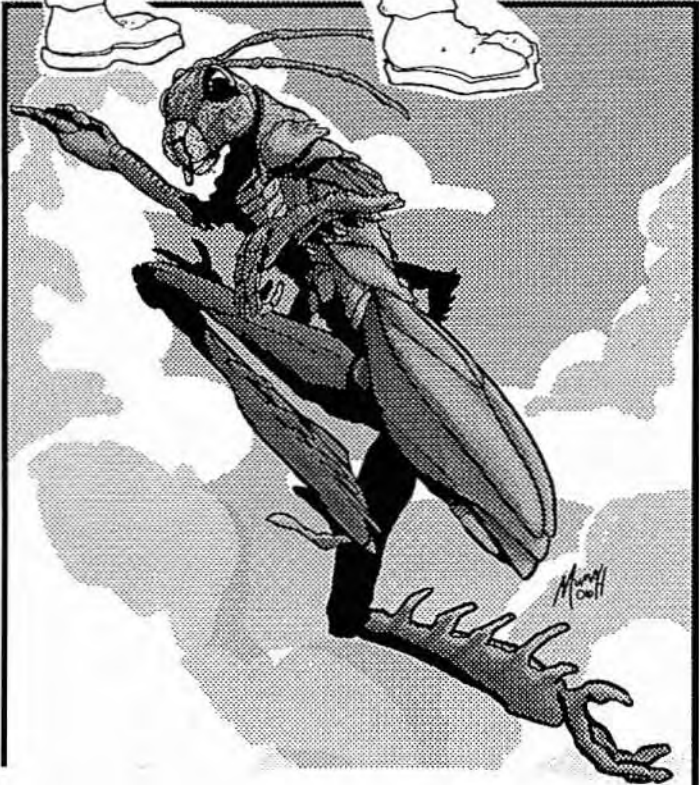
Rifts® Sourcebook One™

– Expanded and Updated – January, 2007

Work on **Rifts® Sourcebook One, Expanded** is coming along nicely and is going to surprise and delight **Rifts®** fans. The new ideas, new vehicles, and new art are going to blow people away, especially the new **A.R.C.H.I.E.** Three and **Republican** material.

For those of you with online access, you can get a bit of an online sneak peek after January first, when we post a bit of a story between **A.R.C.H.I.E.** and **Hagan** that will rock your knowledge of **Rifts Earth** and the **Coalition**. This will set up one of the main updates about **Archie** and the secret group known as the **Republicans**. Don't miss it!

- More of A.R.C.H.I.E. Three's history is revealed (and hints about his future), the Republicans (throwbacks to NEMA and Chaos Earth) are revealed at last, and . . . well, see for yourself when it comes out.
- Robot creation rules.
- New and old weapons, power armor & equipment.
- Triax weapons & power armor.
- A.R.C.H.I.E. Three, Hagan Lonovich and robotic minions.
- The Republicans revealed at last and their secret war with A.R.C.H.I.E. 3.
- Notable monsters, adventures, and new adventure ideas.
- Written by Kevin Siembieda.
- 160 pages – Cat. No. 801 – \$18.95 retail.



Rifts™ D-Bees of North America™

– End of January or Early February

This dynamic, art filled book presents 60+ D-Bees of North America, adding 30+ new D-Bees with updates on D-Bees from past World Books. Each and every D-Bee is illustrated with all new art.

Perfect for players looking for an interesting *non-human* character to play as well as Game Masters looking to throw someone or something different at their player groups.

- Around 100 D-Bees; 30+ new. All found in North America and completely statted out and updated.
- New dynamic artwork throughout.
- Cover painting by Mark Evans.
- Written by Kevin Siembieda and others.
- 192 pages – Cat. No. 874 – \$22.95 retail.
- Ships around the end of January or early February 2007.



Rifts® Dimension Book™ 10: Hades, Pits of Hell™

– February, 2007

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

A *stand-alone* sourcebook designed for use in **Rifts®**, **Rifts® Chaos Earth™**, **Phase World®**, and **Heroes Unlimited™**, but 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 or six book crossover adventure theme called the **Minion War™**. The Minion War series will have *Dimension Book Hades*, *Dimension Book Dyval*, *Dimensional Outbreak* (Phase World®), *Armageddon Unlimited* (Heroes Unlimited), and a Rifts Earth finale, *Megaverse in Flames*, plus a possible *Minion War Aftermath* book. Keep your eyes peeled, it all starts with **Hades**.

- 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 demons 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 Nick Bradshaw, Mike Mumah and others.
- Cover painting by John Zeleznik.

- Written by Carl Gleba.
- 192 pages (expanded from 160) – Cat. No. 872 – \$22.95 retail.
- Should ship mid- or late February.



Rifts® Dimension Book™ 11: Dyval, Hell Unleashed™

Ships March 2007

The Deevils and monsters of *Dyval* have also 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.

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® Dyval** also continues the epic, five book crossover adventure theme called the *Minion War*.

- The realms of Dyval mapped and described.
- Non-Deevil Minions including the insectoid Cryxon, Dragon Shock Troopers, Bonelings, Devil Worm, Ice Golem, and others.
- The Nexus Deevil, Deevil Dragon and Ice Wraith, among others.
- Beasts of War such as Flying Horrors, Infernal Sprites, and more.
- Journey through the Realms of the Deevil Lords, the Great Dyval Desert, the Frozen Wastes and other places.
- Magic weapons, spells and artifacts.
- The Minion War: Dyval's retaliation against incursions from Hades.
- A stand-alone Dimension Book that is also the second step in an epic, five book trans-dimensional adventure we're calling the *Minion War*.
- Artwork by Jeffery Russell, Mike Dubisch and others.
- Cover painting by John Zeleznik.

- Written by Carl Gleba.
- 192 pages (expanded from 160) – Cat. No. 873 – \$22.95 retail. Ships early March, 2007.

The Return of Robotech®

Palladium Books has been negotiating with Harmony Gold for some time now, to reacquire the rights to publish **Robotech RPG** books. We are optimistic that we will be successful in securing the license and have RPG books start hitting the shelves by Spring. I think we are as excited about this licensed RPG as the Robotech fans.

Palladium is still formulating its strategies for the **Robotech® RPG** line, but we will probably start with **The Shadow Chronicles**. More details will be offered in the weeks to come, but I can tell you we are *shooting for a March or April 2007 release* of the initial game, quickly followed by 3-4 supplements in the six months after its debut. Robotech fans, young and old, are waiting with eager anticipation for this RPG.

Rifts® & Other Worlds™

The Art of John Zeleznik

This is another book we're so excited about. **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.

We had to reschedule this title due to poor response from our distributors. It seems art books published by other companies sold poorly, so they are afraid to try ours. Can't entirely blame them for being gun shy. We are hoping we can solicit acceptable numbers in the book trade to see this and the Super-Collector's edition come out in Fall 2007.

- 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.
- \$29.95 retail.

Warpath: Urban Jungle™ RPG

Coming Spring or Summer 2007

Jeff and Kevin would love to see the **Warpath™ RPG** debut at the Palladium Open House, but no promises.

Warpath: Urban Jungle™ RPG deals with the secret, untold war taking place on our very streets. Counter-terrorism, anti-gang and anti-drug operations and much, much more.

The setting: The dark underbelly of our modern world. The dark and dangerous places that suburbanites don't even know exist, the places where locals pray they survive.

The player characters: They consider themselves heroes and patriots, though others might see them as the elite, secret en-

forcers of a powerful government that knows no limits. They are men and women who fight the secret wars that never make the newspapers. They are the "spooks" and nameless "shadow warriors" who operate beneath the radar and outside the law. They are the elite selected from every branch of the military and law enforcement agencies to get the dirty jobs done.

Their mission: To strike down enemies from within and abroad. To keep "the people" safe without their ever knowing they were in danger. To fight and win battles on our streets without the media or the authorities ever knowing about the conflict. And if the conflict is discovered, without knowing who was involved, where they came from or where they disappeared to.

Warpath: Urban Jungle™ is a new, hard-edged, combat role-playing game that deals with the secret war against crime, gangs, terrorism, sabotage and drugs going on in the shadows of our own streets. Police, FBI, CIA, NSA, Special Ops, and ex-criminals join forces under the auspices of a super-secret agency more covert and mysterious than the NSA.

Warning: This isn't a lightweight, touchy-feelie combat game for kids nor a superhero RPG, but a gritty game of espionage, violence and war. The name "Warpath" says it all: Hell unleashed in secret wars that take place in the Urban Jungle (our modern cities). The soldiers involved are given the authority to use extreme violence, deception, and whatever it takes to get the job done and save lives; provided they don't get caught.

Although it will not be for everyone, we suspect **Warpath: Urban Jungle™** will be the surprise hit RPG of 2007. Inspired by the novel, **Warpath**, by Jeffrey Scott Hansen. Watch for it.

- Cover by John Zeleznik.
- Written by Jeffrey Scott Hansen & Kevin Siembieda.
- Final page count and retail price yet to be determined. Expected to be 192-256 pages, \$22.95 to \$24.95 (\$28.95 if we go hardcover with it); Spring or Summer, 2007, anticipated release.



Warpath™ the Novel

– available by mail order or online only

Jeffrey Scott Hansen's novel, **Warpath**, is the inspiration for a new role-playing game coming Spring or Summer, 2007.

This novel is a gritty and violent story about gangs and undercover agents on the streets of Detroit. The violence and explicit language in the novel requires purchasers to be 18 years of age or old. **Warpath** is NOT appropriate for young readers.

If you want a sneak peek at what you can expect in the RPG, check out Jeff's novel.

- Written by Jeffrey Scott Hansen.
- 250 pages – Cat. No. 801 – \$10.95 retail; add \$3.00 for shipping and handling for mail orders in the USA, \$6.00 in Canada, \$11.00 overseas.
- Available only by mail order and online. Palladium Books, 12455 Universal Drive, Taylor, MI 48180.

The Rifter[®]

Super-Subscription Offer

- Free Shipping!
- Free Gift!
- Great Savings!
- A Megaverse[®] of Adventure and Fun!

The Rifter[®] is a quarterly sourcebook series for the entire Palladium Megaverse[®]. It is written by fans and up and coming writers, for fans. Some, like #4, #21, #24, and #34 have even become coveted collector's items that command big bucks! (For a while, people were reportedly paying as much as \$70 online for #21.)

Each issue of The Rifter[®] presents official and unofficial adventures, characters, powers, weapons, equipment and fiction for *Rifts*[®], *Splicers*[™], *Beyond the Supernatural*[™], *Heroes Unlimited*[™], *Palladium Fantasy RPG*[®], *Chaos Earth*[™], *Nightbane*[®], and/or any variety of other Palladium games and world settings. It's also a place where we test new ideas, and showcase new games, like *BTS-2* and some other special projects we're kicking around for the future.

It is also a way to get the latest news and sneak previews of upcoming Palladium products, events and secret projects.

The Rifter[®] is unique in that it is more than a magazine or simple sourcebook. It is also a forum for *new talent*. Imaginative "fan" and semi-professional writers and artists submit their work for consideration and see their creations brought to life and shared with thousands of other Palladium fans. (And get paid for it too!) Palladium regularly uses The Rifter[®] as a vehicle to try new talent with an eye toward future, bigger projects. *Carl Gleba*, *Todd Yoho*, *Jason Richards*, *Brandon Aten*, *Jason Marker*, *Apollo Okamura*, *Brian Manning* and others all got their start in the pages of The Rifter[®].

In short, if you're into one or more of Palladium's role-playing games and like to explore new realms of possibility, then The Rifter[®] is for you.

After several years, we are bumping the price of The Rifter[®] up to \$10.95, but you can still get it at the *OLD SUBSCRIPTION PRICE* of \$31.80 – that's \$7.95 per issue – a \$12 savings, plus a *free gift*.

Super-Whammy Subscription Offer

- **The Same Subscription Price as the last few years: \$31.80** – four issues. Only \$7.95 each – that's a \$12.00 savings on the subscription.
- **Free Shipping:** Palladium picks up the shipping cost. You only pay the price of the subscription. (Limited to the USA

and Canada. Overseas subscriptions *are* charged additional for shipping.)

- **A gift worth \$10-\$15!** Subscribe or re-subscribe *now* through *March 31, 2007* and get your choice of any *ONE* of the following products absolutely *free*:
 - **The Best of the Rifter[®] & Index** (\$12.95 value);
 - or two (2) back issues of **The Rifter[®]** selected from issue numbers **12, 13, 14** or **15** (\$15.90 value for the back issues, more as an out of print collectible for 12 & 13), *free*;
 - or **John Zeleznik's Rifts[®] Coloring Book** (\$5.95) *and* a copy of the original 48 page **After the Bomb sourcebook** (\$7.95; with total a \$13.90 value);
 - or the **Heroes of the Megaverse print** (\$10.00 value) signed by the artist, *Freddie E. Williams II* (Palladium fan-fave and the artist on DC's *Robin* comic book) and *Kevin Siembieda*, *free*.
- **Important Note:** Please enclose *four dollars* (\$4.00 US funds) for postage, packaging and handling, to get the *free gift* item sent to those of you in the United States – \$6.00 for Canada, and \$11.00 for overseas subscribers.
- That's practically like getting **The Rifter[®]** subscription for a few dollars an issue! Don't delay, order today! And tell a friend! Tell lots of friends!!
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How can Palladium afford to make such a tantalizing offer? Because our fans always come first and because we are anticipating an amazing year of fun and surprises, and **The Rifter[®]** with its news, coming attractions and sneak previews is your first look at the Palladium Megaverse[®] and all the excitement that's coming your way. Be part of the adventure.
- **How to order.** *Send mail orders* with a check or money order (for \$35.80 – including the handling and shipping cost of the free gift in the *USA*) to:

The Rifter[®] Subscription Dept.

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Taylor, MI 48180

Credit Card orders can be made on our web site (www.palladiumbooks.com) or by telephone (734-946-1156; this is an order line *only*).

Please indicate which issue number you'd like your new subscription to *start* at: #36 (last issue), #37 (this current issue), #38 (next issue, April 2007), or when your current subscription ends.

Offer good only till March 31, 2007

HEROES UNLIMITED™

The Expanded Mega-Hero

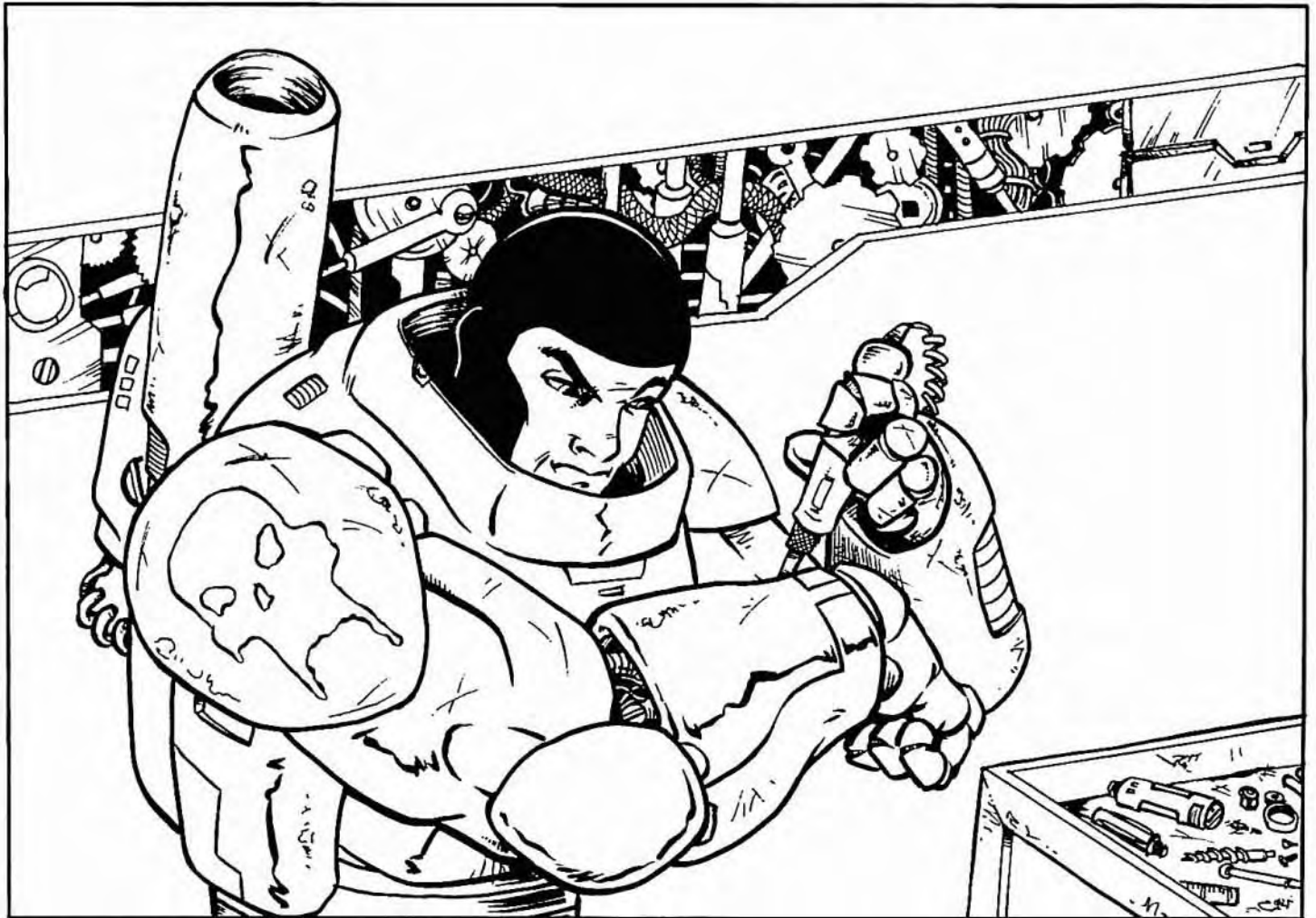
Optional Material for
Heroes Unlimited™ 2nd Edition

By Greg Diaczyk

Throughout the history of Heroes Unlimited™, the biggest claim to fame was the potential to create any and all types of heroes. The Heroes Unlimited™ Revised Edition captured a few concepts that were missed in the original book. The arrival

of the Second Edition polished up some minor points and brought the magic system in line with Beyond the Supernatural™ and Rifts®, which brought a whole new wave of fun and excitement. This version also introduced the Mega-Hero (and Mega-Villain), which had been previously overlooked due to concerns with overpowered characters. But this new add-on option catered to power categories with super powers such as Aliens, Experiments, Mutants and Magic. However, this left out critical information for the other power categories such as Hardware, Bionics, Robotics and Special Training. It was not long before Powers Unlimited™ 1 and Powers Unlimited™ 2 were released, which had a slew of new super powers and a bunch of new power categories. Many of the new power categories expanded elements left out of Heroes Unlimited™ Revised 2nd Edition but never really fleshed out the technology based Mega-Hero (Hardware, Robotics, Bionics, etc.) or the skill based Mega-Hero (Special Training, Physical Training, Mystic Studies, etc.). To fill the need in my gaming group I developed these Expanded Mega-Hero rules which you now see here. As I was busy working on this article, I found myself asking, "So where does my Mega-Hardware hero build all his super gear?" All the basics were there but nothing really detailed any of the specifics. So along came the idea for the Secret Base Creation Rules, which I added at the end of this article as an option available to all types of heroes (and villains).

I would also like to send a special thanks to my buddies Dennie Lutes and Martin Scaiano for proofreading and editing



BRIAN MANNING

my first drafts, as well as Eric Lanctôt, who also assisted with them in play testing the material for this article.

So I invite you to take these Expanded Mega-Hero Rules and the new optional Secret Base Creation Rules and make the most of them in your campaign. Enjoy!

Mega-Powers

There are now two distinct options for a Mega-Hero based on their nature and orientation. The first is dependent on the physiology of the hero. Essentially, all powers are part of their makeup and are due to them being supernatural creatures (Mutants, Experiments, Symbiotes, Psionics, etc.). The second option is that the tools, weapons and equipment used by the character sets them apart from your average super-powered hero and marks them as a Mega-Hero (Hardware, Special Training, Robotics, Bionics, etc.). The choice, however, is ultimately up to the player and the character concept, as the distinction between super-powered and non-super-powered can vary from player to player. Players are encouraged to consult with the G.M. on the character design to help them make the most fun and playable character to use. Also, the final approval of the character design is needed from the G.M., which is another good reason to keep him in the loop during character creation. To give an example of the diversified options you have during character creation, consider a Hunter, who through his experiences, training or some tribal ritual, picked up supernatural abilities. Thus, taking the super-powered Mega-Hero abilities (Enhanced Healing, Supernatural P.S., etc.) as well as the selection of the Special Hunter/Vigilante Mega-Powers of Supernatural Senses and Sharpened Senses. Or through technology, picked up some impressive hunting tools like cybernetics (sensors, concealed weapons, etc.), energy weapons, cloaking devices, super car, etc., which he purchased with his increased budget, or he has a Super-Powered Gadget that mimics a super power (a.k.a. the Mega-Equipped-Hero).

Super-Powered Mega-Heroes

All super-powered Mega-Heroes receive the following enhancements:

Increased Range by 50%: All the ranges of super powers, psionics, magic, senses (even mundane normal ones) receive the +50% increase.

Increased S.D.C. by 50%: Calculate S.D.C. as normal from supers powers, skills and other sources. When you're done, add the +50% modifier.

Increased I.S.P. by 50%: Psychic characters who take the super-powered Mega-Hero option see their I.S.P. base increased by 50%. Plus the Mega-Hero Psychic also recovers his I.S.P. at the increased rate of +50% (so a normal psychic who recovers 6 points per hour of meditation now recovers 9 per hour of meditation, and instead of 2 points per hour of rest or sleep now recovers 3 per hour of rest or sleep).

Increased P.P.E. by 50%: If the Mega-Hero is a mage or uses P.P.E. to perform his powers he sees his P.P.E. base increased by 50%. (Note: Mega-Heroes who don't use magic or P.P.E. for their powers do not get the +50% increase.) Plus the Mega-Hero recovers his P.P.E. at an increased rate of +50%. (Most mages who recover 5 points per hour of rest will now recover 8 points per hour of rest, and those who recover 10 points per hour of meditation will now recover 15 points per hour of meditation.)

Increased Healing: Multiply the Mega-Hero's normal rate of healing by 1D4+1. Use super powers such as Healing Factor as your base before the multiplier. Any special multipliers to healing rate (such as the x2 from the Longevity Special Mega-Power) stack onto this multiplier (so a x4 healing increases to x6 with Longevity).

Considered a Supernatural Creature: The hero's strength is considered supernatural and he has the following bonuses: +2 to save vs Possession and Horror Factor, +1 to save vs Magic.

Equipment-Based Mega-Heroes

Non-super-powered, Equipment-Based Mega-Heroes receive the following special bonuses.

Increased Range by 50%: Applies only to gadgets, specialty items and anything they build themselves (like a gun or sensor system) using their special hero skills or abilities.

Increased S.D.C. by 50%: Applies to all gadgets, specialty items and anything they build using their special hero skills or abilities, including body armor that they make themselves.

Increased Budget by 50%: The Mega-Hero's budget is increased accordingly and they may have access to more advanced gadgets, energy weapons and maybe even minor cybernetics (implants only, no replacement limbs or major bionics) at the G.M.'s discretion.

Special Mega-Powers

Special Mega-Powers are abilities, talents or assets that mark the Mega-Hero as something greater than a normal hero. Each Mega-Hero may select one, two or three Special Mega-Powers. However, for each Special Mega-Power he selects, the Mega-Hero must select one Achilles' Heel. Certain Mega-Powers have built-in Achilles' Heels or indicate they are worth more than one Special Mega-Power (and would therefore need the selection of more than one Achilles' Heel to offset its selection). There is also a category-specific section of Mega-Powers and Achilles' Heels that are fine-tuned to bring out and enhance certain power categories. See the "Power Category Specific Mega-Hero Options" below for further details on these Mega-Powers and Achilles' Heels.

Special Mega-Power Random Roll Table

Though I personally like to build my character, selecting each Mega-Power (and Achilles' Heel) to complement the design, those who wish for a bit of randomness may use this table.

- 01-05 Impervious to Disease.
- 06-10 Doesn't Need Air to Breathe.
- 11-15 Doesn't Need to Eat or Drink for Nourishment.
- 16-22 Tremendous S.D.C.
- 23-33 Tremendous Physical Strength.
- 34-39 Impervious to Pressure.
- 40-45 Longevity.
- 46-50 Awe and/or Horror Factor.
- 51-55 Immortal*.
- 56-60 Undead*.
- 61-66 Super Genius Inventor (New).
- 67-78 Super-Powered Gadget (New).
- 79-84 Companion (New).
- 85-95 Wealth (New).
- 96-00 Power Amplification or Specialization (New).

*Counts as two Special Mega-Powers.

Existing Special Mega-Powers

For easy reference, here is a list of existing Mega-Hero Special Powers and a quick summary of what they offer. For complete details, please refer to pages 181 & 182 of **Heroes Unlimited™ Revised 2nd Edition**.

Impervious to Disease: +2 to save vs Poisons.

Doesn't Need Air to Breathe: (Self explanatory).

Doesn't Need to Eat or Drink for Nourishment: (Self explanatory).

Tremendous S.D.C.: +1D4x100+160 S.D.C.

Tremendous P.S.: +20 P.S., Death Blow on a natural 16-20.

Impervious to Pressure: (Self explanatory).

Longevity: Heals 2x as fast, +1 to save vs Disease.

Awe and/or Horror Factor: Factor is 11+1D4, plus the option of trading points from I.Q. and P.E. to increase it further.

Immortality: Bio-regenerates 2D6 Hit Points or 3D6 S.D.C. every 10 minutes (this supersedes the Mega-Hero's Enhanced Healing power). Can survive up to -130 Hit Points. After being in negative Hit Points, a 1D4 hour rest period is needed for recovery (may appear in a coma or even dead), after which they are restored to 4D6 Hit Points above zero. One hour after the regenerative coma, they can bio-regenerate as normal. If the immortal suffocates (takes 5x longer than a normal human, about 15 minutes) or is brought down in Hit Points between -131 to -300, he falls into a death-like trance for 4D6+12 hours before he regains consciousness. He then heals as above. Can only really be killed by being atomized (more than -300 Hit Points), otherwise he will regenerate. This ability counts as two Special Powers.

Undead: Immune to Poison/Drugs/Toxins, Impervious to Cold and Heat, normal attacks do no damage, (Supernatural Strength does half), regenerates 2D6 Hit Points or S.D.C. per melee, regenerates limbs within 1D4 days, no longer needs food

to eat or air to breathe, does not age and is immortal, +1D4x10 S.D.C. **Vulnerabilities:** Silver, sunlight, wood, P.B. attribute is reduced by 1D10, Horror Factor of 10+1D6, Vampirism (Blood, Life Force/Bio-Energy, P.P.E., Super Hero Energy). This undead power counts as two Special Powers and one Achilles' Heel.

New Special Mega-Powers

Below is a list of new Special Mega-Powers available for selection by the Mega-Hero. Some are pretty generic while others are really only open to a narrow group of power categories.

Super Genius Inventor: This Mega-Hero is exceptionally talented when it comes to developing new and innovative gadgets. This special Mega-Power is best used with Hardware characters, though at the G.M.'s discretion, it can also be used with Super Sleuths, Secret Operatives, Stage Magicians, Super Inventions or a Mutant/Psychic with Mechano-Link or Telemechanics.

The Super Genius Inventor may select one minor power to invent as a gadget at levels 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12 and 14. The Super Genius Inventor may trade the inventing of three consecutive minor super-powered gadgets for the inventing of one major super-powered gadget. During the 5 levels he advances developing the major super-powered gadget he can develop one third of the abilities offered by that power (if applicable). For example, at level 2 a Super Genius Inventor decides to invent a gadget with Darkness Control. Right from the start he can create goggles that let the Super Genius Inventor see in normal or unnatural darkness. At level 4 he can start building a suit that lets him Shadow Meld. And finally, at level 6, he can create a darkness generator grenade that he can toss into a room to absorb all the ambient light, creating darkness. Upon reaching level 8 he may create an entirely new minor powered gadget, or start the progression of a new major powered gadget from levels 8 until 12. There are, however, certain major super powers that do not lend themselves to being split (like intangibility, invisibility and sonic speed), and need the full 5 levels of advancement before the Super Genius Inventor can start construction of the device. In all cases, the G.M. should be consulted and always has final approval.

If the Super Genius Inventor would like to start with a major super-powered gadget he may select the Super-Powered Gadget Mega-Power, building on it or simply creating new gadgets as normal as he advances in levels. If the Super Genius Inventor wishes to duplicate, replace a damaged device or mass-produce a gadget (given to other members of the hero's team or as a source of income), a tremendous amount of money and time is required to do so. Each gadget is considered a "one of a kind, handmade device." While the Super Genius Inventor's ideas have gone from a concept to a working prototype, several months of research into full production and manufacturing are needed, not to mention the start-up costs involved. Even still, in most cases such gadgets are part of the Super Genius Inventor's personal equipment, his symbol or signature. So he is even less likely to actively pursue creating "super-powered" devices for others. Even if the right price is offered by a teammate, or a willing sponsor comes up with the capital, he could conceivably start mass-producing the gadget, but the Super Genius Inventor will always dumb down the idea (typically 10% to 25% of the

original power, duration, damage and or effect, saving the best – the original gadget in his arsenal – for himself). This aspect should be role-played and worked out with the G.M., as most heroes should not be mass-producing such powerful items, as the inherent problem lies with the average Joe thug having the potential of becoming a super-powered villain, all thanks to the Super Genius Inventor!



For repairs or replacing a damaged or destroyed gadget, the costs are not too bad. It is safe to assume that the Super Genius Inventor knows how to build such machines and only needs to purchase replacement materials and spend the time to rebuild and test the device. Typical cost for initial construction or replacing a destroyed unit should be around \$50,000 to \$500,000 (1D10 x \$50,000) per minor power or third of a major power. A single major super-powered gadget will cost \$300,000 to \$1,800,000 (3D6 x \$100,000). Typical construction time should be 5D6 hours per minor super-powered gadget or third of a major super-powered gadget, to 2D4x10 hours for a major super-powered gadget. That is total consecutive hours for construction. A more relaxed approach would be 8 hours a day, or 2 hours if they are crime fighting or working a paying job, thus the 5D6 hours is more reasonably three weeks. But a Super Genius Inventor could be pressed for time and thus could use the above rolled number for the time needed to complete the task doing an all-nighter.

Super-Powered Gadget: On top of this Mega-Hero's usual assortment of powers and equipment, he has a gadget that emulates super powers. This gadget is always something new and innovative (not currently available with today's or the campaign setting's level of technology). At the price of one Special Mega-Power, the gadget emulates one major super power or up to three minor super powers (or even three smaller gadgets that each emulate one minor super power). Taking this option more than once increases the number of powers a single gadget has, or the number of gadgets, accordingly.

Roll or select one of the following gadget appearances. The S.D.C. and A.R. listings for the gadgets are guidelines and may be adjusted up or down by as much as 50%; consult with your G.M.

01-10 Backpack: A.R. 12, 220 S.D.C.

11-20 Battle Suit: A.R. 13, 440 S.D.C.

21-30 Belt and/or Harness: A.R. 10, 180 S.D.C.

31-40 Boots or Footwear: A.R. 11, 180 S.D.C. each.

41-50 Cape or Cloak: A.R. 7, 200 S.D.C.

51-55 Arm Bracers or Bands: A.R. 15, 250 S.D.C. each.

56-60 Gloves or Gauntlets: A.R. 12, 130 S.D.C. each.

61-70 Goggles, Glasses or Visor: A.R. 11, 100 S.D.C.

71-80 Helmet or Cap: A.R. 14, 200 S.D.C.

81-85 Ring, Bracelet, Amulet, Necklace or Collar: A.R. 14, 120 S.D.C.

86-95 Gun-Styled Weapon: A.R. 15, 200 S.D.C.

96-00 Melee Weapon: A.R. 17, 300 S.D.C.

Note: The +50% bonus for the Equipment-Based Mega-Hero has not been applied to these gadgets and should only be applied to Mega-Heroes who have taken the Equipment-Based Mega-Hero option. The A.R. for all gadgets is considered a Natural Armor Rating, thus any attacks that strike below the rating do NO damage. Also, most gadgets (except the battle suit and possibly the cap or cloak) are hard to hit and need a Called Shot with typically a -3 to strike.

Companion: This can be an animal companion/familiar or artificially intelligent robot/drone. Animals are considered to be well trained, can understand basic instructions and function as an above average intelligence pet (see *Monsters & Animals™*, Second Edition, from the *Palladium Fantasy RPG®*, for a thorough list of animals and their stats). Drones have the following features:

Rudimentary Artificial Intelligence: The drone or robot is a very smart computer, with programmed responses and operational protocols. Though not sentient, it has a rough I.Q. of about 8, making it quite versatile and a quick learner (though child-like) for a simple Artificial Intelligence. This is also one of the reasons why it relies heavily on commands from its master. The drone is controlled via a small handheld controller, which includes video and audio info from the unit.

Power Supply: Most units will use an electrical battery (16 hours, 4 hours backup). It plugs into a socket to recharge or can jack into a car to recharge off the alternator/battery. Power storage is roughly the equivalent of a car battery (but much smaller). It needs 4 hours to fully recharge. Some will have experimental power sources (typical of companions whose masters have Unstable Power Supply or Solar Powered Devices). Still

some might use a modified micro-fusion power system, but if such an option is selected reduce the drone's creation budget by \$1 million. Another option might be that the companion is a giant computer at the Mega-Hero's base. It operates the base and communicates with the Mega-Hero over a secured radio signal, satellite relay or cell phone. The advantage to this option is that the unit never needs charging and runs off the base's power (with a backup generator or electric battery). If one is using the optional **Secret Base Creation Rules** that follow, the hero gets the Defense: Automated Defenses - Artificial Intelligence feature for free! The down side is that the companion is not easily portable and must remain at the hero's base.

Additional Budget: Has a budget of \$1D4+2 million for the remaining construction of the drone's systems, using the normal Robot creation rules.

In either case, the strange link between man and animal (or man and machine) is brought about mysteriously by the Mega-Hero. It is the Mega-Hero's link to his companion that has brought about the extraordinary changes in it (either by bringing to life an inanimate machine or bestowing magical abilities upon an animal). As such, if the companion is destroyed, simply going to the hardware store or pet store to get a new one won't work. The hero must wait for his next advancement in this ability before another companion is found/built. Though each companion will be unique (having its own personality and appearance) once replaced, it will have all the previously invested abilities given to it when it links to the master. Also, due to this phenomenon, the master can also sense the presence of his companion and general condition (good health or injured, scared or happy), and he can always track the feeling to find his companion; only death will break the link.

Every three levels (3, 6, 9, 12 and 15), the character can select one advancement from the following list:

Another Companion: Typical of animals, sensor drones or to replace a slain companion. The companions and master work in unison and are able to cover more ground. Any other powers (new or old) purchased for the original companion apply to any additional companions. The new companion may be identical to the first one, but does not need to be.

Supernatural or Creature of Magic: The animal becomes a Supernatural Creature or Creature of Magic. Double Hit Points/S.D.C., does supernatural damage in all attacks and regenerates 1D4 Hit Points/S.D.C. per minute. The animal also has its P.P.E. base doubled (which it can freely lend to its master should he need the extra P.P.E.). Drones/A.I. Robots develop strange properties (instilled magical/psychic phenomena from master or latent nanobot abilities?), double S.D.C. of unit and increase A.R. by 2. Can also regenerate minor damage on its own at 1D4 S.D.C. per hour, and does supernatural damage.

Superior Link: Animals are connected to the master just like a Familiar Link (see the Wizard's special ability on page 152 of **Heroes Unlimited™ Revised 2nd Edition**, or the spell Familiar Link on page 190 of the **Heroes Unlimited™ G.M.'s Guide**, for complete details). Drones/A.I.s are linked similarly to their master through cybernetic implants (receives Headjack & Optic Nerve Video Implant or Multi-Optic Eyes as part of this upgrade), allowing him to directly see and hear through his drone(s) or to converse with his A.I. companion(s).

Protected: The companion has developed an innate ability to avoid damage and injury. This can be any one of the following:

Force Field: Technological, Magical, or Psychic, with 50 S.D.C. per level of the master, regenerating 1D6 S.D.C. per melee round.

Quick: Can Auto-Dodge (+2) and has a +1D6 P.P.

Resistant: For animals, add +1D6 to P.E., +1 to save vs Psionics, Toxins, Magic and Horror Factor, and +5% to save vs Coma/Death. For drones, increase the A.R. by 2 (considered a Natural A.R.).

Cloaked: The companion is quite adept at concealing itself. Select one of the following (whichever is most appropriate):

Innate Magical or Technological Ability: Has one of the following: Invisibility: Simple, Shadow Meld or Chameleon. If an animal, it has an additional +2D6+2 P.P.E. to add to its natural base which it can use to cast these spell-like abilities. **Note:** This option does not require the animal to already be a Creature of Magic or Supernatural Creature, but if it also has that feature then add the above P.P.E. bonus before applying the P.P.E.-doubling bonus from the Creature of Magic or Supernatural Creature companion addition. Use the Mega-Hero's level of experience for the calculation of the spell duration. Drones can have experimental equivalents that function on a time basis (again, use the Mega-Hero's level of experience for the calculation of the spell duration). They can be used 3x per day for the duration of the spell.

Superior Skill: The other option is the companion possesses superior stealth abilities (+50% to Prowl or has a base of 80%) or in the case of the drone, a silent hover propulsion system or special pads on feet or tires and camouflage coloring that offer an 80% Prowl skill.

Higher Intelligence: The link to the master has somehow brought about higher than normal intelligence for animals (I.Q. of 8+1D6) or altered the programming of the drone enough to evolve into sentience (I.Q. 12). Animals can speak and read all languages the master can (as well as communicate with others of its species just like the Mutant Animal Psionic power of Animal Speech, found on page 170 of **Heroes Unlimited™ Revised 2nd Edition**). Also add a +5% bonus to any natural skill or ability the animal possesses (Prowl, Swimming, Tracking, Climbing, etc.). The Drone can also read and speak any language its master can. It can also plug into most computer systems, phone lines and other standard hardware to provide its master with remote computer access, or on its own operate a computer system to retrieve data or operate computer controlled machines. Has the Computer Operation skill (+10% bonus) and has the Telemechanics ability with machinery (applies only to itself in regards to operating machinery), which is on all the time and costs no I.S.P.

Wizard Note: If a Wizard/Mystic Studies character takes this Mega-Power, treat it as getting two extra/free advancements. At level one he automatically gets a companion with a Familiar Link (bumping his normal Familiar which he receives at level 3 to getting it at level 1). At level 3 he may select 2 advancements (instead of the usual 1) and progress as normal, receiving another advancement at levels 6, 9, 12 and 15.

Wealth: Makes the individual hero a Mega-Hero by granting him the cash, assets and resources to not only give him the freedom to pursue a career as a vigilante crime fighter, but raise him above the common super-powered hero. The character can afford high-priced lawyers for his mistakes, Public Relations & Image Consultants, Costume Designers, Vehicle, Weapons and Gear Designers and Repair Facilities/Mechanics. Those who prefer a little more secrecy (and have the right skills) can afford the right tools (labs, computers, manufacturing shop, etc.) to make their own gear. For Hardware, Bionics, Robotics and any other power category that relies on budgets to purchase powers, the budget will be greatly increased and the character could see access to prototypes, exotic or even alien equipment! The Wealthy Mega-Hero usually has a wide range of custom-made hero-related items (vehicles, body armor, weapons, etc.). If the Mega-Hero doesn't already have a budget he may be able to come up with 3D6 x \$10,000 to purchase specialty items like a car, body armor or special weapons if the G.M. approves. Any special gadget that mimics super powers requires the Mega-Hero to have the Super-Powered Gadget Special Mega-Power. For Mega-Heroes who have a limited budget (like Hardware Weapon Experts, Stage Magicians, Super Sleuths, etc.), they will see their original budget multiplied by 10 times (putting them into the \$100,000 to \$1,000,000 range). This multiplier replaces the +50% bonus to the budget for being an Equipment-Based Mega-Hero. This should also grant them access to energy weapons and upgraded vehicles and equipment with the G.M.'s approval. Larger budgets (Robotics, Bionics, Eugenics, etc.) will see their existing budgets doubled (this too also replaces the +50% bonus for being an Equipment-Based Mega-Hero). On top of the above-mentioned budget, the Mega-Hero will most likely have one or two complete backups of everything if he needs it, especially if he is thinking that such pieces of equipment are likely to get damaged or destroyed during his work (especially true for costumes, body armor and vehicles). Only prototypes might be a one of a kind item (see the **"Losing and Replacing Hero-Defining Features and Equipment"** below for further details and ideas). These somewhat "limited" budgets for an unbelievably wealthy hero are not the total sum of wealth they can accumulate, but represent the available cash they can sink into their crime-fighting career without corporate shareholders, government tax agencies or the media noticing where all this money is going.

Power Amplifier or Specialization: Double the range, duration, effect and damage of one major super power, or three minor super powers, or a theme of psionic powers (e.g. Psi-Sword & Psi-Shield or all Telekinetic powers). Or as a special option for psychics, one can grant the Burster or Zapper versions of Pyrokinesis or Electrokinetics from *Rifts*® to the Mega-Hero (subject to G.M. approval and alteration).

Achilles' Heels

As powerful as Mega-Heroes are, they always have something that reins them in. The Mega-Hero character needs to select one Achilles' Heel for every Special Mega-Power to offset and account for his Mega advantages. Note that certain powers have built in Achilles' Heels or indicate they are worth more

than one Special Mega-Power, and would therefore need the selection of more than one Achilles' Heel to offset their selection. Additional Achilles' Heels relating to specific power categories may be found in the **"Power Category Specific Mega-Hero Option"** section to follow.

Achilles' Heel Random Roll Table

- 01-03 Vulnerable to Psionics.
 - 04-06 Vulnerable to Magic.
 - 07-09 Vulnerable to Light.
 - 10-18 Deadly Metal.
 - 19-21 Vulnerable to Fire.
 - 22-24 Must Transform into an Inhuman Form to Use Powers.
 - 25-27 Solar Powered (or Night Powered).
 - 28-30 Loves the Opposite Sex.
 - 31-33 Vulnerable to Cold.
 - 34-36 Slow and Ponderous.
 - 37-39 Vulnerable to Heat.
 - 40-42 Extremely Nearsighted.
 - 43-45 Allergy.
 - 46-48 God Syndrome.
 - 49-51 Paraplegic (new).
 - 52-54 Blind (new).
 - 55-57 Deaf (new).
 - 58-60 Mind of Its Own (new).
 - 61-63 Amnesia (new).
 - 64-67 Power Outbursts (new).
 - 68-70 Extremely Deadly Metal* (new).
 - 71-73 Loss of Humanity (new).
 - 74-76 Major Character-Defining Insanities (new).
 - 77-79 Nocturnal (new).
 - 80-88 Prototype (new).
 - 89-91 Limited Use Item (new).
 - 92-97 Solar-Powered Device (new).
 - 98-00 Unstable Power Source (new).
- *Counts as two Achilles' Heels.

Some Achilles' Heels may not quite fit a player's concept of the Mega-Hero (such as a Mutant with super powers rolling Prototype), so at the G.M.'s discretion the player may re-roll or select something more appropriate.

Existing Mega-Hero Achilles' Heels

For easy reference, here is a list of existing Mega-Hero Achilles' Heels and a quick summary of what problems they create for your Mega-Hero. For complete details, please refer to pages 183 to 185 of *Heroes Unlimited*™ Revised 2nd Edition.

Vulnerable to Psionics: -4 to save vs psychic attacks (with no other bonuses), all psionic attacks do double damage and last twice as long.

Vulnerable to Magic: Magic spells inflict double damage and effect. Enchanted Weapons do triple damage and physical

attacks from Mystically Bestowed and Creatures of Magic do double damage!

Vulnerable to Light: Lasers and similar light based attacks do double damage. The character is also light sensitive (needs sunglasses, goggles, etc.). Moderate light without protection hurts the eyes (vision range is half, -2 initiative, -1 attacks, -5% on skills). Sunlight or bright artificial light without protection completely blinds the character (-8 to strike, parry and dodge, loses one attack and is -90% to perform any skill needing vision to perform).

Deadly Metal: Particular metal penetrates any Natural A.R. of the Mega-Hero and does double damage direct to Hit Points when successfully struck by the metal.

Vulnerable to Fire: Normal fires do double damage to the Mega-Hero. Magical fires do double damage directly to Hit Points! The character also has a natural fear of fire.

Must Transform into an Inhuman Form to Use Powers: Select or roll on the following table for the inhuman form the Mega-Hero must become to use his powers.

- 01-15 Angelic or demigod hero.
- 16-30 Hulking humanoid monster of unusual color.
- 31-40 Demonic looking hero (horns & tail).
- 41-50 Humanoid dinosaur or reptile.
- 51-60 Creature made of stone.
- 61-70 Creature made of muck, slime or garbage.
- 71-80 Resembles a ferocious animal.
- 81-90 Resembles a humanoid insect.
- 91-00 Hulking, impressive humanoid juggernaut.

Solar Powered (or Night Powered): During the night (or day), the Mega-Hero sees his P.S. and S.D.C. reduced by half. Damage, duration and range of all powers are also halved when he is trapped in darkness (or sunlight) for more than 15 minutes. Without a minimum of 4 hours of sunlight (or darkness) per 24 hour period the character's powers diminish 10% every eight hours, until they are down to 30%. Regains powers at 10% per hour of bright sunlight (or while in darkness).

Loves the Opposite Sex: -6 to initiative and unlikely to notice things going on around him/her when in the presence of the opposite sex. The character is also more susceptible to seduction and the "obvious" good character of the opposite sex.

Vulnerable to Cold: Within 30 seconds of exposure to cold temperatures at or below freezing, all powers are cut in half in terms of damage, duration and effect. Speed and combat bonuses are also reduced in half and strength drops from supernatural to normal human strength.

Slow and Ponderous: Reduce Spd attribute by half or to 8, whichever is less. If the character has a fast moving power, he only moves fast when actively using that power.

Vulnerable to Heat: Within 30 seconds of exposure to hot temperatures at or above 90° F (32° C), all powers are cut in half in terms of damage, duration and effect. Speed and combat bonuses are also reduced in half, and strength drops from supernatural to normal human strength.

Extremely Nearsighted: Needs eyeglasses or contact lenses to read and see clearly for more than 4 feet (1.2 m). Anything beyond 12 feet (3.6 m) is completely indiscernible. Without the aid of corrective lenses the hero has all combat bonuses reduced in half, loses one attack, and skills are -35%.

Allergy: Penalties from exposure to allergens are -15% to perform skills, reduce combat bonuses in half, lose one attack, and reduce speed by 10%.

God Syndrome: Overconfident, underestimates his enemies and forgets his own weaknesses.

New Mega-Hero Achilles' Heels

Below is a list of new Achilles' Heels that are available for selection by the Mega-Hero. Some are pretty generic or are drawbacks found as part of certain power categories. The idea here is not to duplicate those weaknesses for those power categories but to make them available for other character types who wish to use them.

Paraplegic: The Mega-Hero has the obvious disadvantage of needing to rely on a wheelchair because his lower body (i.e. legs) does not work. Story-wise, it can make for a great motivator for a hero to build himself a pair of robotic exoskeleton legs as a means of transportation, but discovers a use for it (a modified, more powerful design) as a super suit. The condition could also be a motivation as to why certain powers developed (the body or mind's way of compensating). Whatever powers or special abilities are selected for the Mega-Hero, they should only temporarily or partially negate this disadvantage (e.g. a robotic suit that needs to be removed, Telekinesis to float or move about limited by I.S.P., or mutant flight abilities affected by legs that hang limp, reducing maximum fight speed and control by 20%).

Blind: The Mega-Hero has no sense of sight, which means he can't drive, read a book (the Mega-Hero may be able to read but he needs to take Literacy: Braille in order to be able to do so), watch TV, use a computer, etc. In terms of combat, the hero has a -5 to strike, parry and dodge (has gotten used to his condition and is therefore not as penalized as someone who has recently been blinded). On the plus side, the penalties for fighting in the dark or an invisible adversary are not applicable (use the above -5 instead of the standard -8 to strike, parry and dodge). It would be wise for the Mega-Hero to select powers or special features that help offset this disability (such as Radar, Amplified Hearing, using a Familiar's eyes to guide himself or to read with, Telepathy to "see" what other people around him see and more easily communicate directions for navigating obstacles with their help, etc). Taking bionic or cybernetic eyes that restore sight cannot be selected initially, as that will completely negate this Achilles' Heel. (See the "Losing and Replacing Hero Defining Features and Equipment" below for further details.)

Deaf: The Mega-Hero has no sense of hearing. He can still detect minor vibrations with his sense of touch, but will be unable to hear sounds. In terms of combat, the hero has a -6 on initiative and is very susceptible to surprise and sneak attacks. It would be wise to select powers that help offset this Achilles' Heel, like Telepathy to talk to people as well as "listen" to what they can hear by interpreting surface thoughts with their assistance. It might also be of use for the Mega-Hero to take Literacy: Lip Reading and Language: Signing to help him better to communicate with the hearing world.

Mind of Its Own: The Mega-Hero who possesses an Enchanted Weapon, Enchanted Object or a Robot/Exoskeleton with an Artificial Intelligence (A.I.) will have that item try to manipulate him (need to make an M.E. check to avoid “suggestions”). Though most Enchanted Weapons already have a compatible alignment, this one in particular has a quest or mission to complete and it has a habit of dragging the Mega-Hero in on the “greater objective,” especially when something else of importance is obvious (like chasing after the Enchanted Weapon’s nemesis instead of rescuing the people trapped in a burning building). An Enchanted Object, on the other hand, might have a hidden intelligence and alignment (use the Enchanted Weapon info as a guideline). It can manipulate things subtly (psychic flashes, or empathic transmissions) or even occasionally offer advice or suggestions that are brought about either for the purpose of pure mischief, or some hidden agenda of the Enchanted Object (like returning itself to its “true and rightful” master!). An Artificial Intelligence might have a built-in safeguard to protect its original creator (which ends up being the Mega-Hero’s adversary?), or a prime directive that inhibits or forces a Mega-Hero’s action or inaction!

Amnesia: A lazy player might say, “Yeah! Don’t need to write up a background!” But that is quite far from the truth. The player will have to work extra hard and closely with the G.M. on determining a background. Almost everyone in this situation will want to know who they were/are. Even the rare case of the character who has been given a new lease on life and a fresh chance to start over will have a few problems. In either case, the G.M. and player should litter the character’s new life with clues, hints, misdirections and red herrings about the past life (to either help the character solve the mystery of who he was/is, or as a reminder that he does not want to know who he was, let alone who his old enemies are).

Rolling or selecting from the following table can help G.M.s and players alike in shading in some of the peripheral details of the old life.

01-39 A Relatively Normal Life: The Mega-Hero lived a relatively normal life before something traumatic forced his subconscious to block his past memories. In time, things might return, but whatever it was that forced his mind to retreat is sure to be terrible (accidentally killing his whole family, responsible for something tragic in the community, etc).

40-62 Hunted: The Mega-Hero is in a little trouble; the police, criminals or some other major organization is looking for him (escaped test subject, wanted for questioning, owes money, etc.). Unfortunately for the Mega-Hero, he’s received some major head trauma in the initial phase of the pursuit and can’t remember why he is being chased. These pursuers are often quiet and sneaky, and strike when the Mega-Hero least expects. They may fumble their surprise attacks occasionally, which alerts the Mega-Hero to their closeness, forcing him to pack up and flee, often dropping everything he has (like a current case, new friends or allies) to make his escape as his hunters are often more than a match for him, and often know secrets about the character’s past that they try and exploit.

63-72 Public Knowledge: The Mega-Hero’s medical condition has somehow leaked to the public, a nemesis, or other villains. If the info is not broadcast on the news (cops or federal agents may be looking to help or cause more trouble), the vil-

lains who do find out about the Mega-Hero’s secret(s) start looking to finish off the weakened Mega-Hero. These attackers often have intimate knowledge of the Mega-Hero (could be from past encounters, or information leaked with his amnesia condition) and operate out in the open, challenging the Mega-Hero, often in packs, or causing trouble to draw his attention only to force him to fight them in order to save a burning building of people, etc.

73-94 Abduction/Experimentation: The Mega-Hero is part of some kind of elaborate experiment. However, he doesn’t know the whole story. Bits and pieces may arise in dream-like memories of select events, but one thing is for certain, he experiences mysterious blackouts, occasionally waking up at home and realizing several hours have passed, or waking up somewhere else, but near his home. In all instances, he has no memory of anything that happened during the blackout. This is also compounded by the fact that prior to the blackouts starting, the first thing he remembers is waking up in an alley, park, forest or some other abandoned area. The clues to his past are probably linked to the blackouts and abductions, but the truth is all part of the fun...

95-00 Miscommunication: During the initial phases of the character’s Amnesia, a minor misunderstanding or miscommunication occurred. The people who are actually trying to help the character are perceived as the bad guys. Anyone (including loved ones) who tries to convince him to come in for “treatment” is perceived as being manipulated by the bad guys so they can bring him in and “finish the job” (lobotomize him, steal his powers, implant an alien/Possessing Entity, etc.).

Power Outbursts: During times of stress or simply at random incidents, the Mega-Hero’s powers flare up or fail to act as expected. (The G.M. should feel free to have the powers flare up during “interesting” plot events.) Anytime a Natural 1 is rolled while using his powers it causes a detrimental or unhelpful effect (G.M.’s call). During times of stress there is a 20% chance that his powers will flare up (extra speed, extra damage, unable to pull a punch, etc.) or cut out (stops working for 1D4 melee actions per round).

Extremely Deadly Metal: The metal not only does double damage directly to Hit Points, but being touched on the skin by the metal burns the hero, doing 1D6 S.D.C. per melee round! Also, simply being in close proximity to a high concentration weakens the Mega-Hero and disrupts many of his powers. For every pound (0.45 kg) of metal, the Mega-Hero needs to be 10 feet (3 m) away to avoid its effects. When within range the hero finds his powers function at only 10% capacity, and he can also suffer from nausea, headaches, body pain, tremors or other, similar debilitating symptoms. All of which accumulates to the loss of all combat abilities, reduces the number of attacks to one and speed down to a crawl (Spd attribute of 2). If the Mega-Hero fights the response to the exposure he needs to save vs non-lethal poison (16+) and besides looking a little paler than usual, he can fake not being affected by it for 1D6 melees, at which point he would need to save again. If he is forced to do anything strenuous, the façade is instantly revealed. If he fails the saving throw he instantly keels over from the pain and discomfort from the exposure. Once out of range of the metal or if it is placed in a shielded box (minimum one inch/25 mm thick of lead or 6 inches/15 cm of concrete or stone), the Mega-Hero

will return to normal in 1D4 melees. **Note:** This Achilles' Heel counts as two Achilles' Heels (essentially an add-on to the Deadly Metal Achilles' Heel).

Loss of Humanity: The Mega-Hero (typically a cyborg, transferred intelligence or monstrous mutant) has lost a part of his humanity. He sees himself as no longer human. Many think of themselves as machines (or monsters), becoming more logical (sacrificing the lone individual to save the many is not a problem), losing their emotions, and becoming cold and callous to the people around them (not noticing someone's emotional need for a hug or kind word). They also tend to become impatient with the weaknesses of "frail humans" and may go out on their own, or be a problem in a group.

Major Character-Defining Insanities: This Mega-Hero is a person who is relatively normal save for a character-defining insanity (probably linked to his desire to become a hero?). Selecting any one of the following insanities will count as a Mega-Hero Achilles' Heel. Each can be debilitating in and of itself, yet offers a different or quirky aspect to the Mega-Hero without turning him into a Crazy Hero. **Note:** The player is still free to build a Crazy (Mega) Hero as outlined on pages 33 to 38 of **Heroes Unlimited™ Revised 2nd Edition**. Taking the Crazy Hero option can count as selecting 3 Achilles' Heels, making the character a Mega-Crazy-Hero. For more details on the various insanities and the problems associated with them, see pages 28 to 38 of **Heroes Unlimited™ Revised 2nd Edition**; the following text is a quick summary for those considering this option.

Psychosis: Though not all of these may work well for the player, some do offer some potential.

Frenzy: At first glance, this might be a cool way to build a melee-fighting Mega-Hero. However, this "positive" side only lasts as long as there is a villain for the Mega-Hero to vent his rage against. The moment all the villains are subdued or killed, the Mega-Hero continues his frenzied attack with the closest person near him. He will even attack allies or innocent bystanders and won't stop until he himself is subdued or no one is left standing.

Phobia: No matter what the fear is of, this is always a frustrating response for members of the Mega-Hero's party. The Mega-Hero either freezes in his tracks (or curls up into a ball), unable to move or react to anything until the source of their fear is removed, or he runs as fast as he can away from the source of the fear without regard for who he leaves behind.

Obsessions: The Mega-Hero will go out of his way to love or hate the object of his obsession, to the point of ignoring more important things like saving the lives of people in a burning building versus pursuing the villain (who he is obsessed with) as he makes his escape. This can also be a great distraction for any villain to pull out if he needs to flee the insane Mega-Hero (such as bringing in mutant rats as minions to fight/distract a Mega-Hero obsessed with hating and destroying rats).

Power by Association: Though similar to some of the weaknesses of the Magic power category, this one is purely psychological and can be applied to just about any power, weapon or piece of equipment of the Mega-Hero.

Multiple Personalities: Though a little unlikely for most, this might be an interesting idea for the Nanobot Hive (see the "Nanobot Hive" below under "Optional Mega-Hero Alternatives").

Nocturnal: The Mega-Hero's lifestyle has turned him into more of a twilight individual. This can either be due to the fact that he mostly hunts nocturnal monsters (like vampires) or fights crime at night and has adapted his lifestyle to suit, or it could be more of a supernatural dependence on the night for his Mega-Hero powers. In either case, the Mega-Hero only operates at night, and attempts to work in the day lead to several problems. The first is sensitivity to light. The character easily gets sunburnt from direct exposure to the sun (will burn twice as fast as a normal person), and constant bright lights can lead to headaches or migraines (being outside in the sun for an hour without sunglasses will certainly trigger an episode). His eyes are also sensitive to bright flashes or other blinding light, with effects lasting twice as long, and he is -2 to save versus such attacks if given the chance. Not to mention the exhaustion and crankiness he is sure to feel from the lack of sleep when active during the day (-2 to initiative, -1 to strike and dodge, and is also -5% on all skills). The character is also extremely pale and might be confused for a vampire or other undead if he is not careful. This Achilles' Heel cannot be combined with the Vulnerability to Light, Night Powered Achilles' Heel or the Undead Special Mega-Power, as they are all too similar.

Prototype: The super-powered gadget, robotic or bionic feature of the character is a revolutionary, yet experimental piece of technology. The character has either stolen it or is field-testing it to work out the kinks. Every time the device or feature is used, there is a 10% chance of a malfunction or problem occurring. When used in combat (using a D20), any natural unmodified roll of 1 or 2 will result in needing to roll on the following Prototype Event Table. When using a skill aspect of the device, any roll from 91% to 100% requires a roll on the Prototype Event Table below, even if the skill was successful.

Prototype Event Table:

01-25 Minor Glitch: The power temporarily dims or fluctuates, a limb twitches, or a brief bit of static rolls across the screen. Nothing serious, but the system should be diagnosed at the earliest convenience to the Mega-Hero. Incurs a -1 to strike for the next attack.

26-50 System Freezes: A critical system error occurs and locks the system up. Most devices need to be turned off and restarted to reboot the system, or reversed and backed up to unjam it. Most gadgets will need about 5 to 6 seconds (about 2 melee actions) to reboot. Computerized systems, artificial intelligence systems, and bionic and cybernetic systems will need 15 to 60 seconds (1D4 melees) to reboot. During that time the device or system cannot be used. If a non-critical system like a weapon or sensor, it can be put aside until a more convenient time is available to fix it (like when you're not in combat!). In the meantime, the Mega-Hero can rely on another weapon system or other types of sensors until then. If it is a critical system that needs to be fixed now, the Mega-Hero must stop and fix it immediately (becoming a temporary target) or survive as best he can with the deficiency.

51-75 Drop in Power, Performance or Efficiency: For some unknown reason, the device drops by 25% in its damage, range and/or effect. It still works, but requires a diagnostic investigation to resolve and repair the issue. If another roll is required on the Prototype Event Table, roll percentile again after you roll the results from the Prototype Event Table, and anything higher

than 50% means another 25% drop in performance (25%, then 50%, then 75%, then 0%, at which point it fails to work at all!).

76-90 Power Surge or System Overload: For 2D4 melee rounds, the device starts to behave in an unusual way. Damage output, protective aura, speed, etc., increases or decreases by 10% per melee round (roll 1D6, a roll of 1, 3, 5 is a decrease, 2, 4, 6 an increase) and most everything else starts to get warm, smokes or steams, vibrates or makes funny noises. If the previously rolled time elapses and the device has not been shut down, it will severely damage itself. This can be melting, bursting into flames, exploding, leaking toxic fumes, or whatever is most appropriate to the device. Every time the device is reactivated, it will continue to overload if the device has not been repaired. Bionic and robotic features will usually indicate a detailed warning to its user that they are overloading, time to critical failure, and time to shutdown before permanent damage occurs to the system or the point of no return (can't shut it down now, it's going to explode!). Mega-Heroes who need to push their machine in order to survive a circumstance can continue to operate it on a limited basis. For every minute of cooldown, one melee round is restored to the final countdown. So if a player rolled 6 (on 2D4), he has a minute and a half until overload. If he operates the device for one minute, then lets it cool down for four minutes, he can hobble along, running, cooling and restarting, until he makes it back to his lair or to safety.

91-00 Unpredicted Weakness or Side Effect: Some unknown design element has just been revealed! G.M.s, use the situation that precipitated the need to roll on this table. The weakness can be just about anything; a hole in the armor (A.R. is actually 2 points lower than listed), or perhaps the device is susceptible to ambient conditions (radiation, fire, electromagnetic fields, water, etc.) and is damaged easily by it. Or maybe it stutters or jams just before activating (-6 initiative), or it glows/generates noise that draws attention to it even if it's supposed to be stealthy.

Limited Use Item: A technological or magical device that only has a limited number of charges per day. The device has a set number of uses per day (1D4+2) before needing to recharge (which it must do for 8 hours to fully charge).

Solar-Powered Device: Though almost identical to the other Achilles' Heel, Solar Powered (Night Powered), this version is more specialized to work for technological characters. This option works great during the day, but in the dark, the power (range, damage, effect) is halved, and then only works for 1D6 hours before needing to be recharged/placed in the sun. If the character is a Robot, the Solar Powered Power Supply must be purchased to select this option. Cyborgs who select this option will find all basic features (sensors, motion, strength, etc.) work no matter what. Weapon systems, Super-Powered Gadgets, advanced optics, flight systems, etc., work only while exposed to sunlight. When not in sunlight, these special bionic features only have half as many charges or operate half as long. This can only be maintained for 1D4 hours without sunlight. After that, all the special features shut down until the cyborg can get sunlight.

Unstable Power Source: The Robot, Cyborg, Super-Powered Gadget or Invention requires a unique and revolutionary power supply. This can be anti-matter, P.P.E., cold fusion, something alien or even extra-dimensional (like tapped into a micro-singularity/mini-black hole). On the plus side, the power

source could be what generates a number of the unusual properties or abilities associated with the character/device (such as Supernatural Strength, increased range, and increased S.D.C.). The down side is that the energy source is somewhat volatile, dangerous or unpredictable. Breach of the power supply or even total destruction of it has phenomenal and potentially earth-shattering consequences (2D4x100 damage to a 200 foot (61 m) radius around the device, plus 1D4x10 damage to the remaining 1000 foot (305 m) area past that. The power supply, device (and the character?) are vaporized in the catastrophic rupture. The typical cost for a major system such as a Robot character's power supply in the Robot's initial construction or an aircraft engine for a Hardware character's jet is \$500,000. The cost for a minor system such as a Hardware character's vehicle power supply for a motorcycle or car is \$50,000. Cyborgs from the Bionics power category and the gadgets of the Super Invention power category that have no budget (or do not need to purchase a power supply during creation) have it as part of their system at no additional cost.

Anti-Matter, Ionic Storage, Cold Fusion and Super Fuel Cell: While the power supply is activated, a noticeable charge is in the air. Static electricity buzzes around with the common occurrence of little static discharges (no damage but has a 30% chance of igniting flammable gases in the area such as fuel leaks, escaping gas vapor at a gas station or chemical plant). You also don't want this guy anywhere near explosives (especially near plastic explosives). A strange magnetic field also radiates from the power supply that affects anything that is not hardwired into it. TVs, cell phones, computers, etc., will experience periodic flickers, freezing on the screens, static or other annoying yet relatively harmless occurrences (range 50 feet/15 m from the power source). During lightning storms or similar high voltage disasters, the power supply will draw such energy into itself (making the character a prime target for random lightning strikes). In most cases, the device will shield the character from any serious damage, but each strike draws the attention of others ("Hey! Why does that guy keep getting struck by lightning?"). The strikes also momentarily stun the Mega-Hero using or holding onto the device (loses 3 melee actions that round).

P.P.E. Battery: Through some fluke or miraculous breakthrough of science, the inventor has stumbled upon a renewable ambient energy source. He has also created a storage and collection device that turns that energy into electricity. It also has the potential for certain minor positive side effects (such as bestowing the character's suit with Supernatural Strength, or increasing S.D.C. of gadgets or the super abilities associated with the unit it powers). The negative side to things is that during certain times of the day or periods in the year (during peak magic events such as midday, noon, the equinox, etc.; see pages 317 & 318 in **Heroes Unlimited™ Revised 2nd Edition** for more details), the power source surges and can overload (1% chance per every 10 P.P.E. that could be drawn by a first level mage at these increased power events). If it does overload, the unit shuts down as a safeguard, reducing the unit to basic backup function while it survives on backup power. If the Mega-Hero needs to use a power or special feature he can override the safeguard. However, doing so has a 25% chance of burning out the weapon or feature every time it is used or per every minute of use (whichever is more appropriate). On the plus side, the weapon or feature does double damage, range and effect. The power

source is also a magnet for the supernatural, practitioners of magic and psychics. Psychics fear the unusual power supply and react to it as an abomination or source of supernatural evil. Practitioners of magic recognize it as a technological source of magical energy and will try to capture it (or the blueprints) for themselves. Supernatural creatures are drawn like a moth to a flame, either wanting to feed off it (smells like sweet nectar to all supernatural creatures), or coveting it like a practitioner or magic if they have innate spell casting abilities or have learned magic.

Micro-Singularity: The scientist has created a Rift in space and time that is linked to a black hole! Fortunately for him (and Earth), he has taken the tremendous gravitational forces involved and used them to stabilize the Rift (and make it portable), and uses the remaining energy to create a potentially powerful and renewable source of energy. The down side is the instability caused by having an open tear in the fabric of space and time (a Rift), and worse still is moving it around. The whole thing sends out waves of energy that attracts the attention of those wishing to preserve the delicate balance between worlds (Shifters, True Atlanteans, Temporal Wizards, etc.). It also attracts those trying to escape or sneak into our world (such as Alien Intelligence essence fragments or evil supernatural creatures looking for a free ride). Another negative aspect is that a rupture or destruction of the power supply will not destroy everything in the designated radius, but sucks it all into the black hole or possibly another (yet hostile?) dimension.

Alien Device: Draws the attention of aliens who feed on/use the energy it produces. Every time the power source is activated, the character has a squad of aliens hunting him down, looking to reclaim their "stolen technology." This can be a barrage of warriors, or a single super villain trying to steal back the device. To make matters worse, the ambient energy it radiates causes an unusual visual disturbance around the device (blurs, distorts as if someone is trying to look at a 4-D or 5-D object, glows, shimmers, creates an ionized effect like the Aurora Borealis/Northern Lights, etc.), which can create a Horror Factor of 8 to normal citizens and children (most heroes, law-enforcement and the curious are not affected) and can also make it difficult to hide when the suit is active (unless it has some kind of stealth power).

Power Category-Specific Mega-Hero Options

Though many of the other Special Mega-Hero powers may or may not be applicable, here are a few power category specific options to even the playing field and customize your character's design.

Psionics

Special Mega-Powers

These Mega-Powers are a slightly broad yet limited grouping of powers available to certain power categories, all of which have access to minor or major psionic abilities. These power categories include Natural Psionics, Latent Psionics, Mutants with Psionic Powers (Latent Psionics) and Super Sleuth (with the special option).

Opening of the "Third Eye": Those familiar with *Rifts*® may recognize this as the enlightened state reached by those of the legendary *Psyscape* (see pages 29 & 30 of *Rifts*® **World Book 12: Psyscape**™, for further details). Radiate their Nature/Emotions, Dream Vision, Transform into Energy Being (Pure I.S.P.), Sense Supernatural, Extended Psionic Powers (all Sensitive or all Physical psionics have double range, duration and effect. Plus one Super Psionic power is double range, duration, damage and effect). Bonuses: +3D6 S.D.C., +6D6 I.S.P., +2 M.A., +2 to save vs Possession, +2 to save vs despair-based attacks, +2 to roll with punch/fall or impact, +2 to disarm. Note: Bonuses are half for minor Psychics such as Mutant Psychics (with only a few minor powers; those with Super Psionics have full bonuses), the Super Sleuth (taking Option #2 or the Mega-Hero option of Intuitive Information Gathering), or others with only minor psionics.

Tremendous I.S.P.: Add an extra 1D6x100 to the character's I.S.P.

Incredible I.S.P. Recovery: The Mega-Hero may or may not already have a large pool of I.S.P. at his disposal, but what he does have is a quicker I.S.P. recovery rate and a shorter down time. I.S.P. is recovered at a phenomenal rate of 6 points per minute of meditation or rest, or 1 point per minute of activity.

Magic

Magic is offered to a number of power categories and is usually a major part of it. Any magic-using power categories have access to these special Mega-Powers, including Mystic Studies, Mystically Bestowed, Enchanted Weapon and Enchanted Object.

Special Mega-Powers

Exceptional Talent for Magic: Increased Spell Strength (+1 at levels 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12 and 14 instead of the normal advancement in Spell Strength), +2 to save vs Magic, +6D6 P.P.E., +2 P.E. and double the amount of P.P.E. the mage can draw on at places of power. The Mega-Hero can also add any two spells from any level to his initial spell selection (should conform to the character's concept and should always have the G.M.'s approval).

Tremendous P.P.E.: Add an extra 1D6x100 to the P.P.E. attribute.

Incredible P.P.E. Recovery: The Mega-Hero may or may not already have a large pool of P.P.E. at his disposal, but what he does have is a quicker P.P.E. recovery rate and shorter down time. P.P.E. is recovered at a phenomenal rate of 10 points per

minute of meditation or rest, and 2 points per minute of action or activity.

Hunter/Vigilante

Special Mega-Powers

Prey of Choice: Psychics, Mages, Mutants, Vampires, Werebeasts, Robots, Cyborgs, or something else! (Pick one.) When hunting his Prey of Choice, the Hunter receives a +20% on all related skills against them (Tracking, Detect Ambush, Prowl, Interrogation, etc.). The Hunter is also so familiar with their combat style that he can predict and make the best use of their weaknesses. He is also +6 to save vs their Horror Factor, and +2 to save vs any and all of their special attacks (on top of any P.E. or M.E. bonuses!). The Prey of Choice, on the other hand, is a little bewildered as to how their enemy seems to know their every move.

Combat Awareness (Level 1): The Hunter can focus in on an individual Prey of Choice. He becomes extremely aware of every little twitch, quirk and breath of his prey. The Hunter sees the spark in his prey's eyes as it is about to jump into action, and he then follows that spark as it hits the muscles and puts his prey into motion. But by then, the Hunter has usually already figured out what his prey is going to do! The Hunter is +3 on initiative against the individual Prey of Choice, and receives a +3 to strike and parry it. The Hunter can also easily anticipate when and where his prey's next move will be, and can usually avoid it without interfering with his own rhythm, granting him the Auto-Dodge ability against this single opponent. The Prey of Choice, on the other hand, is so overwhelmed by how easily his blows are anticipated and deliberately cut-off even before his thought has a chance to become action, that he loses 2 of his own attacks trying to figure out what is happening, as well as redirecting his own moves to counter the Hunter's bewildering attacks. Thus the prey has a -3 to dodge any and all of the Hunter's attacks.

Cloud Senses/Avoidance of Prey (Level 3): The Hunter knows every sensory organ or system on his prey. He knows their blind spots and is constantly keeping a feel for which direction the wind is blowing so he always stays downwind of his prey. Often this also involves staying behind them, in the shadows, or attacking from a concealed place (like on the ceiling, from behind a closed door, etc.). This ability has a base skill of 50% +5% per level of experience. The Hunter can strike and remain unseen as long as he can successfully roll under this skill rating, in which case the Prey of Choice has an additional -5 to strike, parry and dodge the Hunter. Should the Hunter fail a roll, he will need to break off the attack and hide (with a successful Prowl roll) and return, making another successful Avoidance roll, to continue the attack with the bonuses.

Advanced Combat Awareness (Level 5): The Hunter's knowledge of his prey has expanded so much that he can successfully take on and deal with multiple members of his Prey of Choice. When focusing on a group of his Prey of Choice, the Hunter gains the following bonuses against all of them. He receives the Auto-Dodge ability and cannot be surprised by any of his Prey of Choice. He also receives +2 to initiative, +2 to strike

and parry, and +1 to dodge all of the Prey's attacks. All the Prey are scared, panicked and bewildered by the Hunter in their midst, and receive the following penalties: -1 attack, -2 to strike, and -2 to dodge all of the Hunter's attacks.

Advanced Cloud Senses/Avoidance of Herd/Pack (Level 7): The Hunter's understanding of his prey and the prey's herd or pack mentality gives him an unbelievable edge over them. Not only do most of the pack or herd of his Prey of Choice not see him (or only see a flash of him before being struck), but also the encounter often feels like there could be more than just one Hunter attacking! The base skill is 20% +5% per level of experience. If the Hunter successfully rolls under the skill, he can move about the shadows or sensory blind spots of his Prey, striking with ease. In which case, all are -5 to strike, parry and dodge his attacks.

Supernatural Senses: This Hunter has a nose for the supernatural, and will see an energy aura faintly emanating from the invisible or those otherwise cloaked by magic, psionics or mutant powers. The same is true of Astral Beings, Alien Intelligence fragments, and similar hidden creatures. The Hunter can also detect, like a sixth sense or sense of smell, the essences of psychic, magic, mutant and supernatural energies.

Mutants, Mutant Animals or any others with super powers from the areas of senses, attribute enhancements or natural animal powers, and less than 20 P.P.E., are difficult if not impossible to pick out from ordinary humans and animals. Range: 5 feet (1.5 m) + 1 foot (0.3 m) per level, and can detect and track to the source at 5% +2% per level of experience.

Mutants, Psychics, Mutant Animals, Mages, magic items or any others with super powers or psionics which have some kind of energy control, use psionics, have innate magic powers but are not supernatural, and have over 20 P.P.E. (or have I.S.P.), can be detected and tracked. Range: 100 feet (30.5 m) + 10 feet (3 m) per level, and can detect and track to source at 25% +5% per level of experience.

Mutants, Psionics, Mages and Enchanted Items using magic, psionics or energy-based mutant powers are more noticeable, and draw the attention of the Hunter. Range: 250 feet (76 m) + 25 feet (7.6 m) per level, and can detect and track to the source at 50% +5% per level of experience.

Supernatural creatures, Mega-Heroes (or really powerful Mutants with things like Supernatural Strength or Invulnerability), Mystically Bestowed (only when bestowed, otherwise registers as a normal human), or beings with more than 200 P.P.E. or 300 I.S.P., register much better to the Hunter's senses. Range: 400 feet (122 m) + 50 feet (15.2 m) per level of experience, and can detect and track to the source at 60% +5% per level of experience.

Supernatural creatures or beings with more than 200 P.P.E. or 300 I.S.P. using magic, psionics or energy-based mutant powers are much more noticeable to the Hunter. Range: 600 feet (183 m) + 100 feet (30.5 m) per level of experience, and can detect and track them to their source at 70% +5% per level of experience.

The Hunter can also often identify what kind of energy he is detecting and discern what kind of creature or being he is tracking or has found (e.g. an Enchanted Weapon, or a Mutant with Alter Physical Structure: Fire). Base skill is 20% +5% per level of experience. +10% if he has encountered that type of power or

energy type before (e.g. he's hunted an Alter Physical Structure: Fire Mutant before, and this new creature he tracks feels like that too).

Sharpened Senses: All five senses are sharpened (not as good as the minor super abilities, but almost as good as the Mutant Animal's abilities) either through intensive training or through mystic study/bestowment. If the Mega-Hero already has super powers which enhance the senses, or offer additional senses, double the range and effect (instead of the normal +50% offered to Mega-Heroes). For those who are normal humans (or who have an enhanced sense but not all of them), the following sharpening of their senses has taken place.

Vision: Can see in low levels of light, about half as well as a cat. He still needs a light source (star, moon, city lights, etc.), otherwise he'll be completely blind (considered nightvision with a range of 30 feet/9.1 m). He also has exceptionally clear ranged vision, about double that of a normal person (20/10). Bonus: +1 to strike with an Aimed Shot from a gun or from a thrown weapon.

Hearing: Has become accustomed to sifting out the delicate sounds of prey (the ruffle of fur or feathers, the swishing of legs through the underbrush, or the faint crunch of the earth beneath them). Bonuses: +1 initiative.

Smell: Allows the character to detect very faint scents. Can track by smell 25% +4% per level of experience. He can also identify a person by scent/odor, as well as if the target is experiencing an extreme emotion, at 20% +2% per level of experience. Bonuses: +1 initiative.

Touch: Can detect slight variations in texture, read raised text by touch alone, and has a bonus of +5% to perform delicate skills and tasks such as Demolitions, Pick Pockets, Pick Locks, Palming, Cardsharp, etc.

Taste: Recognize common ingredients (sugar, salt, pepper, spices, etc.) at 35% +5% per level of experience. Can identify exotic tastes such as chemicals, toxins and poisons at 15% +5% per level of experience. Practicing with an exotic taste for more than two months will make it a common ingredient to the Hunter.

Cyber-Hunter: The Hunter has acquired several cybernetic systems (typically sensor implants and select minor implantable weapons, though no bionics). Select 2D4+2 cybernetic systems. The Cyber-Hunter also often specializes in tracking/hunting cyborgs, robots, and high-tech bandits and villains.

Achilles' Heel

Energy Vampirism: Though a hero, the Hunter must feed on his quarry. This can be I.S.P., P.P.E., other mutant energies or life energy (like the Bio-Ghost). The Hunter can feel his needed energy and track it to its source. Range is 50 feet (15.2 m) + 10 feet (3 m) per level of experience. Base Tracking skill is 25% +5% per level of experience. He is also usually not restricted to one type of prey (though he could be), and can hunt/feed on animals, humans, or mutants alike.

The Hunter has two possible reasons for this need:

1. He actually needs it to survive, requiring little in the way of normal food and drink (about one good meal and a gallon of water per month). To maintain his powers he must consume

about 50 P.P.E. or I.S.P., or 50 Hit Points (life energy) minimum per week, 100 points is preferred. Failing to gather enough energy will starve the character and he can die.

2. The energy he collects allows him to channel and create all of his Mega-Hero abilities (and consequently, his Achilles' Heels). If he is forced to stop feeding, he returns to a normal Hunter/Vigilante (completely losing all of his Mega-Hero powers and weaknesses). To maintain his powers, he must consume about 40 P.P.E. or I.S.P., or 40 Hit Points (life energy) minimum per week, 80 points is preferred. If he goes a week without feeding, reduce all of his Mega-Hero bonuses by half (Achilles' Heels still have full effectiveness). If he goes more than two weeks without feeding, he loses his powers. To regain his powers, he needs to hunt and feed for 4 weeks, collecting at least 80 points per week, and all of his powers will be restored. Note that the Hunter still needs to eat and drink as much as a normal human. His odd extra feeding requirement also may affect his desires for certain foods. At least 40% of these types of Hunters develop a preference for raw meats and blood, as well as devouring organs like heart, liver, and brain, and often crack open the bones to suck out the marrow. Cannibalism is also not unheard of (about 10%).

Super Sleuth

Special Mega-Powers

Cyber-Linked Database: This is essentially an upgraded version of the Option #1 available to the Super Sleuth (the Cyber-Sleuth). The Mega-Hero is hooked into a computer network/database (has almost instant access to police radio bands and their databases) via Cyberjack or Headjack implants, obtained by good relations with either the local police department and/or a federal agency (like the F.B.I. or C.I.A.), or hacked into on his own.

This Cyber-Super-Sleuth should be able to learn the following from accessing the database with a name or photo (collected through a built-in cybernetic camera/video recorder eye implant):

Lowly Thugs: 85% chance of finding rap sheet, suspected associates and/or criminal connections.

Gang Leader: 62% chance of finding rap sheet, suspected associates and/or criminal connections.

Syndicate/Organized Crime Lieutenant: 48% chance of finding rap sheet, suspected associates and/or criminal connections.

Syndicate/Organized Crime Boss: 18% chance of finding rap sheet, suspected associates and/or criminal connections.

Super-Powered Criminal/Vigilante: 45% change of finding known powers, suspected criminal behavior and suspected connections.

Super-Powered Villain/Crime Lord: 22% change of finding known powers, suspected criminal behavior and suspected connections.

Government Agent (Public Figure): 92% chance of finding record of heroic deeds, commonly used tactics/super powers, medals of commendation and known associates.

Government Agent (Semi-Covert Organization): 38% chance of finding record of heroic deeds, commonly used powers, known associates, possible activities and or targets.

Government Agent (Top Secret or Covert Program): 6% chance of finding out commonly used powers, known associates or possible sponsoring branch of the government and area of activity.

As the character progresses he may add 5% total per level of experience to these percentages as a representation of the database being updated (by him or the original database administrators). For example, the Super Sleuth might chose to add a +2% to Thugs, +2% to Government Agents, and +1% to Super-Powered Villains upon reaching level 2.

Cybernetics: The Cyber-Link option also grants a few minor cybernetics. These are implants that don't significantly alter the human physique, replacing limbs or major body components (as this would constitute infringing on the Bionic power category). Includes Headjack/Cyberjack with full hacking utilities, Multi-Optics Eyes or Video Nerve Implant, Optical & Audio Input Recorder (data recorder for uploading images and sound bites to reference on database), Amplified Hearing, Gyro-Compass and Clock Calendar. He may also select 1D4+1 other cybernetic implants of choice (typically a Cyber-Disguise, sensors or other minor implants).

Intuitive Information Gathering: This is essentially an advanced version of Option #2 (the Paranormal Detective) presented to the Super Sleuth power category. Minor psionics include: Telepathy, Empathy, Object Read, Total Recall, Speed Reading, Sense Evil, Clairvoyance and one Sensitive of choice. The Super Sleuth has an I.S.P. Base of 1D6x10 + M.E. +1D6 per level. Note: Using this option as a Mega-Hero Special Power means the Super Sleuth does not lose any of his skills as originally indicated as part of Option #2.

Achilles' Heel

Driven: Traumatic flashes of crime victims repeat in his head, driving him to find the perpetrators, or the psychic imprints left on or by victims haunt the character (especially for those Super-Sleuths who use Option #2 or the Intuitive Information Gathering Special Mega-Power). This is also heightened through observing crime scenes, videos and/or photo evidence. He cannot sleep, having bouts of insomnia (see pages 46 and 47 of the *Heroes Unlimited™ G.M.'s Guide* for complete details on sleep deprivation), and often is obsessed about solving crimes so he can seek justice and/or stop the cries of the silenced victims from screaming in his head.

Mystically Bestowed Special Mega-Power and Achilles' Heel

Limited Power: On top of the standard powers offered for this power category, the Mega-Hero has a non-renewable reserve of 2D6x1000 P.P.E. (This is in addition to any other P.P.E. used for the Mystically Bestowed's super powers or spell

casting abilities.) It does not regenerate, can't be added to, etc. Once used up, the Mega-Hero not only loses the option of using this P.P.E. pool to do whatever he wants, but he also loses all of his Mystically Bestowed powers as well as the his alter ego! He can use this P.P.E. to do anything he wants (use spells as a general guideline for P.P.E. cost, effect, ability and duration; one can also use psionics for other types of powers, just use the I.S.P. number as the P.P.E. cost for psionic-like powers the Mega-Hero wishes to use). If the Mystically Bestowed Mega-Hero has spells instead of super powers they use the P.P.E. base as outlined in that power category, and use this Mega-Power when those spells won't cut it. Typically, this power comes as a contract or test. Once completed, the Mega-Hero may have consequences or obligations to fulfill. Roll or select from the following table:

01-25 **Experiment:** It's a one shot deal, his mysterious benefactor was seeing if it could handle a link with a mortal, liked offering anonymous help, or used this opportunity to connect and observe this world and its people. At the G.M.'s discretion (and storyline), the Mega-Hero may select or train for another power category when the experiment is complete. Select from the following: Enchanted Weapon, Enchanted Object, Robotic (Suit), Bionics, Physical Training, Super Sleuth, Stage Magician, Secret Operative, or even possibly Experiment.

26-66 **Test:** The Mega-Hero's benefactor wanted to see if he "has the potential." Failure means the same as the Experiment option above. Success means the rerolling or selecting of new powers and/or Mega-Hero options. If he keeps or reselects the same options, it's "Phase 2" of the test; otherwise the Mega-Hero has received "permanent" status with his benefactor (loses the Limited Power ability).

67-00 **Contract:** Some contract has been struck with the Mega-Hero in exchange for power. "A deal with the devil" or another malicious force, an alien invader, supreme being, etc. Whatever the case, there is usually some unpleasant side effect (lost soul, death, slavery, becoming something's lunch, etc.) when the character uses up all of his Limited Power.

Note: This Mega-Power counts as two Mega-Powers and one Achilles' Heel.

Mutant Animals

Mega-Hero Mutant Animals are slightly different from the normal creation process due to the use of Bio-E. If you are using the Mutant Animal creation rules straight out of *Heroes Unlimited™ Revised 2nd Edition*, build the character using the Bio-E points as indicated and select your Special Mega-Powers and Achilles' Heels as usual. For those using the up-to-date Bio-E rules, which include Vestigial Disadvantages from the new *After the Bomb® RPG*, the following special features may be of some use.

Special Mega-Powers

Tremendous Bio-E: This is a bonus of Bio-E points in the amount of 2D6x10 points that can be used to purchase extra animal features, animal psionics or even super powers during character creation (see the "Determining Animal Psionics or Minor Super Abilities" section on page 170 of *Heroes Unlim-*

ited™ Revised 2nd Edition for Bio-E costs of minor super abilities available to Mutant Animals and the restrictions that apply).

Major Super Ability: Normally, Mutant Animals are unable to select a major super power as part of the Bio-E purchasing process (but may purchase a select few minor super abilities). Taking this Special Mega-Power allows the character to select one major super ability (no Bio-E Cost) to add to his abilities.

Specific Achilles' Heel

Extra Power Costs Bio-E: Taking the above-mentioned Special Mega-Power of Major Super Ability but applying a Bio-E cost to it counts as an Achilles' Heel, as the Mutant Animal suffers in other areas because of the spent resources (he will need to have fewer powers, or pick up Vestigial Disadvantages, to afford the purchase of a Major Super Ability). Bio-E cost for the Major Super Ability varies with the type of powers, but here is a general guideline (talk to your G.M. for specifics).

Shape-shifting powers, such as Alter Physical Structures, Stretching and Metamorphosis: Animals, cost 80 Bio-E.

Super attributes, such as Animal Abilities, Sonic Flight, Spin at High Velocity and Supernatural Strength, cost 50 Bio-E.

Control powers, such as Control Elemental Force, Create Force Field, Magnetism and Sonic Power, cost 60 Bio-E.

Life-altering powers, such as Multiple Lives, Immortality, Bio-Ghost and Invulnerability, cost 100 Bio-E.

Stage Magician

Special Mega-Powers

Trickster Magic: The Stage Magician has all the special O.C.C. Abilities of the Trickster Mage as found on pages 64 to 73 of *The Rifter*® #9½: Entertainment Factor, Unnerving Calm & Confidence and Spell Knowledge. He also starts with a Base P.P.E. of the P.E. attribute x3 +3D6, +2D6 per level of experience. He does not, however, receive the standard bonuses (as outlined by the Trickster Mage O.C.C.). Instead, he receives the following bonuses (which are on top of the Stage Magician's normal bonuses): +1 to I.Q., +2 to M.E., +1 to P.E., +4 to save vs Illusion Magic, +5 to save vs Trickster Magic, +1 to save vs Horror Factor at levels 2, 4, 6, 8 and 12, +1 to Spell Strength at levels 4, 7, 10, 13 and 15.

Ludicrous Magic: The Stage Magician has all the special O.C.C. Abilities of the Ludicrous Mage as found on pages 74 to 93 of *The Rifter*® #9½: Humor Factor, Monologue, Unnerving Laugh, Make Balloon Animals & Monsters, Clowning and Spell Knowledge. He also starts with a Base P.P.E. of the P.E. attribute x3 +3D6, +3D6 per level of experience. He does not, however, receive the standard bonuses (as outlined by the Ludicrous Mage O.C.C.). Instead, he receives the following bonuses (which are on top of the Stage Magician's normal bonuses): +2 to M.E., +1D6 to Spd, +2 to save vs Illusions, +3 to save vs Lu-



BRIAN MANNING

Nov 2006

dicrous Magic, +1 to save vs Horror Factor at levels 2, 5, 8 and 12, +1 to Spell Strength at levels 4, 7, 10, 13 and 15. The Ludicrous Mage's Limitations also apply (counts as an Achilles' Heel).

Optional Mega-Hero Alternatives

Dual Class

A special alternative to the above Mega-Hero options is to meld two compatible power categories, to create a better skilled hero with a touch of something extra to make him different yet on the same power level as most other Mega-Heroes. The premise behind this option is that the hero receives special training and conditioning, but also has an innate set of powers, or receives powers after the training, to make him a dual class. Some examples might be a Hardware character with a Robotic Exoskeleton, Secret Operative with Bionics, or a Wizard with an Enchanted Weapon.

When selecting the skilled class, take all the special skills and training that come with that class (Physical Training, Special Training, Hardware or Mystic Studies). For the second class, one needs to select a power category that grants abilities that are innate or do not require any training to have learned (Bionics, Robotic Exoskeleton, Mutants, Latent Psionics, Enchanted Weapons, Enchanted Items, etc.). Ignore all the skill selections, selecting just the powers.

Some limitations should be observed:

Magic & Psionics: Due to the channeling and use of one's innate P.P.E. to learn magic, any potential to develop psionics was already used for that. Therefore, Mystic Studies cannot be combined with the Psionic power category.

Bionics: Bionics will interfere with super abilities, magic and psionics for all but a few rare exceptions (G.M. discretion).

Mystic Studies: Mystic Studies will work with Mutant Animals, Mutants and Experiments, but all super powers selected must be innate or instinctive and can not require a great deal of control or focus to use (like energy-controlling abilities). Examples of acceptable powers are senses, attributes boosters, and innate physical conditions such as invulnerability, immortality, multiple lives, etc.

Other Limitations: The hero must divide his experience points equally between his two power categories (typically doubling the total amount of experience points one needs to reach the next level). He is also restricted from selecting the Mega-Hero option (for either or both power categories) or power categories that automatically make him a Mega-Hero (such as the Immortal power category from pages 58 to 67 of **Powers Unlimited™ 2**).

Robotics: Nanobot Hive

This option is, in itself, almost like a sub-power category (much like the Super Soldier was for the Experiment power category). The creation of the Nanobot Hive is essentially the same as for creating any other Robot character; just select your type of intelligence (Advanced, Neural or Transferred) and use your budget to purchase the standard features of your robotic body. The following exceptions and limitations should be noted:

1. Master Configuration: Whatever you build with your budget is the robot's natural form (so be sure to purchase any cosmetic features you want or you'll need to select the Shape Shifting option below for any radical changes to hide your heroic persona or robotic nature).

2. Power Supply Limitations: The power supply is limited to either a Micro-Fusion Power System (each nanobot has its own nano-fusion power system; the nano-scale may reduce the price, but the sheer quantity of them restores it back to the original amount for the Micro-Fusion Power System) or Super Solar Engine, due to the fluid nature of the Nanobot Hive.

3. Large, Built-In Weapon Systems or Kinetic Weapon Limitations: Weapons such as mini-missiles, machineguns and grenade launchers can be purchased, but the ammunition cannot be created by the nanobots (unless the Robot character also possesses the needed skills: Demolitions, Mechanical Engineering, Weapon Engineering, Electrical Engineering, Advanced Mathematics and Chemistry). Thus it will typically need to carry a box or bag of ammo with it. It can carry the ammo inside its body but a critical hit (Natural 20) or a Called Shot to that location with an energy weapon or high-powered rifle will detonate the ammunition (damaging the Nanobot Hive accordingly).

4. Energy-Based Weapons, Sensors and Propulsion Systems: These can be purchased as normal, but the following advantage applies to all of them. The nanobots have the necessary hardware and software to align themselves together to create those complicated features. The features can be disassembled (i.e. the nanobots break down and move to other parts of the body) for concealing purposes at no extra charge. Takes one melee action to reform or conceal the feature (this can also be done with the above large or kinetic systems to hide them or for easier travel).

Mega-Powers

The Nanobot Hive Mega-Hero option is actually a bit of a hybrid between the two Mega-Hero power lists, and has the following Mega-Hero abilities instead of the standard list from either option.

Increased Range by 50%: This applies to all sensors, weapons and special abilities.

Increased S.D.C. by 50%: This is applied after the final S.D.C. total has been calculated/purchased for the Robotic frame and armor upgrades.

Increased Healing: The nanobots can actually repair themselves and restore 1D6 S.D.C. per minute for minor damage (up to 30 S.D.C.). Major damage will need access to raw materials for the nanobots to repair existing nanobots, and to manufacture new nanobots to replace those lost in the damage. Typically will

cannibalize 10 S.D.C. of materials to restore 1D6 S.D.C. to the character.

Robotic Nature: Like other robots, the Nanobot Hive possesses Superhuman/Robotic Strength, does not fatigue, is not affected by poisons, toxins or psionics, does not need to breathe, nor will it die if forced into a vacuum.

The Nanobot Hive is not considered supernatural, and therefore does not possess Supernatural Strength or any of the other bonuses or benefits of being a supernatural creature.

Increased Budget by 50%: The Robot's creation budget is increased by 50%, granting the player more purchasing power when it comes to building the Robot.

Nanobot Hive

Special Mega-Powers

The Nanobot Hive may make its selection of Special Mega-Powers from the following list. Each power selected from this list costs one Mega-Hero Special Power. If the player still feels he needs to select one of the other Special Mega-Powers, he is free to do so if the G.M. approves it.

Liquid Metal: The Nanobot Hive can take on a metallic humanoid shape that can mold itself into simple shapes, pour itself through holes and under doors, or stretch any and all of itself (same limitations and abilities of the Stretching super power). It can also pour itself into a box to hide or flatten itself out, covering a wall or floor (the surface then appears to be metallic or mirrored). In this state the Nanobot Hive is more fluid and can more easily resist damage to itself. It is semi-invulnerable, taking no damage from kinetic attacks (punches, kicks, bullets, blades, etc.), which pass right through. The hole or slash mark then appears to "heal" within seconds. Severe damage (decapitation, cutting off a limb) will require one melee action for the lost part to slither on over and reattach itself to the rest of the Nanobot Hive. Explosions will blow the Robot apart, but other than needing to spend 2D6 melees reforming, it takes no damage. It is vulnerable to all other forms of attack, including energy weapons.

Nanobot Swarm: The Nanobot Hive can dissipate its normally near solid form to hide, pass through tight spots or to float/fly. In this state, the Nanobot Hive is impervious to all physical attacks; only energy weapons can harm it, and even then only area effect energy weapons do full damage (like fire). Any energy weapon shooting into the swarm will only do half damage. The swarm can coalesce together (appearing like a mist or smoke of any color), or cover everything in a room like dust or fine particles of sand (great for spying on a room!). As a swirling cloud, the Nanobot Hive can float or fly at a speed of 14 (9.5 mph/15 km) with a maximum altitude of 50 feet (15.2 m). If it wishes to be able to move about faster than that, the character must purchase the Concealed Micro-Hover Jets Propulsion System with the corresponding speed and altitude. But due to the nanobots' individual small size, the maximum swarm speed would be 210 mph (336 km); to go faster they will need to reform into their natural state to reduce air drag.

Shape Shifting: If you could call Liquid Metal macro shape control, Shape Shifting would be micro shape control. The Nanobot Hive has exceptional control over the positioning of

each nanobot. In game terms, it can take on any detailed shape (organic or inorganic). So the Nanobot Hive can look like a chair and a desk with a computer on it, take on the appearance of almost any animal, or mimic the appearance of a specific person (has a rudimentary Disguise skill of 20%; if taken as a skill the character gets a +10% bonus to the skill, but to make a fully effective copy the Nanobot Hive will also need to have the Imitate Voice and Impersonation skill). Though it can't change its weight (still the same number of nanobots), it can shrink or grow the overall size the Nanobot Hive occupies (variable density). The minimum size is about that of a house cat, while the maximum size is about as big as a car or large horse. Remember, though, that a 200 lb (90 kg) robot is going to be a 200 lb (90 kg) cat or a 200 lb (90 kg) car when it changes shape. The Shape Shifting ability lets it form simple weapons and tools out of its hands as well as add up to four additional appendages (tentacles, tails, legs, arms, etc.). Each extra pair of arms will add one attack per melee and a +1 to parry, while adding a tail will provide an additional attack. Even the ability to fly is possible by creating physical wings; maximum speed of 50 mph (80 km), but the Nanobot Hive must be at its normal size or larger or it will be too heavy/dense to fly. Any intricate or special features the Nanobot Hive wishes to be able to create (like sensors and weapon systems) must be purchased using the standard robot rules as part of its Master Configuration. Also, due to the close quarters and constant contact needed to maintain the detailed shape, the Nanobot Hive takes full damage from all types of attacks. Damage exposes the silvery-metallic insides of the Nanobot Hive's structure, but appears to heal quickly – within a melee – even if the actual damage done to the Nanobot Hive isn't repaired (heals at the normal accelerated rate as indicated above).

Magnetism: Nanobots typically use magnetism anyway to stay together and function as a hive (locomotion & propulsion). This power can occur when they work together to increase their magnetic potential. Grants all the same abilities as offered by the major super power of the same name.

Mechano-Link: Nanobots can find it extremely easy to invade and usurp control of other systems. They can also easily adapt their structures to better communicate, interface and control other pieces of technology. They receive all the benefits and abilities offered by the major super power of the same name.

Cloaking: The nanobots' understanding of technology and their natural use of it can easily allow them to adapt this feature into their systems. They receive all the benefits and abilities offered by the major super power of the same name.

Fragment Hive: The Nanobot Hive can temporarily split off portions of itself, thus creating more than one robot. Elaborate programming is hardwired into each nanobot to keep the hive mind intact. This is to prevent the mind from going crazy and allowing its nanobots to replicate uncontrolled (thus creating a nanobot plague). While separated, the mini hives are controlled by the hive mind, but typically function in the background, networking and keeping the mini hives in contact with each other. As a safety protocol, any mini hive that exceeds the range, or loses contact with the hive mind for more than a minute (like entering a Rift) self-destructs, destroying all the nanobots in that mini hive. Note that the Nanobot Hive is always of a constant mass (same number of nanobots), so a Fragmented Hive of 200

lbs (90 kg) can split into two 100 lb (45 kg) mini-hives, or a 50 lb (22.5 kg) and a 150 lb (67.5 kg) mini-hive. Maximum number of fragmented hives: Original hive, +1 at levels 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13 and 15. Each Nanobot Hive has all the powers of the Nanobot Hive (except fragmentation of the hive). Maximum Range (before self destruction) is one mile (1.6 km) per level of experience. Each mini-hive is linked through an encrypted radio signal, and each can freely see and hear (as well as transmit all other sensory data) between Fragmented Hives, which make for an excellent, instant familiar.

Nanobot Hive

Special Achilles' Heels

The unique nature of the Nanobot Hive offers a number of special limitations available for selection as Achilles' Heels. Most will find these Achilles' Heels adequate but the player is still free to select from the standard list of Achilles' Heels above.

More than One in Charge: Often refers to itself as "We" or "Us," and suffers from the Multiple Personalities and/or Schizophrenia insanities.

Requires Metal & Energy to Live: Though not impervious to energy, it needs to transform to collect new energy, typically using solar cells and/or electrical plugs to connect to a standard outlet. The character is also restricted to purchasing the Super Solar Engine power supply in initial creation. As part of this Achilles' Heel, it needs to transform into a solar cell (needs Shape Shifting power) or plug into an existing power supply to recharge. It needs to rest and recharge for 1D4+2 hours per day (usually turns into a pool of liquid metal, or black, slimy substance if a solar cell). This Achilles' Heel may require that the Nanobot Hive also has the Mega-Powers of Shape Shifting or Liquid Metal to gather energy and raw materials. At the G.M.'s discretion, it may be said it has purchased the ability to create an electric plug (for free) to collect energy and uses the Nanobot Hive's regenerative/repair abilities to collect raw materials.

Vulnerable to Magnetic Fields: Magnetic fields break down the cohesion of the nanobots' current configuration and/or shape, and disrupt shape-shifting abilities. Light magnetic fields (like a fridge magnet or those found on a toy) will cause the Nanobot Hive's appearance to move, be attracted or shimmer, revealing the Nanobot Hive's inhuman nature (loses 1 attack and is -2 on initiative as it tries to compensate and repair its image or escape the effects). Greater magnetic fields (someone with the Magnetism power, or being near an electrical turbine generator) will cause the Nanobot Hive to melt and spill out, as well as being drawn to the source of magnetism (completely giving away any kind of disguise it had). In this case it loses half of its attacks and speed is reduced to 20% as it tries to hold itself together; all combat bonuses are gone and it is now -6 on initiative. Any attempt to use an innate special system (energy weapon, flight, etc.) has only a 10% chance of functioning. If it does, it is only half as effective (speed, damage and range are halved).

Immortals

Immortals are considered to be another type of Mega-Hero on their own, thus they cannot select any of the Mega-Hero powers or special options on top of what is already outlined on pages 58 to 67 of **Powers Unlimited™ 2**.

Losing and Replacing Hero-Defining Features and Equipment

With a number of these Mega-Hero features being gadgets or technologically-based (as well as a number of other power categories having similarly important tangible items or restraints on the character), the inevitable questions arise.

Q: What happens when I lose a character-defining gadget?

A: Reusable resources, in cases such as when the character is the original inventor, or has good relations with a sponsoring organization, or access to a genius level repairman (another player character or non-player character used by the hero as part of his background to explain how he got the special gear to begin with), provide the ability to repair or replace the damaged gadget(s).

Non-reusable resources, such as a stolen artifact, an item given as a gift, severed ties with the sponsoring organization, or a found alien artifact, when the character has no allies who can repair or fix exotic gadgets, are a bit more trouble. In this case, the hero should realize this and make every effort to protect his gadget(s). In what should be the extremely rare event that the gadget or gear is destroyed, the G.M. should create an opportunity for the character to find a replacement (either something identical, or something new and different but of roughly equivalent value). But be sure and make the player feel the consequences for not taking the proper care of the item, as well as possibly making him work hard to replace it (waiting at least one level of advancement, and two or three would certainly not be unreasonable).

Q: Can I overcome any of my Achilles' Heels?

A: Achilles' Heels offset many of the advantages of the Mega-Hero that would otherwise make him virtually invincible. They also make for good character development, so one may not want to really get rid of an Achilles' Heel. However, if fixing or healing an Achilles' Heel is one of the primary motivators for the character, it is conceivable to role-play the curing, fixing and/or overcoming of almost any of the character's Achilles' Heels. That may involve seeing a psychiatrist to cure an insanity, building up a resistance to deadly metals by minute exposure, receiving cybernetics or bionics to replace physical impairments, etc. However, such a task should be quite daunting and require a phenomenal amount of role-playing to achieve. Also, even if the character does decide to do this, he should not be able to overcome an Achilles' Heel until level 5, a second one at level 10, and/or a third one at level 15, and even then, those are the minimums.

Q: Is it possible to gain new gadgets or Achilles' Heels?

A: Insanities pop up from time to time due to traumatic experiences, and defeating a villain with a super-powered gadget and taking it as loot is also possible, as is getting upgrades from a sponsoring organization. These changes can mold and shape the character in new directions. But G.M.s should always be careful of what they give out to players, ensuring game balance (i.e. the G.M. still needs to be comfortable in providing the players adequate challenges and a fun time), and making character development and progression exciting and fun.



Secret Base Creation Rules

Many heroes (and villains) have a secret base, lair, fortress or headquarters. Some work within the confines of their own home, whipping out their costumes when the need arises, others have a fully decked-out lair with vehicle garages, launch bays and personnel working to support the hero on his crusade. This section will allow all heroes (normal or Mega) to develop a reasonable setup for their bases of operation when fighting crime.

Determining the Type and Creation Points

Type and Creation Points are determined by the amount of wealth available to the character. Many independents can't afford much and must rely on small, yet versatile bases of operation. The more wealthy or those heroes who have a sponsor (like a government) willing to foot the bill can have pretty much anything and everything at their disposal, if they play their cards right. Below is a list of categories that should allocate the resources a hero (or villain) would have in the construction of a secret base. Groups of heroes can pool their points to build a joint base that they can all have access to. Multiple bases can also be purchased, but the cost comes out of the total available Creation Points determined.

1. Independent Hero: This is pretty much any hero who doesn't have a starting budget or exceptional wealth (like the Special Mega-Power Wealth option), or who is not sponsored by some wealthy philanthropist, government agency or private industry. This hero usually flies by the seat of his pants, performing a quick change in a phone booth or alley when the need arises, revealing his heroic costume underneath. Some are even fortunate enough to have a large life savings that can add to their resources and allow them to afford something reasonable. Independent Heroes need to roll on their life savings under the "Optional Rules" on page 25 of *Heroes Unlimited™ Revised 2nd Edition*. Add their available cash (the value of which is usually determined at the end section of the specific power category) and their life savings, then divide the number by 1000 (rounding up) to determine the available points at their disposal. For example, a Mutant who rolls \$7000 in life savings will have 7 points. Do not subtract any spent points from their cash, as these points only reflect what equivalent other resources they could conceivably come up with to support their crime fighting activities. The hero can also add 50 points if he owns a vehicle, and another 100 points if he has super powers that lend themselves to a technological advantage (Mechano-Link, Telemechanics, Electrokinetics, etc.). The hero can also add another 75 points if he has any skills that might suggest a suitable hobby or career that could facilitate his crime fighting lifestyle (such as Auto Mechanics, Basic Electronics, Computer Programming, Computer Hacking, Sewing, etc.). At the G.M.'s discretion, the skill bonus may be awarded up to three times (total of an additional 225 points) if the character has sufficient skill sets to warrant multiple hobbies or home workshops. The hero can also add another 50 points if he has an M.A. above 20, with a bonus of 10 more points for every point of M.A. over 20. He can also add another 50 points if he has a P.B. above 20, and add another 10 points for every point of P.B. over 20. This reflects his charm and influence when it comes to buying materials and hardware at a discount.

2. Hardware Hero: Any hero who has a budget to build, or equip himself with gadgets, weapons and or specialty equipment has a Creation Point Base equal to his rolled budget (Mega-Heroes who have the increased budget should be sure to add the +50% multiplier first before calculating their Creation Point Base), plus any life savings, divided by 1000. For example, a Stage Magician who rolls a budget of \$60,000 and then rolls

\$7000 in life savings will have 67 points. Each hero who already has a shop to build and maintain his equipment from his power category gains a bonus of 300 points to be spent on Location & Secrecy, Size and Facilities. He also gets another 150 points to be spent anywhere he likes. He can also apply any of the bonuses from the Independent Hero (skills, high M.A., high P.B., etc.) to the Hardware Hero if the G.M. approves it.

3. Independently Wealthy Hero: This is any Mega-Hero who selects the Special Mega-Power of Wealth. Due to the large difference in a possible budget and the huge amount of cash the hero has, no bonuses from any special skills, attributes or due to a predetermined workshop apply to this character. Base Creation Points are 40,000. This hero is also likely to have a second (and possibly third) backup base in case the first one is discovered or to make it easier to change into his hero persona by having bases around the city.

4. Sponsored Hero: Any hero sponsored by the government, private industry or a wealthy philanthropist falls into this group (most Cyborgs, Robots, Power Armor, Experiments, Super Soldiers and the like would be here). Unless the hero is a lone operative, most work as part of a super hero team and are the most likely out of all the hero types to pool their resources and create a super base together. Base points are 600, but the character automatically receives the Installation feature of "Private or Government Oversight." This hero type also does not receive any bonus points for skills or special abilities.

Note: Any of the hero types are free to create multiple bases if they can afford the cost. Some may only have one, others might have a few in key places around the city for quick and easy access, or simply as a secret backup location on top of their normal base of operations. Each base costs full price and comes out of the hero's initial Creation Points.

Characteristics & Features of the Secret Base

A. Location & Secrecy

1. None: Works out of his home or out on the streets. Any level of secrecy is solely up to the hero keeping an eye on who is watching him and avoiding being seen when he changes into his hero persona. Creation Point Cost: None.

2. Abandoned: The hero has found an abandoned area such as an attic in a church, abandoned building, city monument (like a clock tower) or sewer system, which no one appears to know about or looks to have used for a very long time. Creation Point Cost: 5 points.

3. Underground: This is some kind of subterranean structure like a subway terminal, sewer junction or natural cave. The hero has modified it to his tastes (or built it himself). Typically fair access and easily concealed but probably has a few inherent problems (water, moisture, rats, cockroaches, odor, mustiness, etc.). Creation Point Cost: 50 points.

4. Above the City: The hero owns a building, or maybe just the rooftop, penthouse or other high-rise structure, and has set up shop above the city, away from prying eyes. Creation Point Cost: 80 points.

5. City Level: Has some kind of secret base hidden in plain sight or obscured by its surroundings. This could be a warehouse with a hidden entrance in an alleyway, inside a private business like a scrapyard (lots of places to hide) or a public monument, statue or structure. Creation Point Cost: 200 points.

6. Mobile: The hero's base of operation easily moves to avoid detection, or for easy placement when getting ready to deploy for a night of crime fighting. This could be a tractor-trailer, yacht, motor home, or zeppelin. Creation Point Cost: 350 points.

7. Something Exotic: Something no other hero would have, nor would any normal cop or villain think to check. Some ideas include a zeppelin with a cloud dispensing system that hides it out in the open over the city, a dimensional pocket or envelope, Astral Kingdom, or even an alien spaceship with a cloaking device (nothing super fantastic, usually small like a spy or scout ship, hence the cloaking device). Creation Point Cost: 500 points.

B. Installation

Who built the base, and therefore knows about critical design information (how to access it, where the traps are, etc.)? Not to mention knowing its location and perhaps its true owner.

1. Off the Shelf: The hero acquired the design or parts from a public company and had them assemble it. Anyone familiar with that company's products is likely to be familiar with the typical layout and features of the building/complex. The hero may have done some customization, but not enough to affect the available knowledge of the site to others with the right library resources. Creation Point Cost: None.

2. Used a Front Company: The hero purchased the property and materials to build the secret base using a front company or fake shell company. A detailed level of research could be able to trace the lines of ownership back to the hero, but a good accountant and/or lawyer should be able to take care of most cursory examinations or inquires. Creation Point Cost: 50 points.

3. Split Contracts: The hero used multiple contractors and front companies to build or buy sections or modules of the base, in a manner in which no separate contractor knows the whole picture or could determine their job was for the hero's crime fighting headquarters. Creation Point Cost: 100 points.

4. Private or Government Oversight: The hero's sponsor has taken care of every detail and has set up the facility the way they think it should be (which may or may not be exactly to the hero's specifications). The agency (private or government) knows all about its location, features and accessibility. But other than them, the base is a well-guarded secret. A facility built by Fabricators Inc. or some similar company would also fall under this option. Creation Point Cost: 250 points.

5. Personal Construction Crew: The hero did all the work himself or had a team dedicated to him and his crime fighting career build it for him. All are trustworthy employees who would never willingly divulge the hero's secret. All raw materials are purchased by his companies and essentially untraceable (especially if using common materials). Rare materials and

equipment are purchased through front companies owned by members of his team, with huge paper trails that lead nowhere to confuse anyone looking to link the hero to the purchase of those items. This makes this option the most secure of all. The only chance of discovery is by accident (geologist, archeologist, city construction crews, etc.) and even then the hero is usually ever vigilant in keeping nosy people distracted or scared away from the area. Creation Point Cost: 500 points.

C. Size

Most independents might have a hidden closet in their home, others might take up residence in an abandoned section of a subway terminal, or a really wealthy hero might own a skyscraper, using all or just a part of it for his base of operation.

1. Tiny: A small box, container or nothing at all. Creation Point Cost: None.

2. Small: A small closet, safe or sub-flooring recess. Creation Point Cost: 2 points.

3. Medium: A large closet or small room. Creation Point Cost: 10 points.

4. Large: A large room or small apartment. Creation Point Cost: 50 points.

5. Grand: A garage, small warehouse or cavern. Creation Point Cost: 100 points.

6. Gigantic: A large garage/shop, warehouse or expansive cave. Creation Point Cost: 250 points.

7. Super Sized: An enormous complex which could easily be a 50-story building, subterranean military base, or small city block. Creation Point Cost: 500 points.

D. Structure

When the hero goes about arranging his lair, what kind of protective features are part of the construction and its design?

1. Basics: The hero used only the existing structure around him (house, cave, bricks, etc.) for his lair, and did not reinforce or improve the structure or add any kind of fortification. Creation Point Cost: None.

2. Reinforced: All windows have been replaced with Plexiglas, and steel plating has been added to all walls and doors. Creation Point Cost: 100 points.

3. Fortified: The structure has been built from the ground up, taking into consideration the required needs of the hero. Reinforced concrete and steel is used in every structure. This may or may not be cosmetically adjusted to look like a normal house, building or other common appearances. Creation Point Cost: 500 points.

4. Super Structure: Not only is this headquarters built from the ground up, but it also can adjust its appearance and improve its defenses. Normally works like the Fortified option but at a press of a button, reinforcing doors slide into place as do window plating and protective barricades along the roadway. Armored turrets or gun emplacements pop out, revealing any concealed weapon system. Creation Point Cost: 1000 points.

5. Supernatural: Though minimal technology is used in the creation of this place, a plethora of magic protects this sanctuary. The lair is considered to have the Sanctum spell activated at all times, any booby traps purchased are typically magical in or-

igin, entrances are concealed by magic (typically the Chameleon spell), and magic force fields are erected to protect the structure as well as critical areas inside. Creation Point Cost: 2000 points.

6. Impenetrable: This is the ultimate in defensible fortifications. The walls and structure are almost indestructible, or if an above ground house the structure can retract and sink into the ground, and barriers and reinforced doors slide into place. Magnetic field deflectors and force fields (if applicable to the hero's concept) deflect incoming missiles and gunfire. Short of a direct nuclear strike, the place is invincible. Even a direct nuclear strike would only vaporize the exposed surface levels, and the remaining critical areas would still be well protected and the base would still be functional. Villains attacking with Supernatural Strength will find the hardened structure more than a challenge to penetrate. Creation Point Cost: 5000 points.

E. Facilities

Sometimes the hero's lair is more than a safe haven. It can house all the necessary tools and facilities needed by the hero to maintain or create his specialty equipment. Multiple facilities may be purchased to outfit the hero with the needed workshops to fulfill his needs.

1. Small Garage: This is one garage, large enough for one small vehicle like a motorcycle or sports car, and includes all the tools to do reloads, repairs or maintenance on the vehicle. Creation Point Cost: 100 points per garage/vehicle.

2. Large Garage: This is one garage, large enough for a large vehicle like a truck or SUV, and includes all the tools to do reloads, repairs or maintenance on the vehicle. Creation Point Cost: 250 points per garage/vehicle.

3. Giant Garage: This is one garage, large enough for one super-sized vehicle such as a bus or a tractor trailer, and includes all the tools to do reloads, repairs or maintenance on the vehicle. Creation Point Cost: 500 points per garage/vehicle.

4. Hangar: An aircraft hangar, and sufficient runway if it is not VTOL capable. Refueling station and all maintenance equipment are included. Will need a Vehicle Armory to store and reload missiles and other heavy vehicle weapons when not in use by the aircraft. Creation Point Cost: 1000 points.

5. Boat Launch: Suitable for small to medium-sized watercraft such as mini subs, cigar boats and other 4 to 8 man boats. Includes a waterway with a quick launch and a hoist to pull the boat out of the water. Also includes all the tools for maintaining and repairing the boat. Creation Point Cost: 200 points.

6. Vehicle Armory: Most vehicles can have some of their ammunition and spare parts for small weapons inside the garage, but large ordnance, overhauling & loading equipment and storage facilities require a Vehicle Armory. Creation Point Cost: 800 points.

7. Manufacturing Shop: This includes a machine shop, paint booth and other tools of the trade to manufacture the parts one needs. For example, automotive parts or armor (to be installed in a garage), construction of weapons, or fabrication of one's super suit. Creation Point Cost: 100 points.

8. Electronics Lab & Clean Room: This workshop has everything one needs to work on basic electronics (wiring up a bomb, computer repairs, creating a remote control, etc.), as well

as a lab for working on microscopic silicon chips and electronics (can make microchips, circuit boards, etc.). Creation Point Cost: 120 points.

9. Forensics Lab: This facility has everything the hero might need to analyze any evidence he comes across or needs deciphering. Creation Point Cost: 100 points.

10. Chemistry Lab: The hero can use this facility to analyze, manufacture or store chemicals, explosives and select specialty weapons and equipment. Creation Point Cost: 75 points.

11. Medical Room: This room can act as a simple first aid station, but is also equipped to handle long-term hospital care and emergency medical needs of a person. A doctor is still needed to take care of a patient, so if the hero plans to use this room when he is severely injured, he had better plan to have a doctor to take care of him, as he will probably not be in a position to take care of himself. Creation Point Cost: 60 points.

12. Advanced Computer Station: This is more than just a laptop or souped up computer; everything in this station is a hacker's dream come true. Monitors cover a wall, multiple computers of the highest caliber, super high-speed Internet access, and the latest in software are primed and ready for the hero to take command of. Creation Point Cost: 120 points.

13. Cybernetics or Bionics Med-Lab: Any cyborg hero will need one of these diagnostic rooms. The cyborg plugs in, recharges and often sleeps in the diagnostic chair and/or bed. A doctor trained in Cybernetics and Bionics is needed to do any serious modifications or repairs. But the good news is that everything he would need is here. Creation Point Cost: 300 points.

14. Robot Hangar: This would be for any type of large robot (Androids may use the Cybernetics or Bionics Med-Lab). Refueling, maintenance and repairs can be performed here. A Vehicle Armory is needed to reload and outfit any heavy weapons or ordnance used by the robot. Creation Point Cost: 600 points.

F. Accessibility

How easy is it for a hero to get in and out of his lair to change and prepare for a call needing his attention? Does the hero have an escape route or plan if he needs to make a last stand?

1. On Person: The hero wears all his crime fighting accessories and costume underneath his civilian clothes. Just find a washroom, phone booth or dark alley to change in. Creation Point Cost: None.

2. Small, Secure and Portable Storage Space: A box, briefcase, bag or secret compartment in a vehicle hides the super costume and gear. The container is sealed (watertight) and only the hero knows the quirks or combination to have access to it (anything from a Puzzle lock to an Advanced Security System). Creation Point Cost: 2 points.

3. Secret Closet: A secret closet or small room that opens to reveal all the hero's gear. Everything pops out and into place, laying itself out for the quickest and easiest way to get into the gear. Creation Point Cost: 5 points.

4. Secret Passages and Slides: A network of secret passages and slides grants the hero quick access to his lair, and provides a quick exit away from the lair or to get out of the hideout quickly and unseen (for escape or easy travel out of the vicinity of the lair). Creation Point Cost: 15 points.

5. Suction Tubes, Elevators, Trains and/or Travel Cars: High speed suction tubes, elevators, or a mini train or car inside a tunnel gets the hero to his lair quickly over great distances (such as to and from an office, home, another base, etc.). Creation Point Cost: 250 points.

6. Teleportation: Transporter, summoning rings or other means of near instant transportation gets the hero to his hideout so he can change, and then deposits him to a predetermined location near a scene or event. Creation Point Cost: 500 points, plus 50 points per predetermined location or 1000 points to be able to be transported to and from anywhere in the city.

G. Living Conditions

Can the hero live in the base, or is it just a place for storing his stuff? Any of these items can be taken multiple times to fill out the needs of the hero (and possibly his team).

1. None: Just for storage. Creation Point Cost: None.

2. Simple Bedroom: Has a simple bed for lying or sleeping on. Creation Point Cost: 2 points.

3. Spacious Bedroom: A large bedroom with a desk, TV and large, comfortable bed. Creation Point Cost: 3 points.

4. Shared Bedrooms: Bunk beds or military style cots in a large room; sleeps eight. Creation Point Cost: 4 points.

5. Basic Washroom: Restroom with running water and electricity. Creation Point Cost: 2 points.

6. Full Bathroom: Restroom and shower with running water and electricity. Creation Point Cost: 3 points.

7. Super Bathroom: Restroom, shower, hot tub and sauna with running water and electricity. Creation Point Cost: 5 points.

8. Snack Bar: There is a mini-fridge, snack bar, vending machine or other really basic provisions for the hero. Creation Point Cost: 1 point.

9. Small Kitchen: Stove, sink, refrigerator and maybe a microwave. Creation Point Cost: 2 points.

10. Deluxe Chef's Kitchen: Everything you'd ever need in a kitchen. Creation Point Cost: 10 points.

11. Lounge: TV, entertainment center, fireplace, miniature library, etc. Creation Point Cost: 5 points.

12. Gym: Weights, aerobic machines, cardio machines, etc. Creation Point Cost: 50 points.

13. Swimming Pool: A full-size swimming pool. Good for laps, practicing use of S.C.U.B.A. gear, etc. Creation Point Cost: 60 points.

14. Survival Bunker: A survivalist-style storage bunker or nuclear fallout shelter. Packed with food, water purifier, air recycler and everything one might need to survive for six months to a year (still needs to purchase any special amenities like a bedroom, gym, swimming pool, kitchen, etc.). Creation Point Cost: 250 points.

15. Mini Ecosystem: The ultimate in self-sufficiency. The hero has a renewable environment in which to live. It has everything the hero would ever need for an extended stay (5, 10, 20 or even 100 years!). Still needs to purchase any special amenities (bathrooms, kitchens, etc.). Creation Point Cost: 500 points.

H. Defense

Every hero is hounded by his nemesis, sometimes to the point where the villain takes the battle to the hero's front door. This option is essential for those expecting a home invasion, or just in case one has any unwanted guests. Many of these options can be combined or taken multiple times to build the desired defenses.

1. None: Relies on the secret or hidden nature of the lair to keep people out. Creation Point Cost: None.

2. Basic Security System: The base has sensors and alarms that activate when someone opens a door, accesses an area (motion sensors), or attempts to bypass a system. This is something that might be typical of a cheap home security system. Creation Point Cost: 10 points.

3. Advanced Security System: The lair is monitored by cameras, infrared and ultraviolet sensors, as well as motion detectors and an external audio recording system. Any access to the lair requires a pass card, secret code (voice, numeric or both) or a hand/fingerprint scan. Creation Point Cost: 50 points.

4. Ultimate Security System: The whole area is constantly scanned and monitored by a sophisticated barrage of sensors (pretty much everything you can think of). To enter the facility one needs a retinal scan, voice command, pass code, pass card (or chip implant), DNA scan, hand print and possibly even a unique use of one's super powers (surge of a certain type of energy, telekinetically moving a hidden button on the other side of the door only the hero knows about, etc.). Creation Point Cost: 100 points.

5. Natural Defense: There are aspects around the lair that help protect it from invaders, but they were preexisting and were not put there by the hero (though the hero could have picked this spot because of such features), such as a briar patch, thorns or dangerous plants, cliffs or ravines, a river or waterfall, loose rocks, exposed power lines, etc. Creation Point Cost: 5 points.

6. Puzzles: In order to access the right path to the lair, anyone trying to enter (including the hero) must walk through some kind of puzzle to get there. This can be playing a musical cord on a piano, arranging a sculpture in a certain way, traversing a labyrinth, or pressing buttons on a wall motif in the right order. In most cases, a failed attempt means no access, however a reactionary response can be added as a consequence by combining this with #7, Booby Traps. Creation Point Cost: 5 points per puzzle.

7. Booby Traps: This can range from non-lethal scare tactics such as tear gas, smoke or knockout gas, to lethal repellants such as land mines, acid sprays, fire, nerve gas, machinegun nests or electrified floor plating. Can be set as a trap (line, pressure plate, sensor, etc.) or as the result of failing a Puzzle (see #6, Puzzles). Creation Point Cost: 5 points per trap.

8. Self-Destruct System: This would be a last ditch resort to make sure no one takes possession of the hero's lair or his specialty equipment. The blast is sufficient to destroy the base and everything in it, but the hero has also made sure that the destructive force is contained and collateral damage is minimal if any (a villain, on the other hand, might decide to take out a city block as well, just in case). Creation Point Cost: 100 points.

9. Manned Station/Security Guard: A hero may have someone watching over the hideout (just the outside or the

whole thing), a butler, ally or follower. The sentry can watch the security system and call the hero if anything unusual happens. Creation Point Cost: 50 points.

10. Automated Defenses: The hideaway is monitored and protected by a computer (programmed responses) or an Artificial Intelligence. The system could have automated weapons (use #7, Booby Traps to purchase weapons under the control of the Automated Defense, such as a laser battery, machineguns, smoke dispenser, etc.). It not only watches over the facility, but also can alert the hero to specific problems around the base (by radio, cell phone or pager) and identify exactly what is going on. An Artificial Intelligence can also be engaged to watch and tell (or record and show) the hero of news events in the media that occur around the hideout, and suggest possible areas that need improved security, or access points to avoid due to media or police presence. Creation Point Cost: 500 points for a computer, 1000 points for an Artificial Intelligence.



I. Personnel or Employees

Though many heroes work alone, some might have some support staff to aid in the behind the scenes of the hero's life. Any one of these employees can facilitate a number of roles (or

even multiple personnel can fill duplicate roles), but the hero needs to spend the points on the role to have them available. G.M.s should use these employees to relay plot devices and useful information, or to keep the hero alive and equipped long enough to get the job done.

1. Mechanic: The hero has someone who can take care of most of the mechanical needs of his car, bike or other super vehicle. Creation Point Cost: 80 points.

2. Electrician: This person can fix and repair most of the hero's electrical equipment, fix his computer(s), and construct minor gadgets, tracking system and communication devices. Creation Point Cost: 80 points.

3. Weaponsmith: The hero has a dedicated weaponsmith who cleans, repairs and builds his weapons (lethal and non-lethal) for his crime fighting lifestyle. The weaponsmith can also manufacture or build explosives and special weapon cartridges for the hero, should he desire such items in his crime fighting arsenal. Creation Point Cost: 50 points.

4. Hacker: This agent of the hero observes the local media and the Internet, and relays important information to the hero that he finds. He can also hack into police databases, traffic control and other computer systems to manipulate or steal data on behalf of the hero. Creation Point Cost: 120 points.

5. Medic: The hero has a fully trained paramedic or doctor on hand or on call, to help him when he's taken one too many hits or has suffered life-threatening injuries. Creation Point Cost: Paramedic costs 100 points; a full Medical Doctor costs 200 points. A Cyber-Doctor is possible, but in order to have one you need to purchase the Medical Doctor, Mechanic and Electrician personnel to create the role (360 points).

6. Scientist/Forensics: The hero has a man of science at his disposal for to analyze any forensic evidence he comes across, as well as build chemical agents, antidotes or other common scientific gadgets (explosives, knockout gas, tear gas, etc.). Creation Point Cost: 150 points.

7. Other: I'm sure players will come up with other employees or special people in the service of the hero who are critical to his crime fighting career. Butlers, chauffeurs, cooks or security guards are good examples of this. Creation Point Cost: 50 points each, maybe more if the G.M. decides that the role is more technical or grants the hero an area of expertise he does not normally have.

Splicers®

Great House Shiva™

By Todd Yoho

Disclaimer

Many of the names and concepts presented in Great House Shiva are inspired from the Hindu religion and the Hindi language. This is a work of science fiction drawing on the cultural wealth and beauty of the people of India. Neither I, nor Palladium Books, intend any offense to its wonderful people. If anything, I hope this work of fiction directs Palladium's fans to study the history and culture of India. It was a true joy for me to study while researching material for this manuscript.

Introduction

It began with a stray thought...

"I am become Shiva, destroyer of worlds."

...and House Achilles was forever changed.

That little "stray thought" came fluttering through my mind the first time I read the **Splicers® Role Playing Game**. I'm sure it was sparked by the way the Splicers' world is presented as a mishmash of lost human history, religion, and science. I didn't know exactly where to go with it, and it bothered me for several weeks until I finally started making some notes. I was fascinated that in the war torn world of Splicers, the Great Houses still had the capacity to war upon each other while the Machine was pushing them towards extinction. The Blood Feud is an incredible weakness among the Splicers, and something that the Machine would surely use to its advantage and amusement. Once I put that together, I knew *exactly* where I wanted to go with my little "stray thought." The result is Great House Shiva.

Great House Shiva is something of an oddity in the Splicers world. House Shiva is not only dedicated to the eradication of the Machine, but also to the eradication of the other Great Houses. The people of House Shiva are a unique, and disturbing, brand of villainy, ambition, piety, and hope. They possess a singular vision for humankind's future in their bleak world. The members of House Shiva can be horrific opponents against the player characters, but they are also a fantastic opportunity for role-playing characters with an unyielding belief in their cause. They are *not* your average members of the Human Resistance, and they'll probably kill you for suggesting so. Of course, if you're not from House Shiva, they'll kill you anyway.

Todd S. Yoho – 2005



BRIAN MANNING

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History

A People of Noble Mind and Deeds

Great House Shiva was once known as *The Victorious House Achilles*; one of the few houses to ever hold such a distinctive name. At its height, House Achilles was a beacon of strength and nobility among the Human Resistance. It was an example to all of the Allied Houses in its region, always leading from the front. The people of the House weren't afraid to take the fight to the Machine, and weren't afraid to suffer losses in the name of the cause; victory was all consuming. Their leader, Warlord Achilles, once sacrificed his own son to ensure that he took the field. He was a proud and decorated Dreadguard, adored by his people, and by the people of the Allied Houses. In time, this pride, leading to vanity, would come to consume Warlord Achilles. Unfortunately, it would spell ruin for his House, and for all of the Allied Houses.

While victorious in their battles, Warlord Achilles became overconfident in the abilities of the warriors under his command. He lost sight of the fact that his soldiers, despite their powerful Host Armors and War Mounts, were only human.

Achilles, and his people, became blinded by the reputation that they had developed. It was a truth, in their eyes, that they were incapable of defeat.

So, filled with the idea that they were indomitable, House Achilles embarked on a new war plan. It was fought on many fronts against the Machine that ultimately stretched their resources to the breaking point. While tasting victory, many of these new battles fought against the Machine were pyrrhic ones. Needing more men and more material, Warlord Achilles drew many of the local Allied Houses into service under him. He sought to sublimate all of the nearby Houses into a unified Great House. Most came willingly; only a few required single combat between Achilles and their Warlord to decide command. All of the sublimated Houses became blinded by the reputation of *The Victorious House Achilles*. United under Achilles, they believed that they were infallible. They believed that reputation was a weapon, and that it would carry them to victory. The Machine, much to the Allied Houses' misfortune, cared little for reputation.

The Machine struck back against the bloated House Achilles with terrible ferocity. A combination of overwhelming force on the part of the Machine, and overconfidence on the part of Warlord Achilles, led to a series of battlefield massacres that shook the humans to their very souls. The Machine went on the offensive, pushing Achilles' forces back to his doorstep. "Doubt" and "defeat" once more crept back into the vocabulary of the people.

In short, the days of Victorious House Achilles were coming to an end.

There was one final battle fought under the unified rule of Warlord Achilles. Known as the Battle of Arjuna Plain, it was the single greatest loss of human life in historical memory. It was the backbreaking defeat of House Achilles' dominance in the region. The remnants of the Allied Houses broke free from Warlord Achilles' rule. A civil war erupted as young, disillusioned Dreadguards struggled for power to rebuild the Allied Houses. Warlord Achilles was beset by challenges from within, and his war plans against the Machine were forgotten as Blood Feuds were drawn.

The Machine, directed by the Kali personality, withheld from staging a final, exterminating push against the broken Houses. Kali was amused at how these humans had banded together when bolstered by victories, but turned on each other when faced with defeats. Kali was delighted to see the humans fighting amongst themselves, and took direct control of the Machine's activities in the region. She had found her latest "toy box," and it held so many wonderful possibilities in store.

The War Has Begun

Recoiling from defeat by the Machine and embroiled in civil strife, House Achilles was nearing collapse. They had only one surviving Librarian and three Engineers. Warlord Achilles maintained his leadership over a crumbling House, but instead of continuing the fight against the Machine, he was forced to contend with his former allies. Disdain, distrust, and outright contempt replaced his once powerful reputation with the newly re-formed, but still weak, Allied Houses. In particular was House Enoch. Dreadguard Enoch, a former friend and Senator-advisor to Warlord Achilles, founded his own House after finding himself at odds with his old friend. Through mistakes on both of their parts that neither was likely to admit, their friendship dissolved into mutual distrust and anger. Consequently, the Blood Feud between Houses Achilles and Enoch was terrible. It was worse than any between the other Allied Houses.

Kali watched the Feud between Enoch and Achilles with great interest, and began a silent war of her own against the other Houses. Achilles and Enoch had become her favorite toys, so she proceeded to clear the field for them to play. As Kali exterminated the other regional Houses, Enoch and Achilles warred with one another over everything, but their greatest battles were fought over access to the Arjuna Boneyard. The sheer number of dead at Arjuna Plain turned the battlefield into a wealth of immense, if ghoulish, raw material. Both Houses remained weak despite proximity to the Arjuna Boneyard. Neither side allowed the other to harvest the organic wealth lying out in the open without exacting a heavy toll. It wasn't unusual for either House to lose as much organic material on a harvesting raid as was recovered. A stalemate developed, and their Blood Feud festered into a perverse form of trench warfare with the Arjuna Boneyard as a fetid no-man's-land.

The peoples of House Achilles and House Enoch *almost* forgot about the Machine while consumed by their all-encompassing hatred for each other. In this isolated personal war between Houses, their hatred fermented into insanity. A mania began to overcome the peoples of Houses Enoch and Achilles; they be-

came obsessed with each other's destruction. It was in this mania that the stalemate was broken, and *Great House Shiva* was born.

What Pleasure We Find In Killing Our Brothers

In one of the many skirmishes in the Arjuna Boneyard, a Roughneck from House Achilles took a House Enoch Biotic prisoner. As had been done hundreds of times over, the prisoner was taken to House Achilles' Librarian to have his memories and knowledge ripped from his mind before killing him and adding his bio-mass to the Gene-Pool. This time, however, House Achilles gained more than the tactical knowledge of this particular Biotic; they gained a whole new outlook on life. As the Librarian pierced the flesh and the deeply insane mind of the prisoner, it encountered an overwhelming thought that forever changed its own thinking:

"I am become Shiva, destroyer of worlds."

This seemingly random thought began coursing through the Librarian's mind. It was unrelenting. It was infectious. It was like a virus that consumed the Librarian's train of thought. It connected itself with other thoughts, deep thoughts, hidden away in the furthest recesses of the Librarian's vast collection of memories. It was a trigger, bringing these fragments of memories to the surface; disjointed pieces of some ancient, forgotten puzzle that no longer fit together, but instead coalesced to create a new message. The Librarian found itself in a schizophrenic dialogue with itself, and at the speed of thought, forever changed the destiny of a failing Great House.

We should not kill our brothers.

You grieve for those who are not worthy of grief.

Those who destroy their family are ruined by the sinful act.

If you will not fight this righteous war, then you will fail in your duty.

This brings the family and the slayers of the family to hell.

This is not fit for a person of noble mind and deeds.

Seeing my kinsmen my limbs fail. I see no use of killing my kinsmen in battle.

Do not become a coward because it does not befit you.

Can we be happy after killing our relatives?

Death is certain for the one who is born. You should not lament over the inevitable.

What pleasure shall we find in killing our brothers?

Consider your duty as a warrior. You should not waver like this.

I am become Shiva, destroyer of worlds?

Yes.

I am become Shiva, destroyer of worlds.

Rise with a determination to fight.

I am become Shiva, destroyer of worlds!

From that moment forward, the Librarian was changed. It was overcome with a new directive. The Librarian came to the realization that the Machine was only a *symptom* of what plagued humanity. In creating the Machine, *humanity itself* was

its own worst enemy. Only the Librarian, with its enlightened knowledge and directives, knew the true path to salvation for humanity. With this revelation, it began the first steps in realizing its mad dreams. The Librarian moved slowly with deliberate, surgical moves. It abolished its old-guard, loyal Scarecrows and created new ones built in a new image. These were Scarecrows fashioned for its new crusade. Once it had new guardians and spies, it turned its attention to assessing which Engineers it believed would follow its new agenda, and which ones would need to be replaced.

It took the Librarian, who began calling itself The Enlightened, only a brief time to secretly winnow out those of House Achilles who it felt were too weak for its purposes. It directed its loyal Engineers to create hordes of new Biotics from those who had been singled out as weak or especially troublesome. The Enlightened Librarian ordered secret raids on House Enoch. These raids were carefully staged so that the aging Warlord Achilles thought they were the actions of some new, unknown House. In truth, they were. These raids were the silent heralds of the rising *House Shiva* lurking within the halls of House Achilles, and they had a purpose. The Enlightened Librarian needed piles of fresh raw material for a grand experiment. It had designs on a new warrior, a Splicer-form that would carry The Enlightened Librarian's message to all of humanity. Called the Pariah by House Shiva, other Splicers would come to know it as the Betrayer. Created for the express purpose of killing *other Splicers*, the Pariah was a powerful weapon in the Enlightened Librarian's arsenal. In addition to the Pariahs, the Librarian also developed the Naga Dancers, perverse relations to the Packmasters who command bio-enhanced serpents.

Finally, after years of plotting and moving its pieces into place, The Enlightened Librarian decided that it was time to seize control of House Achilles and do away with House Enoch in one decisive blow. Through its loyal minions, it fed ideas to the elderly and weakened Warlord Achilles that House Enoch was ready to fall. The Enochs only required a nudge to push them into extinction, and Achilles would take the field. Achilles knew that he was old, past his prime, and he welcomed one final call to glory and victory. He marshaled his troops, most of who were now actually loyal to The Enlightened Librarian, and staged a massive frontal assault on House Enoch. The battle was swift, merciless, and never in doubt. House Enoch was a shell of its former self, having been weakened by years of the stalemate conflict with House Achilles, raids by the still secret House Shiva, and the occasional short, but devastating, attacks by the Machine. House Achilles and its aged Warlord were victorious. However, like many victories for the waning Achilles, it was a pyrrhic one.

Warlord Achilles had little time to enjoy his final victory. No sooner had the battle ended when a new one erupted. The warriors loyal to The Enlightened Librarian, who made up the majority of the fighting force, turned against Warlord Achilles and his few surviving protectors. This was no challenge to single combat, this was a betrayal, a coup, and Warlord Achilles' death knell was the birthing cry of House Shiva. It would be echoed many times over that night as House Shiva overtook the caverns of House Achilles. The old guard was swept away by the new. Those who would not join the forces of The Enlightened Librarian were either massacred and used as raw material, or given to

the Engineers for reprocessing and remade into Biotics. Through it all, Kali's laughter followed as macabre accompaniment to their screams.

Great House Shiva

Years have passed since House Shiva destroyed House Achilles. No one alive remembers the days of House Achilles. That noble House has passed into history. The Enlightened Librarian still rules, although it does so through its Pariah champion, Warlord Samsara. Thanks to the teachings of The Enlightened Librarian, the people of House Shiva have come to see the wisdom of exterminating the other Houses. Their history has been reshaped by those loyal to the Enlightened Librarian, so the young are taught a twisted version of their heritage. The population as a whole was already overcome with a mass mania thanks to the perpetual war with House Enoch. This mania had become entrenched in the very fabric of their society and passed down through the generations. The Enlightened Librarian had but to twist that mania slightly for its own ends. Consequently, they have become a society of isolationist purists.

The Shivs, as they have come to call themselves, believe that they walk the true path for humanity. They seek to abolish the sins of the past and start fresh. These sins include all vestiges of technology, of which the Machine is the ultimate manifestation. In order to make this fresh start, they must not only destroy the Machine, but also the whole of humanity that has been corrupted by it. Only by destroying the sin, and cleansing the world of the sinners, can humanity make amends for what it has done to itself. This zealous attitude extends to the micro-discs used as currency by many of the Great Houses. It is blasphemy for a Shiv to trade with such things, and preserving them in order to rebuild society after the Machine is defeated is to repeat the sins of the past. Because of this, Shivs rely entirely on a barter system economy. They trade in goods, services, and precious gems rather than in micro-discs.

There are also things that the Shivs hate more than the other Houses and more than the Machine itself. The people of House Shiva have an overriding hatred of Technojackers. These "creatures" (they aren't considered human) that can use technology and form a union with the drones of the Machine are the most egregious of abominations, and are the worst transgressors against humanity. Children born into House Shiva that display Technojacker abilities are *immediately* recycled into the Gene-Pool!

To the Shivs, humans living in Retro-Villages are pawns of the Machine and are not exempt from House Shiva's crusade. Warriors from House Shiva will often sneak into a Retro-Village, draw the attention of the Machine's minions, and slip out while the Machine goes into "purge mode." The more callous Shivs find this tactic particularly amusing and ironic, tricking the Machine into doing their cleansing work for them. This alone has earned them the enmity of the other Great Houses. Blood Feuds are obviously not unheard of between Houses, but such *inhumanity* is alien to all the other Houses. To them, it is the Shivs who are the abominations.

So, the people of House Shiva find themselves alone in the world, fighting a war against both the merciless Machine and

their fellow man. It's not an easy burden to bear, but like most righteous people, they are comforted in knowing that in the end, they are working for a better future.

Population Breakdown

85,000 total people.

6% Archangels.

8% Biotics.

5% Dreadguard.

0.00016% Engineers (14 total).

0.00001% Librarians (1 total, *The Enlightened*).

1% *Naga Dancers* (New O.C.C., see below).

8% Outriders.

1% Packmasters.

15% *Pariahs* (New O.C.C., see below).

30% Roughnecks.

4% Saints.

1% Scarecrows.

1% Skinjobs.

0.00% Technojackers (NONE!).

20% Non-combatants/Civilians (proportionally low for a House this size).

Geography

Great House Shiva is housed in a labyrinth of caverns hollowed out of two peaks, named Gopura and Kovil, in the Applecore Mountains; the only name still held over from House Achilles' reign over the region. These mountains are a foreboding geologic structure; the disfigured remnants of an incredibly ancient mountain range. The outer sheath of softer rocks has long since eroded away, leaving behind a vast group of stubby, pale-white, tan and pink granite spires; like row upon row of interconnected giant apple cores standing on end. Some have speculated that the Applecore Mountains are not the result of natural erosion processes, but were instead the result of a schizophrenic earth-moving project by the Machine centuries ago. Either way, they are imposing, unique, and grotesque, but also strangely beautiful, making them a fit home for the people of Great House Shiva.

The main entrance to the Shivs' Caverns is located at the foot of Kovil with dozens of exits peppering the sides of both mountains, allowing for Archangels and other flight capable warriors and War Mounts easy access to the sky. These exits also allow for ground forces to exit from many different locations, enabling the Shivs to rapidly take to the field on the rare occasion that the House is under siege. When awakened, the armies and air forces of House Shiva emerging from their caverns are like a swarm of angry ants and bees emerging from their hills and honeycombs.

Surrounding the Applecore Mountains is a dense, overgrown jungle known locally as Graha Forest. The jungle is both a blessing and a curse for the Shivs. It provides excellent cover for House Shiva's perimeter defenses, and gives them a great deal of cover for their forces to move out of the mountains undetected. However, this is a double-edged sword, because the jungle also serves as cover for enemies of House Shiva, potentially allowing them access to the Shivs' doorstep. Conse-

quently, the Shivs devote a large amount of their resources to constantly patrolling the jungle. They have developed several new War Mounts and fighting beasts, such as the Jhapattanaga and the Nihilist Suicide Beast, for this express purpose. However, for all of the cover that the jungle provides, the real action is taking place underground.

In addition to excavating a series of interconnecting tunnels between the two peaks, they are moving forward with plans to hollow out the bedrock underlying the jungle valley leading to the Arjuna Boneyard. This would give them unprecedented safe access to a wealth of raw material, and set the stage for further excavation to link up with the empty caverns of House Enoch. The Shivs' ultimate goal is to eventually excavate tunnels beneath the Arjuna Boneyard and connect with the catacombs of House Enoch, giving them total dominance in the region.

Government

Great House Shiva is, like other Houses, a dictatorship, but it is one that is controlled by a Librarian rather than a Warlord. The Enlightened Librarian serves as the head of the government while Warlord Samsara, for all of his power and intellect, serves as an enforcer. The Librarian has final say in all decisions, whether political, social, or military. Assisting Samsara is his bodyguard and Consort, Uthana, along with a dedicated Cadre of lieutenants in the place of the traditional House Senate. The Shiv Cadre are similar to the Senate of other Great Houses in that they are composed of the most powerful and wealthiest members of House Shiva, however they are *selected* to serve Samsara by the Enlightened Librarian. This is another measure taken by the Librarian to keep a tight grip on the reins of power.

It is important to note that Samsara is a leader who *does not* want absolute power over the House. He is content to carry out his duty as a loyal servant to the Enlightened Librarian, furthering the cause of House Shiva and rescuing humanity from itself. Samsara, like all others born into House Shiva, is a true believer in the Librarian and its plans for the future. This devotion and dedication has developed into a cult of personality surrounding the Enlightened Librarian. Remember, in their version of history, it was the Librarian that brought the House back from extinction, gave the people a renewed sense of hope, and "enlightened" them to the true path of survival. No one would think of deposing the Enlightened Librarian in a selfish bid for power. Of course, this form of government has been perpetuated in the teachings of the Librarian since its assumption of power and maintained through the subtle machinations of its fanatically loyal Scarecrows and the Pariah legions. However, this does not mean that the Code of Duty followed by the Dreadguards does not apply to House Shiva.

The Librarian still selects members of the House to join the Cadre, or ascend to the position of Warlord, through devotion, ambition, and raw power. Single combat is the most obvious way to prove to the Enlightened Librarian that a member of the House is worthy of a mantle of leadership. Challenges, when they come, are welcomed. One day, Warlord Samsara will have outlived his usefulness to the Enlightened Librarian and another will take his place. The only constant in the leadership of House Shiva is the Librarian; everyone else is expendable.

Society

Despite their unique cultural development, House Shiva is not, overall, an evil society. The Shivs are, in effect, a theocracy built around the designs and teachings of a seemingly insane Librarian that has had uncounted years in which to establish control over the people. Otherwise, they live like the typical Splicer society as described on page 67 of the *Splicers® Role-Playing Game*. The Shivs live in excellent conditions where they are indeed peaceful, happy and prosperous. They have the same emotions, fears, hopes and dreams of all other humans in the hellish Splicers world; they just have a radically skewed perspective from the majority of other humans. Even if the Enlightened Librarian were killed or deposed, little would actually change. There would likely be a period of infighting to establish dominance of the Warlord, and the Cadre may experience a churning in its membership, but the core belief that House Shiva is the salvation for humanity would endure. Only wholesale genocide of the Shivs could extinguish their beliefs and resolve.

The Horrible Secret of House Shiva

The Kali personality has had good reason to laugh and delight at the rise of House Shiva: it was her creation. In the great Blood Feud between House Achilles and House Enoch, Kali saw a delicious opportunity to bring further misery for the humans, and further amusement for herself. An enclave of humans dedicated to the slaughter of other humans was a wickedly beautiful idea, if she did say so herself.

She knew that House Achilles had only one surviving Librarian, and that her window of opportunity was short. Should another Librarian mature, her plan would be much more difficult, if not impossible, so she acted quickly. Kali began capturing warriors from House Enoch. She concentrated on Biotics because their inherent mental instability was already pliable and easily bent to her needs. With help from the Gaia personality, Kali began encoding hypnotic messages deep within her prisoners' broken and insane minds. They were then released back onto the battlefield where they could easily fall into the hands of House Achilles.

Kali knew that captives would be brought before House Achilles' Librarian so that their thoughts and memories could be incorporated into its own in order to glean valuable intelligence on House Enoch. Concealed within these thoughts were her deeply hidden hypnotic messages. Individually, each was a meaningless stray thought: the clutter of the human mind. Encoded within these thoughts were the idea fragments for the core beliefs of House Shiva, the designs for the Pariahs, the Naga Dancers, the specific bio-enhancements for fighting other Splicers and darker ideas yet to come to fruition. Game Masters, this is an opportunity to use your imaginations and add creations of your own to House Shiva's arsenal. However, once all of these ideas were wholly incorporated into the memory of the Librarian, they were puzzle pieces awaiting the trigger:

I am become Shiva, destroyer of worlds.

The rest, as they say, is history, and Kali continues to laugh.

O.C.C.s of House Shiva

Naga Dancer O.C.C.

Also known as “the Snake Charmers” or “Courtesans.”

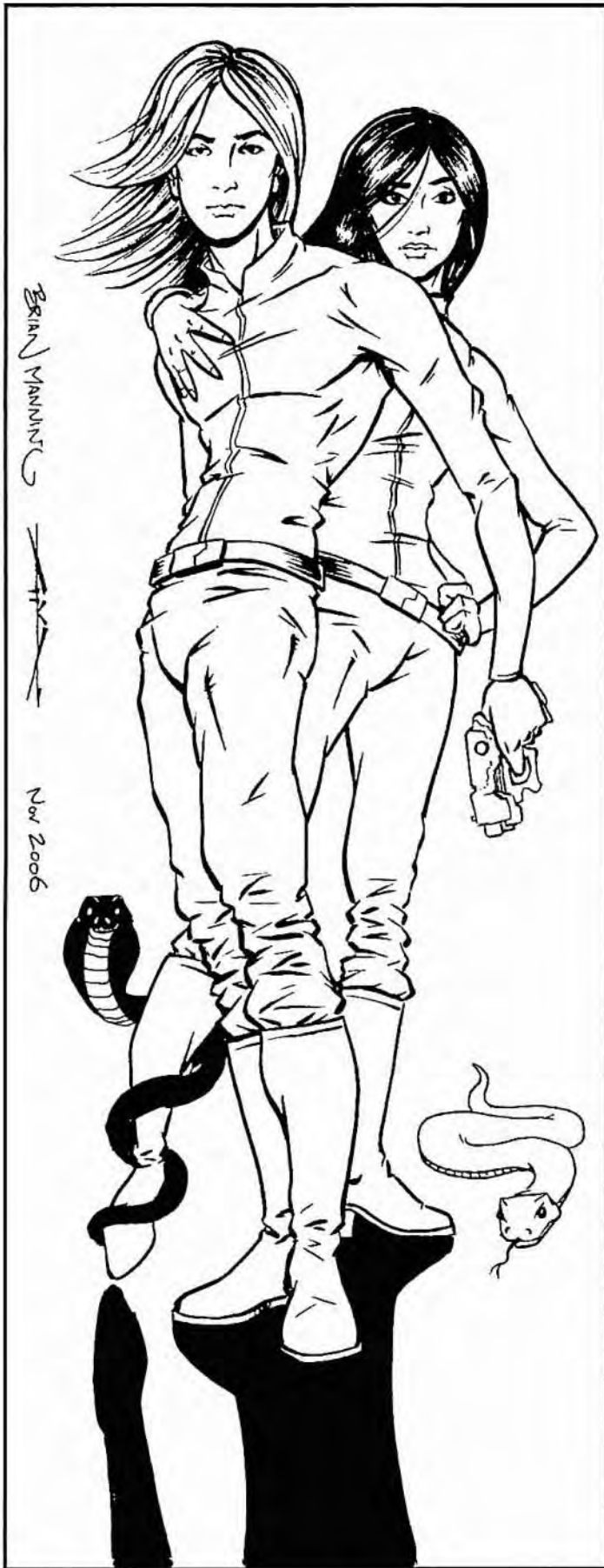
Naga Dancers are relatively new to the ranks of House Shiva. They are an outgrowth of the Packmasters, experts in surveillance, subterfuge and precision assassination. Where the Pariahs are the swords of House Shiva, the Naga Dancers are the scalpels. Both men and women join the ranks of the Dancers, and thanks to their genetic modifications, they all possess a certain androgynous, yet disarming and alluring beauty. They are trained in all manners of walk, speech and appearance, enabling them to infiltrate everything from a Warlord's Great Hall to a lowly soldier's tent. Beauty is a comfortable weapon in their arsenal, much like a shard pistol is to a Roughneck. However, they don't rely on beauty alone; they also have their Naga Serpents.

As the Packmasters are overseers of the Gore Hounds, the Naga Dancers command the Naga Serpents: bio-enhanced cobras. These serpents are superior scouts, capable of maneuvering through the smallest passages with speed and efficiency. They are also excellent sabotage and assassination tools. A Naga Serpent can silently deliver poison to an individual, or introduce virulent toxins into a House's food and water supply. One of the Enlightened Librarian's most insidious plans is to use the Naga Serpents to inject powerful retro-DNA into the very Gene Pools of other Houses, crippling them on a fundamental level.

The Naga Dancers are revered by the people of House Shiva, but in a different way than the Pariahs and Dreadguards. Naga Dancers are not glorious heroes, they are instead mystifying, divine beings. They are not grotesque saviors locked away in Host Armors, or commanders of vicious hounds, or riders of massive War Beasts like most Splicer warriors, but are instead beautiful and perfect in all ways. The Naga Dancers are a vision of what humanity can one day achieve under the leadership of the Enlightened Librarian. They are, in many ways, treated as Enlightened themselves.

In open combat, Naga Dancers rely on subterfuge and their serpents to fight for them, defending themselves when necessary, always looking for an opportunity to flee the battle. They are not front-line combatants, and never go into combat against the Machine except when the House itself is under attack, or when they are cornered with no hope of escape. The Naga Dancers are made to fight other humans and Splicer technology exclusively. This is their greatest strength, but also their greatest weakness.

Alignment: Any, but typically tend toward the selfish and evil alignments. The Naga Dancers have a certain detachment from human life despite their ability to manipulate people.



They believe in the cause of the Enlightened Librarian, and are just as dedicated as any other Shiv, but because of their assignments and training, have a hardened take on life.

Attribute Requirements: M.A. 12, P.P. 12.

Attribute Bonuses: +1D4 to I.Q., P.P., +1D6 to M.A.

O.C.C. Bonuses: Has Splicers P.S., +2 to initiative, +1 to save vs Horror Factor, see also the Naga Dancer O.C.C. Powers.

Base S.D.C.: Not applicable, see the Naga Dancer's *Altered Body*.

Naga Dancer O.C.C. Powers:

1. Naga Dancer's Altered Body & M.D.C.: Each Naga Dancer undergoes a complete restructuring of their body, making them Mega-Damage beings with 4D6 + P.E. attribute for M.D.C. They gain an additional 2D6 M.D.C. per level of experience starting at level two. They can last twice as long as normal humans during strenuous activity and need only 4 hours of sleep each night.

2. Awe Factor and Physical Perfection: Naga Dancers are enhanced and restructured to be physically perfect and trained to use their appearance as a weapon. All Naga Dancers have a minimum P.B. attribute of 21. If lower, raise it to 21, and if 21 or higher, add 1D4 to the character's P.B. attribute. Naga Dancers are extraordinarily physically fit, having perfect muscle tone and definition. Their faces are perfectly proportioned, with a bright, charming, and disarming smile. Their hair, whether long or short, curly or straight, is perfect, even if the character only ran her fingers through it that morning. Naga Dancers have a natural Awe Factor of 9 at first level that increases by +1 at levels 3, 6, 9, 12 and 15.

3. Hypnotic Charm: The very movements of a Naga Dancer are inspired beauty that only they can convey. Anyone trying to imitate a Naga Dancer looks childish, clumsy, and comes away feeling ashamed. Their looks, combined with their fluid, dance-like movements are a powerful weapon that they have trained all their lives to use.

Through very subtle changes in posture, smile, eye contact, poise, speech and physical contact, Naga Dancers can entrance their victims into a sense of safety and security. It is important to note that this ability *is effective* on members of the same sex; the application isn't just limited to sexual advances, although that is a common application of their charm. The power is in the presentation, which can include masculinity, friendly familiarity, and outright intimidation.

They use this ability not only to get close to their intended targets, but also to escape from danger, negotiate deals, and generally get their way. To use this ability, the Naga Dancer rolls on her Charm/Impress score. A successful roll indicates that the victim is distracted by the Dancer's beauty and open to further manipulation, resulting in a -2 to saving throws against the Dancer's Awe Factor and a -15% to skill performance for the next 2D4 hours. A failure indicates that the victim is unimpressed with the Dancer's advances. Failure by more than 20% indicates that the victim has seen through the Dancer's advances and has a +2 to saving throws against the Dancer's Awe Factor and *the Dancer* has a -15% to skill performance against *this individual* for the next 2D4 hours!

4. The Dancing Reflex: Like their serpent companions, the Naga Dancers can react with lightning speed, but only for a limited amount of time. This is an ambush-like ability intended for the Dancer to quickly strike her target, not for use in a prolonged combat situation.

Duration: One melee round.

Limitation: The Dancing Reflex can only be used twice during a 24-hour period.

Bonuses: +2 attacks per melee round, +5 to strike and +5 to *automatic dodge*.

Penalties: None, other than the ability cannot be used more than twice during a 24-hour period.

Bio-E Cost: None.

Prerequisites: None.

5. Fangs, Poison Bite and Spit Attack: Behind the normal, perfect teeth of a Naga Dancer, there is a second, smaller row of pointed, retractable fangs capable of delivering a poisonous bite. When retracted, they are almost impossible to detect except under examination by a dentist, or a very thorough kiss. They have to be exposed for use, although even then the victim only has a 15% chance of detecting them. These fangs are not typically used in combat, but are better than nothing in a pinch.

The Naga Dancer can also spit the venom into the eyes of her target, but only with a limited range. They much prefer to bite their target, and the spit attack is usually done as a surprise attack.

Mega-Damage: Does a single point of M.D. to M.D.C. beings, while doing 1D6 S.D.C. to normal humans. See below for the injected poison effects.

Rate of Fire: Each bite and poison injection action counts as a single melee attack.

Maximum Effective Range: Touch, but can be spit from the Naga Dancer's mouth up to 10 feet (3 m) away.

Payload: The character can produce enough poison for up to four injections every 24 hours. It automatically regenerates within 24 hours of its initial use.

Bio-E Cost: Additional payload can be purchased at a cost of 20 Bio-E points each, with a maximum payload of eight injections possible.

Prerequisite: None.

Effects: Characters bitten by a Naga Dancer, or who have had the venom spit in their eyes, must make a saving throw vs poison at 13 or higher. A successful saving throw results in no damage, but victims that fail the saving throw take 6D6 M.D.C. (S.D.C. beings take 3D6 points of damage direct to Hit Points) and feel as though their blood is boiling in their veins. Victims are -6 to strike, parry and dodge, and skill performance is reduced by 25%. If not treated with the proper anti-venom or ministered to by a Saint within two hours after injection, the victim must make a second saving throw vs poison at 10 or higher. Victims that fail this second saving throw will take an additional 3D6 M.D.C. (S.D.C. beings take an additional 2D6 points of damage direct to Hit Points). **Note:** This toxin *will* affect Host Armors, War Mounts and other creatures just as effectively as it does humans.

In the case of *Host Armor* being affected by the toxin, the pilot loses the benefit of all bonuses granted by the suit's instincts, and bio-enhancements, effectively cowing the suit's "personality." The pilot still has all bonuses gained through attributes and training, and can direct the suit's weapons and defenses, but it is just as if the sensors of a technological suit of armor had been disabled. These penalties are cumulative with others that may be induced by other forms of attack.

Duration: Instantaneous, but the debilitating effects last for 2D4 hours if left untreated.

6. Immunity to Poisons: Because of their constant exposure to poisons, Naga Dancers are engineered to be immune to all known forms of chemical poisons. The downside is that this also includes beneficial medicines such as painkillers. They are still subject to the effects of viruses, bacteria and other types of disease, however.

7. Naga Serpent Bio-Empathy: Naga Dancers share a psychic-like bond with their Naga Serpent companions. This enables the Dancers to see, hear, and feel everything that their serpents do, and enables them to control them over long distances. This is superior to the bond between the Outrider O.C.C. and their War Mounts and is further described below with the description of the Naga Serpents.

Common Skills: Standard (+5%).

O.C.C. Skill Programs: Assassination (+15%), Entertainer (+25%), and Field Intelligence or Undercover (+15%) and one Skill Program of choice (except for Medical Doctor, Medical Coroner, War Mount Rider, or Wingman). Typically Business, Professional Thief, Saboteur, or Veterinary.

Elective Skills: Select four Elective Skills from the following list at first level. Plus select one additional Elective Skill at levels 3, 5, 7, 9, 12, and 15. All new skills start at level one proficiency.

Communications: Any (+10%).

Domestic: Any (+15%).

Espionage: Any, except Wilderness Survival and Tracking (+5%).

Medical: First aid only.

Military: Blind Fighting, Military Etiquette, Resist Torture, and Surveillance only (+5%).

Physical: Any.

Rogue: Any (+20%).

Science: None.

Technical: Any.

Transportation: Horsemanship only.

Wilderness: None.

W.P.: Any.

Secondary Skills: Naga Dancers get to select four Secondary Skills at level one, and one additional Secondary Skill at levels 3, 6, 9, 12 and 15. These are additional areas of knowledge starting without any special O.C.C. bonuses. All new skills start at level one proficiency.

Naga Serpent Companions: The Naga Dancer begins with two Naga Serpents at level one, and gains one additional serpent at levels 3, 6, 9, 12, and 15. Each Naga Serpent can be bio-enhanced according to the Dancer's desires, having 4D6+15 Bio-E available for each, plus another 2D6+10 Bio-E per level of the character's experience to spend on one or more of her serpents for additional enhancements. Slain serpents are replaced with a basic animal having 4D6+15 Bio-E for additional enhancement.

M.D.C. "Living" Body Armor: Rather than a suit of Host Armor, the Naga Dancer only gets a suit of Living Body Armor with 2D6+10 Bio-E worth of enhancements. They rarely wear it except as a disguise, or when they know they are going into combat.

Standard Equipment: Military fatigues, 3D6 sets of extravagant dress and casual clothing, a disguise kit (including pre-distressed clothes for every occasion), utility belt, first aid kit, Face Wrap, one light Bio-Weapon of choice, one weapon for each W.P. with ammunition, backpack, a water skin, two weeks rations, and personal items.

Money: 2D6x100 credits worth of valuable trade items. Naga Dancers also have a small stockpile of micro-discs worth 1D6x100 credits for use when undercover. They are given special dispensation from The Enlightened Librarian to have and use these blasphemous tokens, but *only* if it is in service to the House.

The Upside: You are beautiful and terrible, an instrument of death for House Shiva. The people revere you and your enemies fear you, if they haven't fallen in love with you. You are joined with creatures that are as beautiful and terrible as you are, setting you apart forever. The Pariahs are the champions of The Enlightened Librarian and the deliverers of the message, but you are closer to the message itself: the perfection of humankind.

The Downside: You are forever apart from your people, above them, much like The Enlightened Librarian. While you are closer to the message, you are forever apart and alone, with only your Naga Serpents and the other Dancers to complete you. You work alone, and you live alone. Such is your curse and the price for your status.

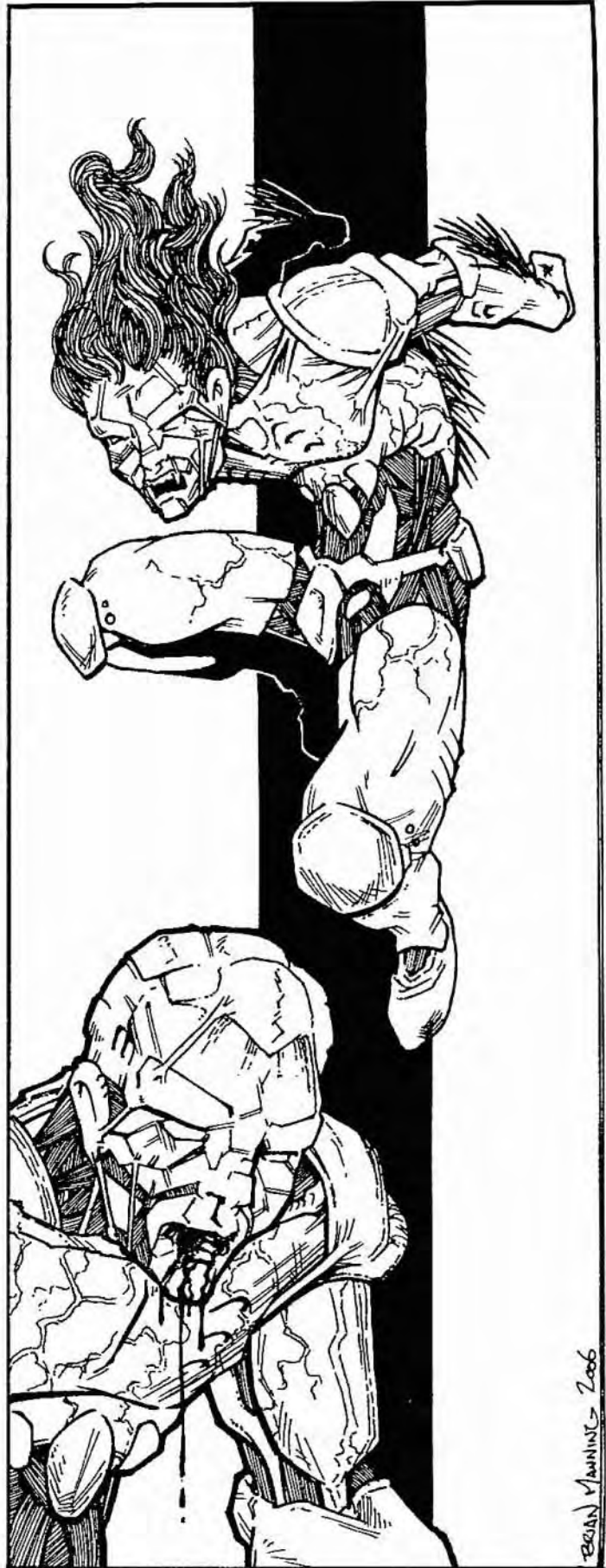
Pariah O.C.C.

Also known as "The Betrayer"

To be a Pariah is to be an outsider, so it is a fitting name for the champions of House Shiva, a people that live outside of normal Splicer society. Designed by the Enlightened Librarian for the express purpose of hunting and killing other Splicers, Pariahs are the divine messengers of its plan for humanity's future. Pariahs are a proud and powerful warrior caste, something that puts them at odds with the Shiv Dreadguards. A strong rivalry exists between the two groups, but because the Pariahs are the chosen of the Enlightened Librarian, it is often the Dreadguards who end up on the losing side.

The Pariahs' sense of uniqueness and superiority has led them to design their own special suit of Host Armor. These suits are given to Pariah initiates upon induction into the caste. The suits are instantly recognizable on the battlefield, which is exactly what the Pariahs intended. This is as much about pride and uniformity as a warrior class as it is about striking fear into the hearts of their enemies. When a Pariah closes the distance with his intended target, he *wants* the enemy to know who is coming for him.

Because Pariahs are slayers of men driven by a zealous directive, they favor hand-to-hand combat over long-range attacks. Every warrior knows the benefit of attacking from a distance, but the Pariahs also have a strong desire to deliver the death-blow with their own hands, to see the last expression on their enemy's face, to stand victorious over the kill. It's no surprise that many of the unique weapons developed by the Pariahs are for close-quarters combat with other Splicers. But, when they must kill from a distance, it is usually with an arrow shot from a Pinaak Bow.



BRIAN MANNING 2006

Pariahs often operate alone on very specific search and destroy missions against other Splicers. They will usually target House leaders, important personnel, and outlying patrols. Although, when they wage full-scale war against another House, the Pariahs aren't slinking around in the shadows, they are in the front ranks leading the charge. When it comes to fighting the Machine, Pariahs let the Dreadguard have all the glory, and rarely engage its robotic forces in open combat. Pariahs have the same burning hatred for the Machine and seek its extinction, but they are driven down a different path to serve the House in their own, unique way. If confronted by the Machine's forces, Pariahs will, of course, defend themselves, but they only go looking for a fight with the robotic hordes under extremely rare circumstances.

Alignment: Any, but typically good, infrequently selfish, and rarely evil. It is important to note that while the other Houses look upon Shivs, and Pariahs in particular, as an evil scourge, the majority of them fall into the good alignments. They have a murderously skewed moral compass, different from the majority of humanity, but they *are not evil incarnate*.

Attribute Requirements: M.A. 14, P.S. 12, P.P. 12, P.E. 14 or higher.

Attribute O.C.C. Bonuses: +1D4 to M.A., M.E., and P.P.

O.C.C. Bonuses: +2 to save vs poisons, toxins and disease, +1 to save vs Horror Factor, +15% to *Intimidate only* if the character has an exceptional M.A. attribute.

Base S.D.C.: 35, plus any from Physical skills.

Pariah O.C.C. Powers:

1. Pariah Reputation: A Pariah's reputation alone is enough to chill the blood of most Splicer warriors. They are death to everyone, and their devotion to the cause is enough to make a Dreadguard pause. Pariahs have a reputation Horror Factor of 10, with an additional +1 at levels 3, 5, 7, 10 and 15. In addition, they also receive a +1 to their Horror Factor for every *three* points of an exceptional M.A. attribute starting at 17. For example, a character with an M.A. of 17 would have a +1 bonus, and a character with an M.A. of 20 would have a +2 bonus. This reputation, however, means nothing to the Machine, and is useless against robots. Note: Pariah characters are mostly immune to the effects of reputation, and are only affected by the reputation of Pariahs of a higher level of experience. Even then they have a bonus of +8 to their saving throw.

2. Pariah Fear Pheromone: Known affectionately as the "fear-mone" by some warriors, Pariahs are capable of exuding a fear inducing chemical that inhibits an opponent's will to fight. This is an inborn ability and not associated with the character's Host Armor, nor does it require the Host Armor to be worn to operate. Not only does it affect humans, but it has also been genetically designed by The Enlightened Librarian and its Engineers to affect *Host Armor itself*, Gore Hounds and War Mounts, making it a powerful inherent chemical weapon for the Pariah.

Mega-Damage: None.

Rate of Fire: Each dispersal action counts as one melee attack.

Maximum Effective Range: Mist: 18 feet (5.5 m) in diameter around the character. The mist dissipates in 1D4 melee rounds.

Payload: The character can produce enough pheromone for up to eight attacks every 24 hours. It automatically regenerates within 24 hours of its initial use.

Bio-E Cost: Additional range and payload can be purchased, increasing the effectiveness of the pheromone. Range is purchased in three foot (1 m) increments at a cost of 10 Bio-E points each. Additional doses are purchased at a cost of 15 Bio-E points each.

Prerequisite: None.

Effects: Characters within the mist must make a saving throw vs toxins at a 14 or higher or be gripped with an intense, *physiological* fear response. Because this is a genetically enhanced physical reaction, bonuses from an exceptional Mental Endurance attribute are no help, but bonuses from an exceptional Physical Endurance are still applicable. Characters that fail the saving throw lose two attacks per melee round, have no initiative, are -3 to all combat bonuses, and skill performance is reduced by 25%. There is also a 01-30% chance that the character will break and flee in terror, exposing him to attacks from behind by the Pariah. If the victim does so, he receives a *bonus* of +20% to his speed score.

In the case of *Host Armor* being affected by the pheromone, the pilot loses the benefit of all bonuses granted by the suit's instincts, and bio-enhancements, effectively cowing the suit's "personality." The pilot still has all bonuses gained through attributes and training, and can direct the suit's weapons and defenses, but it is just as if the sensors of a technological suit of armor had been disabled.

These penalties are cumulative with any incurred from the Pariah Reputation above and any other conditional modifiers that may be applied, such as other chemical attacks, fatigue, etc.

Duration: The effects last for 1D4 melee rounds. Repeated exposure to the pheromone has no additional effects, although the effects of *additional* pheromone sprays are cumulative. **Note:** All Pariah characters are *immune* to the effects each other's pheromones.

3. Pariah Frenzy: When engaged in close combat with another Splicer, the Pariah can throw himself into a murderous, trance-like frenzy. It is the ferocity of this attack that helped develop the Pariah's fearsome Reputation ability. Unlike most frenzied states, the Pariah maintains minimal control of his senses, and can still marginally tell friend from foe. However, this is more instinct and pheromone detection than conscious decision. In this altered state, a Pariah can detect other Pariahs, but other humans, including members of House Shiva, register as foes. It is for this reason that Pariahs often fight alone, or only with other Pariahs. Like the Fear Pheromone, this is an inborn ability and not dependent on being suited up in Host Armor.

Duration: Three melee rounds, plus one additional melee per level of experience.

Limitation: This ability is a pheromone response dependent on the proximity of another genetically enhanced individual, whether Splicer, War Mount, or other creature. It *cannot* be activated when around robots or other non-living constructs. Interestingly, it *can* be activated when around Necro-Borgs and Necro-Bots.

Bonuses: +1 attack per melee round, +5 to initiative, +3 to strike, parry and dodge, +4 to roll with impact, -6 to *pull punch*,

+2 to all saving throws, +2D6 to damage with hand to hand and with any ranged weapons integral to the character, +25% to Spd, and +40 S.D.C. When suited up in Host Armor, the character gains +20 M.D.C. to the Main Body *instead* of the bonus to S.D.C.

Penalties: When the frenzy subsides, the character is exceedingly famished and tired. The character is -3 to all combat bonuses, -35% to Spd, -25% to skill performance and needs to eat at least a full meal within an hour or suffer from double the above penalties. In addition to eating, the character will need to rest for 1D4x10 minutes before the frenzy can be reactivated.

Bio-E Cost: None.

Prerequisites: None.

Common Skills: Standard.

O.C.C. Skill Programs: Man-Hunter (+25%), Martial Artist, Host Pilot (+15%), and two Skill Programs of choice (except for Medical Doctor, Medical Coroner, or Wingman). Good aligned Pariah characters *can* choose the Assassination Skill Program, but it costs *both* Skill Program slots.

Elective Skills: Select five Elective Skills from the following list at first level. Plus select one additional Elective Skill at levels 2, 4, 7, 9, 12, and 15. All new skills start at level one proficiency.

Communications: Any.

Domestic: Any.

Espionage: Any (+10%).

Medical: First Aid only (+5%).

Military: Any (+10%).

Physical: Any.

Rogue: Imitate Voices & Sounds and Ventriloquism only (both +15%).

Science: Mathematics: Advanced and Astronomy & Navigation only.

Technical: Any (+5%).

Transportation: Any.

Wilderness: Any.

W.P.: Any.

Secondary Skills: Pariahs get to select three Secondary Skills at level one, and one additional Secondary Skill at levels 3, 6, 9, 12 and 15. These are additional areas of knowledge starting without any special O.C.C. bonuses. All new skills start at level one proficiency.

Host Armor: Unlike most other character classes that get to build their Host Armor from scratch, Pariahs are instead issued a suit of Host Armor upon induction into the warrior society. These suits are grown to certain specifications, but the character can make individual improvements on them as the suits grow, and as rewards for meritorious service in the name of the House.

Steps One and Two: See below for the starting template of the Pariah Host Armor.

Step Three: Pariahs have 5D6+10 Bio-E at first level for customization of their individual Host Armors. The additional points gained from *Metabolism* have already been calculated into the suit's starting template. For every level of experience starting at level two, the Pariah gets an additional 3D6+10

Bio-E for improvements to his Host Armor. This is in addition to any special rewards that the character may earn.

If the Pariah's Host Armor is destroyed, another will be bonded to him, but it will be a fresh standard suit. Any further augmentation will have to come from gaining levels of experience, or as rewards for outstanding service. However, if the Pariah lost his suit due to foolishness, ineptitude or in a way that brought shame to himself, the Pariah Caste or the House, he may have to atone before any augmentations will be allowed.

Step Four: Pariahs can choose from any bio-enhancement categories, but they tend to go for ones that increase their lethality in hand-to-hand combat.

M.D.C. "Living" Body Armor: Pariahs also get a suit of Living Body Armor with 2D10+20 Bio-E worth of augmentation as a backup armor. They will usually wear this armor as a disguise because of the unique look of the Pariah Host Armor.

Standard Equipment: Military fatigues, a couple sets of dress and casual clothing, survival knife, utility belt, first aid kit, Face Wrap, one light Bio-Weapon of choice, a Pinaak Bow with 1D4x10+10 arrows, one weapon for each W.P. with ammunition, backpack, a water skin, two weeks rations, and personal items.

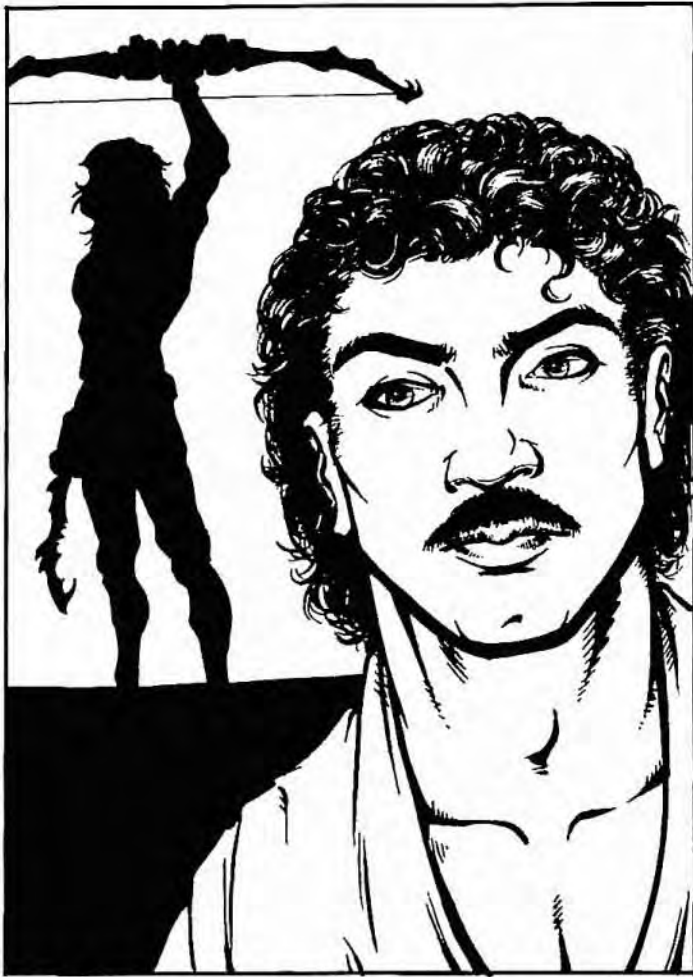
Money: 2D6x100 credits worth of valuable trade items.

The Upside: You are the chosen champion of the Enlightened Librarian, honored to be its divine messenger. You are the most favored of House Shiva, and are its most ardent defender. You are loved and respected, held above the Shiv Dreadguard. They pursue the fight against the Machine, but you have a much higher calling, to usher humanity into a higher state.

The Downside: You are envied by the Shiv Dreadguards and infighting with them is common. You are loved, respected, and placed on a high pedestal. Consequently, you have far to fall if you fail. You also have the burden of saving humanity placed squarely on your shoulders, which may become more than you can bear.

NPCs of House Shiva Warlord Samsara

Warlord Samsara is the Enlightened Librarian's chosen protector and puppet head of House Shiva. His parents were average, ordinary citizens blessed to have given birth to such a powerful and destined warrior. Of course, the Enlightened Librarian had a hand in certain recombination efforts and the injection of choice genetic material through his mother's food while pregnant with Samsara. The Librarian takes no chances when it comes to selecting its future Warlords; it grooms them from conception. Samsara is only the most recent in a long line of citizens turned warrior, turned Warlord that the Librarian needs to maintain his firm hold over the House. Samsara was



raised by his parents, but was tutored in the arts of war, politics and leadership by the Librarian and several of the Houses' most powerful Cadre lieutenants. When he was only 14 years old he was given command of the border guards, and by 17 had risen to a position with the advising Cadre. At the age of 20, he was selected to rule as Warlord, enforcer general for the Enlightened Librarian. He is young, still new to his position, but everyone is enamored by their powerful, optimistic, and youthful Warlord.

Samsara is a natural leader and the pinnacle of the Enlighten Librarian's current crop of chosen warriors. He is the right combination of natural selection, genetic manipulation, education and grooming by the Librarian. Samsara will likely stand as an example to Shivs for generations to come, unless of course, the Librarian finds some way to perfect perfection, and perhaps the Librarian has. Samsara has recently become involved with a Naga Dancer named Uthana, assigned to him as a bodyguard by the Librarian itself. Uthana brings out the best in Samsara's nature, making him kinder to the people and more merciless in battle. She tugs at his furthest emotional ranges, enhancing him in ways that Samsara himself was unaware of. There are whispers that should they have a child, that it would be a powerful warrior and leader for the House. The Librarian does nothing to quell such talk, and Samsara is strongly warming to the idea.

Real Name: Samsara Kanjut.

Alignment: Principled.

Attributes: I.Q. 14, M.E. 15, M.A. 21, P.S. 20, P.P. 19, P.E. 18, P.B. 13, Spd 14.

Hit Points: 36, **S.D.C.:** 62.

M.D.C.: Only when provided by armor.

Age: 22, **Sex:** Male.

Height: 6 feet, 3 inches (1.9 m), **Weight:** 210 lbs (95 kg).

Disposition: A calm, natural leader, ready to lead his people into a fierce battle as easily as into an Enlightened lecture. He adores children and is kind to the injured, disabled, and elderly. Lurking beneath all of his kindness beats the heart of a merciless warrior. He gives no quarter in battle and he expects none. Whether facing down against a war-frenzied Dreadguard, a civilian militiaman, or one of the Machine's abominations, he moves with brutal ferocity. Samsara, keeping with the teachings of House Shiva, is at peace with the atrocities that he has committed against other humans in the name of the Enlightened Librarian's cause.

Description: A tall, muscular, but rather ordinary looking man with dark skin and jet-black hair. He has piercing, gray-green eyes, and keeps a thick, but trim mustache. It is only his height that gives him away in a crowd of House Shiva citizens. Otherwise, he is very much the "Everyman" example of the Shiv cause. He favors wearing green, light fitting robes when among the people, accenting his eyes and soft, peaceful demeanor.

Experience Level: 6th level Pariah.

Combat Training: Hand to Hand: Martial Arts; 5 attacks per melee.

Bonuses: +1 to initiative, +4 to strike, +7 to parry, +7 to dodge, +5 damage, +3 to pull punch, +5 to roll with impact, +2 to entangle, +1 to save vs Horror Factor, +8 to save vs Pariah Reputation, +4 to save vs poisons, toxins, disease, 80% trust/intimidate.

Other Combat Information: Pariah Reputation: 14, all other special O.C.C. abilities as listed under the Pariah O.C.C. description.

Skills of Note: Land Navigation (85%), Prowl (75%), Tracking (75%), Surveillance (80%), Boxing, Kick Boxing, Wrestling, Bio-Comms (85%), Host Armor Combat (86%), Operate Bio-Equipment (80%), Machine Lore (75%), Camouflage (45%), Resist Torture, Wilderness Survival (55%), Trap Construction (40%), Bartering (50%), Sign Language (50%), Public Speaking (55%), Sing (60%), Speak & Literacy: Native Language: Hindi (93/90%), Language & Literacy: Chinese (75/65%), Language & Literacy: English (75/65%), W.P. Archery, W.P. Heavy Bio-Weapons, W.P. Light Bio-Weapons, W.P. Sword, W.P. Knife.

Weapons and Equipment of Note: Personalized suit of Host Armor (described below), suit of living body armor, Pinaak Bow, and other equipment as described under the Pariah O.C.C.

Marna, Samsara's Host Armor

Because Samsara is the prototypical Pariah, he has kept Marna's appearance similar to when he received it. He has invested his earned upgrades into sensory enhancements and hand-to-hand lethality. On the battlefield, Samsara blends in with his fellow Pariahs, letting his actions distinguish him from the rest.

Class: Host Armor, Pariah Specific.

Level: Sixth.

Total Bio-E Spent: 334

Bio-E Remaining: 0

M.D.C. by location:

Arms (2) – 122

Hands (2) – 77

Legs (2) – 142

Feet (2) – 97

Head – 122

Main Body – 418

Speed:

Running: 80 mph (128 km).

Leaping: 20 feet (6.1 m) high, 40 feet (12.2 m) across.

Digging: 20 mph (32 km) through sand and dirt, one-quarter through rock or concrete.

Swimming: 30 mph (48 km/25.9 knots).

Underwater Depth: 700 feet (213.4 m) down.

Flying: Not possible.

Statistical Data:

Height, Width and Length: Standard.

Weight: Adds 500 lbs (225 kg) to the weight of the pilot.

Cargo: None, other than what the character can carry.

Physical Strength: 25, Splicer P.S.

Production Cycle, Lifetime, Horror Factor: Standard.

Bio-Regeneration: Super.

Senses & Features: Enhanced sense of smell enables the character to track by smell alone at 50%. Can recognize the scent of individuals and detect extremes in emotions at 60%. Can detect and analyze the contents of food, beverage or blood at 75% and can detect poison at 50%. Base instincts provide Track (people/humanoids) 60%, Prowl 60%, and Track Animals 70%. Enhanced Sight, Armored Eyes, Heat Pits, Motion Detection, Enhanced Hearing, Reinforced Exoskeleton, Enhanced Neurological Connections, Ambidextrous, Quill Defense.

Penalties: The smell of blood makes the pilot tense and aggressive. See page 76 of the **Splicers® Role Playing Game** for specific penalties.

Feeding/Metabolism: Vampiric.

Sleep Requirements: Does not require sleep, but does need to rest 2D4x10 minutes after feeding. During this time the armor is sluggish, reducing attacks per melee round by two, Spd and all combat bonuses by 25%.

Combat Bonuses: Bite does 1D8 M.D., +1 attack per melee round, +1 to entangle, +7 to initiative, +1 to disarm, +3 to strike, +4 to parry, +3 to dodge, +6 to *automatic dodge*, +2 to roll with impact, +3 to pull punch. Automatically gets W.P. Paired when in Host Armor.

Bio-Weapon Systems:

1.: **Betrayer Blades:** Mega-Damage: 4D6 M.D.

2.: **Chemical Spray:** Sleep.

3.: **Pariah Gut-Whip:** Mega-Damage: 5D8 M.D.



Consort Uthana

Orphaned at the age of 4, Uthana was raised by the community, loved by all, and had a healthy and happy childhood; such as can be had in the war-torn Splicers world. However, in spite of her relatively comfortable childhood, Uthana developed into an emotionally dead young woman. She was always remarkably intelligent, but as she entered her teenage years, she continued to suffer from a cauterization of her feelings. She became shy and cold to everyone, even to the community that raised and protected her after her parents were killed. She seemed destined for the Naga Dancer augmentation.

After the modifications process, Uthana remained cold and aloof, except when she was on the prowl. Her natural personality, combined with the Naga Dancer modifications and training, reformed her into a methodical, yet emotionally radical hunter. Uthana is a devious killer, the perfect example to new Naga Dancers. She receives enormous thrills and ecstasy while on assignment, feelings that she had lost as a child. When not on a mission, she reverts to her aloof and distant ways. However, recently, something has changed. She came into contact with Warlord Samsara.

Assigned by the Librarian as Samsara's bodyguard, Uthana felt an immediate attraction to him. She experienced warmth, desire, and honest-felt feeling when around him, and they soon after became lovers. She cannot explain how or why Samsara has such an effect on her, only that he does, and she loves him

all the more for it. Uthana has heard the whispers that she and Samsara should have a child. She enjoys the idea, although she bears a secret resentment that she would be forced to share Samsara's affection with the child. For now she is content to relish in her emotional satiation with Samsara and the cause of House Shiva.

Real Name: Uthana Uma.

Alignment: Aberrant.

Attributes: I.Q. 19, M.E. 12, M.A. 23, P.S. 12; Splicers Strength, P.P. 15, P.E. 13, P.B. 22, Spd 12.

H.P. & SDC: Not applicable, see M.D.C.

M.D.C.: 69

Age: 19, **Sex:** Female.

Height: 5 feet, 9 inches (1.8 m), **Weight:** 120 lbs (54 kg).

Disposition: Uthana is cold to her friends, and downright icy to strangers. She rarely acknowledges another person unless it suits her needs. She feels nothing for other humans, but strangely comes alive in Samsara's presence. When on his arm, or listening to him speak, she is radiant with energy; her eyes sparkle, her voice carries, and her lips part into a wide, predatory smile.

Description: Like all Naga Dancers, Uthana is a figure of unearthly beauty. Tall, trim, and leggy, she has smooth, perfect, cocoa-colored skin, brilliant green eyes, and long, lustrous brown hair. She keeps her fingernails long, polished a red-dish-green tint, and sharpened to a fine point. Uthana favors orange and red robes when around Samsara, but otherwise wears dark green, almost black, colored clothing the rest of the time.

Experience Level: 6th level Naga Dancer.

Combat Training: Hand to Hand: Assassin; 6 attacks per melee round.

Bonuses: +4 to initiative, +2 to strike, +3 to parry, +3 to dodge, +1 to strike with thrown weapons, +3 to pull punch, +2 to roll with impact, +4 damage, +2 to entangle, +1 to save vs Horror Factor, 75% trust/intimidate, 60% charm/impress, +5% to all skills (already calculated in).

Other Combat Information: Awe Factor: 11, all other special O.C.C. abilities as listed under the Naga Dancer O.C.C. description.

Skills of Note: Disguise (+75%), Sniper, Use & Recognize Poison (59/51%), Vital Points (organics), Dance (90%), Play Musical Instrument: Lire (90%), Public Speaking (85%), Sing (95%), Wardrobe & Grooming, Imitate Voices & Sounds (82/76%), Impersonation (75/59%), Prowl (70%), Seduction (65%), Machine Technology (65%), Chemistry (60%), Demolitions (80%), Demolitions Disposal (80%), Demolitions Underwater (81%), Swimming (80%), W.P. Knife, W.P. Paired Weapons, W.P. Bio-Weapons Light.

Weapons and Equipment: As per the Naga Dancer O.C.C. She also has four Naga Serpent companions, Khao (described below), Trishul, Danta, and Khadga.

Khao, Uthana's Oldest Naga Serpent

Khao has been with Uthana since she completed her Naga Dancer training and is the dominant naga among her serpents.

He is thick-bodied, but surprisingly quick and agile. Black scaled, with green diamond patterned highlights, Khao is easily overlooked when coiled up, napping silently in the shadows. He's not overly fond of Samsara, but he does appreciate his leadership abilities. Extremely even tempered, he hasn't been known to bite anyone without first giving a firm warning. Those who know Khao and Uthana say that Khao is the friendlier of the two!

Alignment: Unprincipled.

Attributes: I.Q. 16, M.E. 16, M.A. 6, P.S. 13; Splicer Strength, P.P. 26, P.E. 17, P.B. 8, Speed: 53 (40 mph/64 km).

Experience Level: Equivalent to 6th level.

Number of Attacks per Melee: Six.

Combat Bonuses: +4 to initiative, +9 to strike, +7 to parry (usually done as a tail swipe), +14 to *automatic* dodge, +4 to roll with impact, +4 to save vs Horror Factor, +1 to save vs poison.

Skills of Note: Land Navigation 70%, Track (people) 65%, Track Animals 80%, Wilderness Survival 60%, Vital Points (organics), Detect Ambush (55%), Detect Concealment (50%), Intelligence (52%), Interpret Shapes (50%), Estimating Distance (60%), Estimating Direction (60%), Estimating Speed (40%), Estimating Exact Location (50%).

Bio-Enhancements: Prehensile Tail, Serrated Whip (manifested as a rattle-like projection at the tip of the tail), Righting Reflex, Sensitive Whiskers, Radar.

Note: All other bonuses and abilities equivalent to those described under the Naga Serpent War Mount entry below.

Xun-Purusha

From the moment Xun-Purusha was extracted from the birthing pod, a fully formed adult, his life has been mired in pain and anguish. He was created to be a perfect clone of Samsara, who the Enlightened Librarian had deemed its greatest champion. However, for all of the Librarian's vast genetic manipulation skills, it deemed the procedure a failure. The Librarian has come to realize that there was something special in the way that personality, environment, education and experience interact to create a fully realized human being. Physically perfect humans are easily manufactured, but the mental and emotional faculties, while they can be manipulated, cannot be spun from whole cloth. Xun-Purusha, as the Librarian soon learned, was flawed mentally, and so was not a *perfect* clone of Samsara. This flawed creation was inferior for the Librarian's purpose. Perhaps the experimental accelerated growth process was to blame, or some unaccountable chemical defect in the brain, or not having a childhood at all resulted in Xun-Purusha's mental instability. The Librarian is still working out the variables for that equation. However, just because the process was a failure didn't mean that the Librarian didn't learn from it. It submitted Xun to a battery of tests in order to further explore the limits of physical, mental and emotional responses in humans. When the Librarian had satisfied its curiosity in the laboratory, it moved on to field-testing.

Rather than be recycled back into the Gene Pool, the Librarian had a better use for the clone. After disfiguring him to hide his easily recognizable face and performing a mind wipe, the Librarian introduced Xun to the Shiv population as a tortured war-



rior who was held captive by the Machine for many years. He quickly integrated into the warrior ranks, and soon became a renowned fighter. It's not surprising, considering who his genetic father was, that he was selected for the Pariah modification process soon after his arrival. Since then, Xun has become a widely respected and loved Pariah champion. Through his efforts on the battlefield, he is currently most favored by the people to succeed Samsara, should that time come. The Librarian is greatly amused by this turn of events; that his failed experiment has still turned out to be Samsara's equal. However, Xun-Purusha has an amusing secret of his own. He knows who he truly is.

Xun was not a flawed clone, and is better than Samsara in many ways. One of the differences between him and his genetic father was Xun's mental *superiority*. Xun's mental deficiencies after emerging from the birthing pod were only *temporary*. As he gathered experience and knowledge from the Librarian's tests and experiments, he began to flex his mental muscles, and found that he was very, very strong. So strong, in fact, that he could hide his mind from the Librarian itself. The Librarian's mind wipe was a trivial thing for Xun to resist, instead letting the Librarian think it had succeeded. His rise through the warrior ranks, his Pariah modifications, and his subsequent status as a people's champion has been through his own, careful design.

He models himself after Samsara, but secretly hates his genetic father. He hates the Enlightened Librarian. He hates House Shiva and everything about it. In fact, he despises all of humanity and is an example of the Librarian's doctrine of "Enlightenment" taken to the extreme. Publicly, he is a Pariah champion.

Secretly, he uses his status and power to thwart the Librarian, Samsara, and the entire House when opportunity presents itself. If it were possible, he would ally himself with the Machine, and *join* in the mad war against humanity. Should Kali ever learn of this deceiver among the Shivs she would gladly welcome him at her side, if only to bask in the irony for a time. Xun-Purusha is a betrayer among a House of betrayers, a pariah's pariah, and perhaps the first weak link in the Enlightened Librarian's powerfully crafted plans.

Real Name: Xun-Purusha.

Alignment: Diabolic, but acts Principled.

Attributes: I.Q. 19, M.E. 27, M.A. 19, P.S. 19, P.P. 18, P.E. 17, P.B. 5, Spd 20.

Hit Points: 28, S.D.C.: 69.

M.D.C.: Only when provided by armor.

Age: 5, chronologically. **Sex:** Male.

Height: 6 feet, 3 inches (1.9 m), **Weight:** 220 lbs (99 kg).

Disposition: Patterns himself after Samsara, playing the part of a calm, natural leader. He loves children and is kind to the injured, disabled, and elderly, but also plays hurtful tricks on them when he can. He gives no quarter in battle, and will dispatch a wounded comrade if the opportunity presents itself. He is at peace with the atrocities that he has committed against others, and longs for the day when he is alone on the battlefield with his "father" Samsara.

Description: A tall, muscular, but horribly disfigured dark-skinned man. His face is hatched with dozens of small scars, his hair is black, but grows in sparse clumps. He has piercing, gray-green eyes, and tries to hid his scars under a brushy, if spotty beard. His appearance is horrific, and it is only his crafted personality that makes people love him instead of recoiling in horror from his face. Xun is infatuated with the color red, and wears blood red colored robes when out among the public.

Experience Level: 3rd level Pariah.

Combat Training: Hand to Hand: Assassin; 6 attacks per melee round.

Bonuses: +1 to initiative, +4 to strike, +4 to parry, +4 to dodge, +4 damage, +3 to pull punch, +4 to roll with impact, +1 to save vs Horror Factor, +3 to save vs poisons, toxins, disease, 70% trust/intimidate, +6 to save vs psychic attack, +6 to save vs insanity, +5% to all skills (already calculated in).

Other Combat Information: Pariah Reputation: 12, all other special O.C.C. abilities as listed under the Pariah O.C.C. description.

Skills of Note: Land Navigation (74%), Prowl (65%), Tracking (65%), Surveillance (70%), Boxing, Kick Boxing, Wrestling, Bio-Comms (75%), Host Armor Combat (82%), Operate Bio-Equipment (70%), Machine Lore (68%), Disguise (40%), Sniper, Use & Recognize Poisons (37/29%), Vital Points (organics), First Aid (60%), Forced March, Running, W.P. Archery, W.P. Paired Weapons, W.P. Sword, W.P. Chain, W.P. Armor, W.P. Heavy Bio-Weapons, W.P. Light Bio-Weapons.

Weapons and Equipment: Personalized suit of Host Armor (described below), suit of living body armor, Pinaak Bow, and other equipment as described under the Pariah O.C.C.

Xarab, Xun-Purusha's Host Armor

Xun is quite proud of his status as a Pariah, and has gone to great lengths to personalize his armor at every opportunity. He wants to be readily identified on the battlefield. Xun has added a pair of vicious serrated horns to the head while allowing the armor's hair to grow wild and entangle around the horns. The arms are outfitted with brutal hooks, barbs and thorny protrusions that he likes to use in close quarter combat. In addition to these hand-to-hand weapons, he has recently upgraded the suit to have a plasma breath weapon. His new favorite tactic is to ensnare an opponent on his horns or hooks and disgorge the foul, viscous material on them at point-blank range.

Class: Host Armor, Pariah Specific.

Level: Third.

Total Bio-E Spent: 248

Bio-E Remaining: 0

M.D.C. by location:

Arms (2) – 107

Hands (2) – 77

Legs (2) – 127

Feet (2) – 97

Head – 107

Main Body – 368

Speed:

Running: 80 mph (128 km).

Leaping: 20 feet (6.1 m) high, 40 feet (12.2 m) across.

Digging: 20 mph (32 km) through sand and dirt, one-quarter through rock or concrete.

Swimming: 30 mph (48 km/25.9 knots).

Underwater Depth: 700 feet (213.4 m) down.

Flying: Not possible.

Statistical Data:

Height, Width and Length: Standard.

Weight: Adds 500 lbs (225 kg) to the weight of the pilot.

Cargo: None, other than what the character can carry.

Physical Strength: 27, Splicer P.S.

Production Cycle, Lifetime, Horror Factor: Standard.

Bio-Regeneration: Enhanced.

Senses & Features: Enhanced sense of smell enables the character to track by smell alone at 50%. Can recognize the scent of individuals and detect extremes in emotions at 60%. Can detect and analyze the contents of food, beverage or blood at 75% and can detect poison at 50%. Base instincts provide Track (people/humanoids) 60%, Prowl 60%, and Track Animals 70%. Enhanced Sight, Armored Eyes, Heat Pits, Motion Detection, Reinforced Exoskeleton, Enhanced Neurological Connections, Ambidextrous, Quill Defense.

Penalties: The smell of blood makes the pilot tense and aggressive. See page 76 of the *Splicers® Role Playing Game* for specific penalties.

Feeding/Metabolism: Vampiric.

Sleep Requirements: Does not require sleep, but does need to rest 2D4x10 minutes after feeding. During this time the armor is sluggish, reducing attacks per melee round by two, Spd and all combat bonuses by 25%.

Combat Bonuses: Bite does 1D8 M.D., +1 attack per melee round, +1 to entangle, +5 to initiative, +1 to disarm, +3 to strike, +4 to parry, +1 to dodge, +6 to *automatic dodge*, +2 to roll with impact, +3 to pull punch. Automatically gets W.P. Paired when in Host Armor.

Bio-Weapon Systems:

1.: **Forearm Blades:** Mega-Damage: 4D6 M.D.

2.: **Chemical Spray:** Sleep.

3.: **Combat Spurs:** Mega-Damage: 4D6 M.D.

4.: **Medium-Sized Horns:** Mega-Damage: +2D6 M.D. to head butt attack.

5.: **Plasma Breath:** Mega-Damage: 6D12 M.D.

Weapons and Bio-Enhancements of House Shiva

New Biological Enhancements

Flame Halo: The Flame Halo is a “death blossom” attack with a powerful fuel/air explosive. Upon command, the Host Armor sprays a fine, highly volatile mist into the air around itself and ignites it a split second later. The resulting fireball is loud, destructive, and sure to clear the area around the blast center. The only drawback is that the character at the center of the explosion is also going to take some of the damage! This is less of a combat tactic as it is an assassination and terror weapon.

Shivs with this modification will often infiltrate an enemy base and set off the Flame Halo near enemies who are outside of their host armors, such as a mess hall, infirmary, or sleeping quarters. The unprotected enemies are often obliterated by the Mega-Damage blast, while the Shiv is lightly damaged and can either move on to another target area, or can exfiltrate and return to strike again at another time.

Category: Ranged Bio-Weapon.

Mega-Damage: 3D8x10 M.D. to everything within 20 feet (6.09 m) of the blast center, 1D8x10+15 to everything between 21 feet (6.4 m) and 50 feet (15.24 m) of the blast center. Game Masters may also want to apply rules for impact damage and stun effects from explosives found on pages 116 and 117 of the *Splicers® Role Playing Game*.

Maximum Effective Range: 50 feet (15.24 m).

Rate of Fire: The single blast counts as two melee attacks.

Limitation: The Flame Halo attack can only be performed once every three melee rounds.

Payload: The Host Armor has enough chemicals for three attacks per 24 hour period.

Bonus: +5 to strike everything in range, but this is the only bonus that counts toward the Flame Halo.

Bio-E Cost: 50 points.

Prerequisite: Resistance to Physical Attacks, Resistance to Heat, Fire Breath, and Chemical Sprayer, which changes into the Flame Halo.

Pariah Gut-Whip: A gruesome reengineering of the Tendril Injectors unique to House Shiva is the Pariah Gut-Whip. This is a terrifying weapon, and all other houses have banned its creation. Any Splicer that is found possessing one of these weapons is either killed on the spot, or captured and “rehabilitated” into a Biotic. All other Great Houses believe that only a dangerously psychotic Splicer would ever use such a terrible weapon. Of course, the Shivs are quite proud to use it in their perpetual Blood Feud.

Category: Offensive Bio-Weapon.

Maximum Effective Range: 15 feet (4.57 m).

Bio-E Cost: 50 Bio-E per blade weapon transformed into a Gut-Whip.

Mega-Damage: 5D8 M.D. as per the Tendril Injector on page 97 of the **Splicers® Role-Playing Game**. However, against a target wearing *Host Armor*, the internal tendril attack only occurs when the wielder makes a successful Natural Critical Strike. Even if the strike total is equal to or exceeds an 18, 19, or 20 with bonuses, the injection attack fails; the target only takes the base 5D8 M.D. The Critical Strike To Hit number increases by +1 at every *other* level of experience of the pilot since implementation of the weapon to his Host Armor. For example, if the pilot is third level when the Gut-Whip is implemented into his armor, *at fifth level*, the pilot’s Critical Strike Range is increased to a Natural 17, 18, 19, or 20. Obviously, the earlier that a pilot has this weapon integrated into his armor, the more dangerous its potential.

Upon a *successful* Critical Strike, the Host Armor is breached and the pilot is subject to the horrific ripping tendrils. The victim takes 1D8x10 S.D.C. per melee round, loses initiative and half of his normal attacks per melee round. Usually, the victim’s only thought is of escape, and can either wrench himself free of the tendrils or can attack the weapon itself, which has 2D4x10+18 M.D.C.

Prerequisite: Forearm Blade or other Large Bone Weapon that is transformed into the Pariah Gut-Whip.

Shiva’s Blood: A brutal organic acid, Shiva’s Blood can be used in the place of the biological defense Acid Blood, and can then be used in the Acid Nodules ranged bio-weapon system. As it is an organic acid, it does *no damage* to inorganic materials, including ceramics, glass, plastic, metal, etc. Range, Bio-E cost, and Prerequisites all as per the Acid Blood and Acid Nodules bio-enhancements found in the **Splicers® Role-Playing Game**.

Mega-Damage: Shiva’s Blood does 3D8 M.D. per melee round.

New Weapons

Betrayer Blades

A favorite Pariah weapon is the Betrayer Blades. These are serrated and hooked blades that look like they were made for ripping bloody gashes in soft, fleshy targets. They were clearly not designed for fighting the Machine. In addition to their obvious hooks and serrations, they are also coated with a fine, gritty, sandpaper-like crystalline material that gouges and abrades wounds on a microscopic level. If that weren’t painful enough, these microscopic crystals *detach* themselves when they come in contact with blood, leaving behind thousands of small shards in the wound. The result is an open, ragged, bloody mess infested with little blades that make treatment difficult at best. The wound is so terrible that regeneration powers work at only *one-half* their normal efficiency.

Weight: 4 lbs (1.8 kg).

Mega-Damage: 5D6 M.D., plus the wound is incredibly painful and highly subject to infection. Because of the microscopic crystals left behind in the wound, the character suffers an additional 1D6 M.D. per melee round, per wound, until properly treated.

M.D.C. of the Weapon Itself: 100 M.D.C.

Trade Value: 3000 credits.

Bio-Enhancement: Betrayer Blades can be incorporated into Host Armor as an upgrade from Forearm Blades for 30 Bio-E points.

Pinaak Long Bow

The Pinaak Long Bow is the preferred long-range assassination weapon of the Pariah. It is silent, accurate, and capable of delivering a variety of arrows on target. It is a composite weapon made of bone covered in a lumpy skin with a strong, sinew string drawn between the limbs. It also has several sets of Advanced Eyes staring out from the face of the bow that act as an organic targeting system. The grip has a small connecting jack that pierces the shooter’s hand, linking the bow’s eyes with the shooter. This provides for the bow’s accuracy, but if the shooter and bow are not linked in this manner, it does not provide the bonus to strike.

Weight: 4 lbs (1.8 kg).

Mega-Damage: Varies, depending on the arrow. A normal, shaft arrow shot from the bow does 2D6 S.D.C.

Maximum Effective Range: 640 feet (195 m).

Rate of Fire: As per the shooter’s W.P. Archery skill.

Bonus: +2 to strike, but only if linked to the shooter.

Trade Value: 1500 credits.

Pinaak Specialty Arrows

In addition to the readily available high-frequency arrows detailed on page 131 of the **Splicers® Role Playing Game**, the Shivs have developed several types of specialty arrows for use

with the Pinaak Long Bow. These include explosive tipped, acid nodule tipped, glo-markers, bore tipped, and chemical varieties.

Light Explosive: 1D6x10 S.D.C. Trade Value: 15 credits each.

Medium Explosive: 2D6 M.D.C. Trade Value: 30 credits each.

Heavy Explosive: 4D6 M.D.C. Trade Value: 40 credits each.

High Explosive: 1D4x10 M.D.C. Trade Value: 55 credits each.

Acid Nodule: As per Shiva's Blood above, or Acid Nodules Bio-enhancement. Trade Value: 100 credits each.

Glo-Markers: Upon impact, the tip of the arrow shatters, doing 2D6 S.D.C., and covers a two foot (0.6 m) area with a luminescent chemical. The chemical will glow with the intensity of a modern day-glo wand for 1D4 hours or until washed off. Trade Value: 20 credits each.

Spore Nodules: Damage is 2D8 M.D. on impact; will continue to do 1D8 M.D. for 3D4 melee rounds. Trade Value: 130 credits each.

Bore Nodules: Damage is 1D10 M.D. on impact, will continue to do 1D10 M.D. for 1D4 melee rounds. Trade Value: 130 credits each.

Chemical Nodules: Upon impact, the tip of the arrow shatters, doing 2D6 S.D.C. and releases a chemical compound into a two foot (0.6 m) area. Damage is as per the Chemical Sprayer bio-enhancement found on page 100 of the *Splicers® Role Playing Game*. Trade Value: 150 credits each.

Pariah Host Armor

The signature look of the Pariah is their unique Host Armor suit. They are all grown from the same batch template, giving them uniformity, but over time, as upgrades and modifications are made, they become the calling card of their wearer. However, no matter how much customization is done, there's no mistaking a House Shiva Pariah on the battlefield.

All Pariah Suits are a rich, milky, pale blue color interlaced with thin, red veins crisscrossing under the skin. After feeding on fresh blood, the veins are a thick red color that pulse with life. The suit's musculature is very fine, lithe and sinewy, and protective bony plates cover the chest, joints, neck and forearms. The head is also protected with these bony plates, but it is concealed beneath a rich, thick mane of hair. The hair is a living part of the armor, allowing the pilot to trim and detail it to taste. Some pilots shave it bald, giving the head a smooth, helmeted appearance, while others allow it to grow wild, giving it a rough, unkempt, bestial look. Despite the various hairstyles favored by the Pariah, it is the faceplate that draws attention.

The faceplate is an eerie, fanged mockery of the Naga Dancer's perfect features fashioned out of segmented bone and sinew with very fine articulation. The articulation is so fine that it is actually capable of mirroring the facial expressions of the pilot. This means that when the pilots suit-up, they all wear the same face, providing anonymity and uniformity, but leaves them with the ability to express emotion. No matter how many bio-enhancements are grown into the armor, the faceplate *always* remains the same.

All Pariah Host Armors start with an optimized combat package. They are built for close combat, evidenced by their reliance on hand to hand weapons, quill defense, reinforced exoskeleton, and enhanced neurological connections. However, it is not unusual, or considered dishonorable, for individuals to add one or two ranged weapons to their Host Armor as personal upgrades. Other common individual upgrades include increased strength, tentacle harpoons, additional limbs, and Betrayer Blades. **Note:** All effective bonuses granted by bio-enhancements have been included in the statistics below.

Class: Host Armor, Pariah Specific.

Level: First.

Total Bio-E Spent: 180

Bio-E Remaining: 0

M.D.C. by location:

Arms (2) – 97

Hands (2) – 77

Legs (2) – 117

Feet (2) – 97

Head – 97

Main Body – 330

Speed:

Running: 80 mph (128 km).

Leaping: 20 feet (6.1 m) high, 40 feet (12.2 m) across.

Digging: 20 mph (32 km) through sand and dirt, one-quarter through rock or concrete.

Swimming: 30 mph (48 km/25.9 knots).

Underwater Depth: 700 feet (213.4 m) down.

Flying: Not possible.

Statistical Data:

Height, Width and Length: Standard.

Weight: Adds 500 lbs (225 kg) to the weight of the pilot.

Cargo: None, other than what the character can carry.

Physical Strength: 25, Splicer P.S.

Production Cycle, Lifetime, Horror Factor: Standard.

Bio-Regeneration: Enhanced.

Senses & Features: Enhanced sense of smell enables the character to track by smell alone at 50%. Can recognize the scent of individuals and detect extremes in emotions at 60%. Can detect and analyze the contents of food, beverage or blood at 75% and can detect poison at 50%. Base instincts provide Track (people/humanoids) 60%, Prowl 60%, and Track Animals 70%. Enhanced Sight, Armored Eyes, Heat Pits, Motion Detection, Reinforced Exoskeleton, Enhanced Neurological Connections, Ambidextrous, Quill Defense.

Penalties: The smell of blood makes the pilot tense and aggressive. See page 76 of the *Splicers® Role Playing Game* for specific penalties.

Feeding/Metabolism: Vampiric.

Sleep Requirements: Does not require sleep, but does need to rest 2D4x10 minutes after feeding. During this time the armor is sluggish, reducing attacks per melee round by two, Spd and all combat bonuses by 25%.

Combat Bonuses: Bite does 1D8 M.D., +1 attack per melee round, +1 to entangle, +5 to initiative, +1 to disarm, +3 to strike,

+4 to parry, +1 to dodge, +6 to *automatic dodge*, +2 to roll with impact, +3 to pull punch. Automatically gets W.P. Paired when in Host Armor.

Bio-Weapon Systems:

1.: **Forearm Blades:** Mega-Damage: 4D6 M.D.

2.: **Chemical Spray:** Sleep.

Hand to Hand Combat:

Head Butt: +1D6 M.D.

Body Block: +3D6 M.D.

Punches, Elbows and Kicks: +2D6 M.D.



RIFTS®

Abernathy Pass

A Typical New West Boomtown

Optional Material for Rifts®

By Zachary Houghton

Abernathy Pass was simply another small western community hoping to survive another year when Abernathy Smits, a senile recluse, discovered what is now known as the Abernathy Silver Lode (Smits Load was rejected for obvious reasons). Since that time, the population of Abernathy Pass (formerly

known as New Gibbonsville) has swelled from some 22 souls to over 200, with more folks coming in every day.

The town makes a good living not only by selling goods and services to this flood of fortune and adventure-seekers, but also by taking a registration fee in return for legally recognized "claims," areas of territory generally 1 square mile (1.6 km) for the prospectors to work for that possible "big strike."

Abernathy Pass is located some 180 miles (288 km) south of the ruins of *Missoula, Montana*, near the old *Lost Trail Pass* and just inside the old Idaho border on the *Bitterroot Mountain*

Range. The area is remarkable in having almost no nearby ley line activity. To date, the town has managed to avoid conflict with the local Simvan tribes and the Nez Perce Indian presence (who eye them warily) in the general area.

No one is quite sure how long this new silver strike will last, or what will happen to Abernathy Pass in the afterward. But for the moment, in one little corner of the New West, dozens of fortunes are made and lost.

Abernathy Pass

Permanent Population: 213

Transient Population (including Tent City): 1D2x100+40

1. The Peerless Saloon & Inn: Run by a pair of brothers, Adam and Gregore Tiberius, these two men have to be the richest businessfolk in town (along with perhaps Rose Campbell). Adam is an ex-Juicer who underwent detox just in the nick of time. However, it has left him physically weak and embittered (was Unprincipled, now Anarchist leaning towards Miscreant). Gregore (5th level Vagabond, Unprincipled), the eldest, brought his brother out here thinking the change of scenery would do him good. It hasn't.

The Peerless has 2 common rooms, twenty private rooms, a large gambling area and downstairs lounge and bar that is jam-packed 24/7/365. Their standard beverage is their homemade "rotgut," which costs 2 credits per shot. Finer spirits can be had, but are not inexpensive. Recently, they cemented a deal with Rose Campbell to have her provide them with beer from several breweries from the Colorado Baronies. Other forms of entertainment at the Peerless include the occasional live music act, weekend prizefights (no pointy weapons, please), and the available company of several "professional" ladies.

2. Martin's Mercantile: Sells a true hodgepodge of dry goods, canned goods, farming implements, clothing, and every sort of other odd and end they can squeeze into this store. The Martin family was one of the first to settle in Abernathy Pass, and they often unconsciously find themselves mentioning this in everyday conversation.

3. Lawson's Folly: This out of place, ostentatious 3-story house was commissioned by Emo Lawson, one of the first prospectors to strike it rich from the Abernathy Lode. Soon after striking it rich, this grizzled, life-long prospector swore he would build a house "within staggerin' distance" from the Peerless Saloon. To this end, he had this truly impressive but wholly unnecessary dwelling built. His silver strike made him an incredibly rich man, but he is drinkin', gamblin', and womanizin' his way through it just as fast as he can. His 3-story house has become somewhat of a byword for excess and poor decisions by the townsfolk.

4. The Rough Outfitter: Sells pickaxes, shovels, blasting caps, camp gear, and all the other basic supplies an independent miner or prospector would need. It is rumored that the owner, Linus Hennault, has been in contact with a company of Mining 'Borgs down around Silvereno in regards to forming a partnership to work the claims around Abernathy Pass. Things could turn ugly very quickly if the townsfolk (who would resent these high-tech workers coming in and working more efficiently than they ever could) find out exactly how far these negotiations have gone.

5. Tinkerer: Mario Bianci (1st level Techno-Wizard, Scrupulous) is an adventurous 18 year-old whose imagination was fired by reading old stories of the California Gold Rush of the old American Empire. He made the trip all the way from his small Midwestern village to Abernathy Pass, where he scrapes out a living fixing small electronic devices, doing odd jobs, selling rudimentary, homemade two-way radio communication sets to travelers and prospectors, and genuinely enjoying every moment of it.

6. Trujillo's Vehicle & Repair: The only place within 300 miles (480 km) where any sort of vehicle maintenance can be had (with the possible and unreliable exception of nearby Mario Bianci, the Tinkerer). Although he's most at home with basic automotive and mechanical repair, owner Peter Trujillo can usually manage at least jury-rigged repairs to robots and power armor. He has recently come in possession of a dilapidated Chipwell CAI-100 Warmonger power armor, and has no earthly idea quite what he's going to do with it.

7. Lawyer: Jace Jurdain claims to have been an ace lawyer in a "big town back East." He's more or less the default representation for anyone who gets in any sort of trouble with the law, or has to appear before Sheriff Augmon regarding a claim dispute, and can afford him (charges 20-200 credits or equivalent in trade items, depending on how wealthy he gauges his clients to be). When the heavyset 59 year-old drinks too much (which is often), he's often heard to brag how he "showed up Karl something good."

8. Richards Carpentry: Run by one John Richards, this man has set himself up as the only professional carpenter in a boomtown full of amateurs. His rates aren't cheap, but with more buildings and houses going up each day, he and his extended family of workers (it seems like he has at least 2 dozen cousins when needed for larger projects) stay busy almost around the clock.

9. MercHouse: The MercHouse is a combination bodyguard/protection service for those worried about travel or attacks on their claims. It is run by an old adventuring comrade of Sheriff Augmon's, a semi-retired 6th level Headhunter (Unprincipled Alignment) named Priam Marquez. He mainly handles the business side of things, and leaves the actual field work these days to his reliable crew: Grady Cronauer, 3rd level Human Gunslinger (Anarchist), "Stump" Iengraw, 5th level Grackletooth Mercenary Warrior (Scrupulous), and Delmon Harwell, 2nd level Headhunter (Unprincipled) using an extremely banged-up Bandito Arms Sidewinder Power Armor suit (88 M.D.C. left for the main body). A MercHouse member can be retained weekly for 400 credits (plus expenses). Business has been very steady, and Marquez is actively considering hiring a couple more qualified bodies to assist with the workload, especially since the silver rush has also seen an increase in area bandits.

Marquez first came to the town thinking there was easy money to be made from the circumstances of the Silver Rush. He was pleasantly surprised to find his old friend as Sheriff of the town, and the MercHouse often backs up the Sheriff when he needs a bit of extra firepower. MercHouse members will never oppose Sheriff Augmon or take a job requiring such.

10. Hadley the Dentist: Once a prospector with delusions of grandeur, this former inhabitant of Old Bones has all but given

up on his nearby riverbed claim, and fills a niche not only as a dentist (his formal training), but also as a barber, doctor, and surgeon. Charges extra for anesthetic.

11. Blaster For Hire: Rufus Tilford (Anarchist) was pretty much a failure in the world despite his considerable psychic powers until he lit upon the idea of using his (2nd level) Blaster powers (see **The Rifter® #19**) for profit for miners. With his ability to create and control explosions, Tilford can excavate areas that might be difficult or dangerous for prospectors or miners. The work is relatively safe for him, pays well (100 credits per day), and he has found his niche as a respected member of the community.

12. Tent City: The rowdiest part of Abernathy Pass, Tent City is home to the newly-arrived, those awaiting more permanent quarters, a trickle of Tolkeen refugees resting here on their way further west, and more than a few itinerant and traveling businessmen. Where existed perhaps only a dozen tents a year ago is now a burgeoning extension of the town, housing anywhere between 140-240 individuals.

13. Holy Host Church: Home for the flock of Preacher Jehosaphat Williams, a kindly, middle-aged, gentle man who seems out of place in this rough-and-tumble setting. The Holy Host also seconds as a meeting house for the townfolk.

14. Schoolhouse: A tiny, one-room schoolhouse where Preacher Williams teaches the few children of the town during the week, for which he is paid in trade by the town.

15. Society Quarters: To meet with the extreme demand for billeting the new Silver Rush has brought, several town businessmen chipped in together to build Society Quarters, a 22-room hotel/temporary quarters complex that is not only exceedingly cramped, but features such shoddy workmanship that it is under repair almost continually. Worse, the foundation was poorly laid, and so the entire building now increasingly tilts and settles to the right. There's a pool going on among the townfolk as to precisely when the entire thing will simply collapse.

16. Riggs' Stable & Hire: Jal Riggs runs Abernathy Pass' only stable. It costs a credit a day to stable a horse or pack animal. He also sells a variety of pack mules, burros, and horses. Also supplies tack, feed, and saddles.

17. Blacksmith: Prices 150% of normal. However, this Grackletooth blacksmith loves any sort of magical or mystic item (it's a hobby), and will often trade his work in return for these.

18. Rose's Trade: The business and home of "Wild Rose" Campbell (6th level ex-Saloon Girl, Unprincipled), widow of the famous bandit "Holdout" Campbell. It is rumored she parlayed the ill-gotten moneys he left her into this thriving and growing business. Rose acts as the unofficial banking and exchange center for the town, and also manages the fur trade for the area's trappers. She has a pair of loyal Noli Bushmen who accompany her on her journeys back to buy and sell high-demand items, in addition to finding markets for the silver. Rose is an absolute stunner, though she continually refuses (albeit coyly and expertly) the advancements of many of Abernathy's Pass' males. Travelers looking for rare and expensive items such as laser weapons, black market body armor and explosives, and all sorts of contraband, can find it here. It's also the place in town to do any sort of trade in these items — she will normally pay up to 75% of market value. Rose has also managed to be the official

Recorder of Claims for the town — basically, if someone wants to register their claim and make it legal by Abernathy Pass standards, Rose Campbell is the person to go to. Claim registration is a one-time 50-credit fee.

19. Jail & Town Center: Functions as Abernathy Pass' jail, armory, town hall, courthouse, and residence of Sheriff Augmon.

Sheriff Michael Augmon

Some individuals are born leaders. So it is with Sheriff Michael Augmon. Back when Abernathy Pass was a huddled half-dozen log buildings, Augmon was merely an adventurer passing through, carrying the physical and emotional scars of too many lost battles. A Snow Lizard Dragon Hatchling had decided to show his power over this small settlement, and began tearing the small village apart. Armed with nothing more than years of combat experience and an L-20 Pulse Rifle, he fought until the Hatchling broke off and decided to seek easier pickings. Afterwards, the citizens of Abernathy Pass unanimously elected him Sheriff and Protector for as long as he wanted to hold the position. In the eight years since then, Sheriff Augmon has used his wits and skill with an energy rifle to fight off every attack on Abernathy Pass. He has also kept the town as orderly as possible in light of the Silver Rush. When someone does break the law, it is also Augmon who presides over the trial and ultimately passes judgement. He is not exactly uncomfortable with this power, and he seen firsthand what chaos can mean to a community. However, his methods are not heavy-handed, and he is beloved and revered by nearly all of the townfolk.

He is assisted by his deputy of four years, (4th level) Deputy Andrew Clane (Scrupulous Alignment), and can also call on a posse of townfolk in situations requiring more manpower, as well as his old adventuring buddy Priam Marquez's MercHouse.

Real Name: Michael Patrick Augmon.

Species: Human.

Alignment: Scrupulous.

Hit Points: 58, S.D.C.: 39.

Height: 6 feet (1.8 m).

Weight: 200 pounds (90 kg).

Age: 43

P.P.E.: 5

Attributes: I.Q. 15, M.E. 17, M.A. 17, P.S. 15, P.P. 12, P.E. 15, P.B. 11, Spd 18.

Disposition: Sheriff Augmon is a man of few words, soft spoken, and tends to reflect before saying anything. He painfully recalls the mistakes of a reckless youth, and it has made him cautious in his speech and dealings with others. However, folks swear he tends to "get two feet taller" when he's facing criminal elements or threats to the town. He radiates competence and a never-say-quit attitude. He is accepting of all peaceful humans and D-Bees, but does view the extremely powerful supernatural with some suspicion. Sheriff Augmon will not hesitate to lay down his life for the town, but if he must do so, it will be dearly purchased.

Experience: 7th level Lawman.

Skills of Note: Speaks American and Spanish at 98%, can read and write both languages at 85%, Detect Ambush 60%, Detect Concealment 55%, Land Navigation 80%, Wilderness Survival 70%, Horsemanship: General, W.P. Revolver, Energy Rifle, and Knife all at 7th level proficiency, W.P. Energy Pistol at 4th level, and Hand to Hand: Expert at 7th level.

Attacks per Melee: Five.

Bonuses: +2 to strike, +3 to parry & dodge, +3 to pull punch, +2 to disarm (does not include W.P. bonuses).

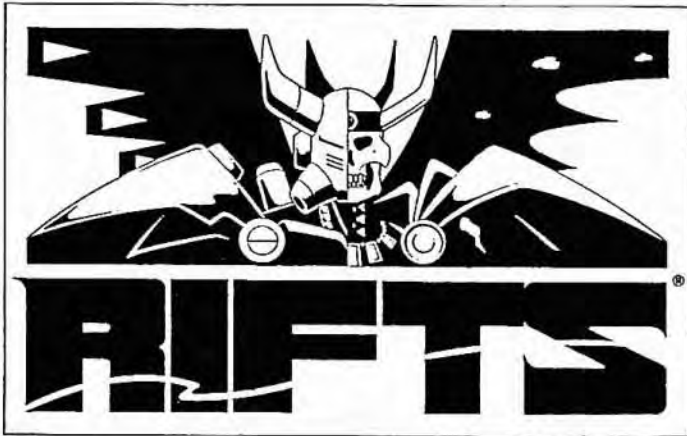
Magic Knowledge: None.

Psionic Knowledge: None.

Weapons and Equipment of Note: Weapons include his trusty L-20 Pulse Rifle, Northern Gun NG-11S "Sawed Off" and an 1863 Remington .45 Revolver. Also owns a suit of Bandito light M.D.C. armor, and has a pair of two-way radios for communication with Deputy Clane.

Cybernetics: Limited to a clock calendar and gyro-compass.

Money: Has managed to store away 8,000 credits in savings. In addition, he has some 12,000 credits worth of silver to his name.



THE RCSG, FT. LAREDO, AND THE EAST ST. LOUIS RIFT

Optional Source Material for Rifts®

By Matthew Olfson

The creation of the Devil's Gate was a unique happening in the Rift-torn world of Earth. Nowhere on the globe is there a Rift quite like this one, nor can one be made, because the circumstances that led to its creation could never be recreated on Earth again. It was an accident that couldn't be duplicated by any being shy of a god, and even then, only maybe. The reason why is because it was made by a god who just so happened to be at the right place at the right time, doing the exactly what she sought out to do, but lacked the power to control things when they invariably got out of hand.

The origin of the East Saint Louis Rift can be attributed to a Godling named Va'Korra. The young, ambitious Godling was a psychic tracker on an unprecedented level. Though her name had yet to become renowned throughout the Megaverse, her gifts of tracking people and events yet-to-be made her a valuable asset to the court of Odin, her grandfather. But to the All Father and his court, she was just a tool to be ill-treated and nothing more. As a result, Va'Korra became determined to free herself of her Asgardian shackles of servitude and become a full-blown god herself. To this end, she sat in meditation for weeks searching the possible futures of the Megaverse for something that could aid her in this nearly impossible goal. Just when she was on the verge of giving up and resigning herself to a life of servitude and disrespect, she found it. The most brilliant flare of raw supernatural energy she had ever seen. Though it took place on a remote world in an even more remote corner of the Megaverse sometime in the distant future from where she was, the event she foresaw generated more than enough power to transform herself into a god the likes of which even the gods had never seen. Immediately, she began conceiving plans around this power surge of P.P.E. and amassing a wealth of items and secrets to aid her in this quest. And after a few brief decades, after all her preparations were made, Va'Korra slipped out of the royal palace in the dead of night and began her great adventure.

Using her fabled powers of tracking, Va'Korra followed the psychic trail to the event of awesome energy she had foreseen. Her journey was not a straight line, though, as they never are. The trail ran from place to place and time to time, to the many places where the event and its shock waves touched. She had visited more than a thousand worlds and times before she finally found the precise time and place that she was looking for: the fabled world of Midgaard, the home of the True Atlantians, in the calendar year of 2098 as its current inhabitants counted time. Knowing in advance that this world was momentarily magically bankrupt and incredibly low on the levels of usable psychic energy, Va'Korra brought along a powerful talisman that stored vast amounts of P.P.E. (much more than normal). That way she would have enough energy to initiate the transformation spell before the wave of energy rushed in to fuel it and transform her into the "god of all gods." Being an accomplished interdimensional explorer, such trinkets had been very useful in the past and had saved her life on more than one occasion. This time the talisman would enable her to fulfill her wildest dreams.

With the right world and time located, all the Godling had to do now was find the right place from which to cast her spell. Not being able to find the land the Atlanteans called home before abandoning the world, she looked for a place that would be right next to where the rivers of energy would flow. She considered going to Cairo and standing near the Great Pyramid of Giza, but that place was under the constant scrutiny of the gods of the Egyptian Pantheon, and she didn't want to draw any undue attention before she ascended into a greater being. After some research, she found an ancient pyramid that was built by the Cahokia (pronounced Kah-ho-key-ah) who thrived in North America between 800 and 1,200 A.D., located near the 2098 A.D. city of St. Louis. This ancient step-pyramid was made to bring part of the Earth into the sky and heavens in an attempt to make themselves into a civilization of gods. Nothing could be



more poetic to the Godling. Obviously, their attempt failed, since their all too mortal descendants in the Choctaw Tribe had no such godlike powers. Still, the pyramid was sure to be the focus of tremendous power and Va'Korra needed to tap into it. Too much power, in fact. If she dared to actually stand on the ancient buried pyramid the immortal would be vaporized, so a tall perch somewhere not too far off, would be ideal.

For the ceremony, Va'Korra chose an architectural marvel called the Saint Louis Arch due to its height, distance from the pyramid, and aesthetic value. Sitting inside the top of the arch, at the anointed time she began casting her ritual spell. Though some onlookers were curious, no one had enough time to interrupt her, as the crowd around her went from placid to panicked in the blink of an eye. Sirens sounded throughout the city and a panicky voice sounded over the monument's PA system, "A missile's flyin' this way! We're being NUKED!" Va'Korra had been on Midgaard long enough to know the slang terminology's meaning and knew the time was at hand. All at once the people around her were scrambling towards the exits as though there were a chance of escape. It was time to complete the last element she needed to enchant her being and survive the rush of raw P.P.E. Using the energies in her talisman, she created a Rift right then and there to act as a vent to allow any excess energy to be shunted off. Exactly as she timed it, the moment she called upon the power and uttered the arcane words to open the Rift, the nuclear missile hit, killing 3 million people simultaneously. With them serving as the sacrifice for her spell, and with the flood of energies from those dying all around the world, there was more than enough fuel to power the spell. In fact, more power than she could channel even with her magical trinkets. As a result, she did achieve the godhood she dreamt of... for about two seconds. After that, the energies overwhelmed Va'Korra and consumed her in a brilliant flash of blue fire. The combination of the Godling Shifter's spell of empowerment, the death of the newborn uber-god, and the destruction of all her Asgardian items of magic, released unfathomable amounts of psychic energy. Far more than what the 3 million inhabitants of the city could have ever released on their own.

Though it did Va'Korra little good, the Rift intended to vent off the excess P.P.E. did open, and has stayed open ever since as the now infamous Devil's Gate. However, because of the explosion of magic in the air, the Rift was destabilized and its destination was not fixed. Because of her innate Shifter abilities, the doorway and veil of crackling blue energy leads to the last 28 worlds Va'Korra had visited, one for every syllable of her incantation. One of these worlds is ruled by the D'Norr, another leads to a world in the Anvil Galaxy devoid of sentient life. Most of the places the Devil's Gate leads to are harmless. But not all.

Secret of the Devil's Gate

In 62 P.A., the town of Troy was invaded by an army of strange and demonic creatures intent on abducting hundreds of humans for purposes unknown. Fortunately for the people of the Coalition town, a company of Grinning Skull MBTs and Sams were on maneuvers no more than 30 miles to the south. But by the time they got to Troy, the demons were gone and half the town was missing. Those who were left behind said that the

monsters left heading west by southwest, towards the old Saint Louis ruins, and that those they took were still alive.

When the armored company intercepted the demon army an hour later, they found most of the human captives either dead or wishing for death as the large thorny demons dissected them while breath stilled entered their screaming lungs. It was the most gruesome site any of the soldiers had ever encountered. Outraged by what they saw, the CS force attacked with everything they had the moment the tanks came into firing range. The demons were taken by complete surprise, though they shouldn't have with the Sam scouts flying overhead for five minutes before the attack. Confused as they may have been, the demons fought back with all the magic might they could muster. And they might have won too if another company of SAMAS weren't called in from New Chillicothe for reinforcements. After the hour long conflict, only 28% of the captives from Troy were saved, while the other 580 were either sent home horribly disfigured or dead.

This was far from the first time monsters and demons attacked a Coalition town. Creatures such as the Neuron Beasts and Black Faeries have been a blight on the continent for as long as anyone can remember. They were even active during the early days of Whykin just after the Great Cataclysm. But for the Coalition, this was the first time they had attacked one of their towns in such great numbers. To ensure that this never happened again, they had to uncover why these two particular creatures were often teamed together and did what they do.

With these particular demons being about as subtle as a thundercloud, it didn't take a lot of work to figure out where they were coming from: the St. Louis Devil's Gate Rift. The hard part was determining why they were so aggressive, diabolical, and insane. That took a much larger investment of time and resources. Chi-Town sent in some of their best paranormal scientists (who would later form the backbone of the Rifts Control Study Group) led by their best "man," Dr. Colonel Kimberly Laredo. As quickly as possible, they constructed a makeshift base camp erected just outside of the Saint Louis ruins so they could study what emerged from the perpetual Rift there. Of the demons, monsters and D-Bees that came out of the Rift during the first month, none of them were of the kind they were looking for. Those that were deemed priority threats were exterminated before they could cause any trouble. But then on the 24th of the month when the moon entered its first quarter, they emerged. Two Neuron Beasts and 32 Black Faeries hovered their way through the dimensional gate.

When they emerged the group of demons seemed to be highly organized and followed a well-defined command structure. The menacing Neuron Beasts ordered the Black Faeries about in the tongue of Faerie and to each other through silent telepathy. Then, after collecting themselves, they set out in a westwardly direction. Careful not to be seen, the study group followed them to see where they were going and what they were up to. As the hours went by, the demons continued their trek until they came across the Missouri river and soon after, came across a small clan village of the Blood River Tribe, a tribe of Psi-Stalkers who are allied to the Coalition States. The moment they saw that the village was in danger, the observing scientists took it upon themselves to radio a warning to the tribe so they would be ready.

The alien invaders attacked, obviously intent on doing to them as their fellows did to Troy. But with the scant minutes of warning they had, the Psi-Stalkers had just enough time to ready for battle and greet the inhuman creatures head on. This gave the observers a chance to see what the creatures were capable of. And though they displayed a frightening amount of magical and psionic power, the order and discipline they showed earlier seemed to be breaking down. One of the battle frenzied Black Faeries even turned on one of the Neuron Beasts, forcing its master to cut it down with its Psi-Swords! It was chaos. When the fight was over, the Psi-Stalkers managed to slay most of the creatures with a minimum of collateral damage on their side and managed to capture three of the Black Faeries and one Neuron Beast.

The captured creatures were taken back to the research camp by boat as the Psi-Stalkers kept them all sedate with P.P.E. drains and regular beatings to counter their regenerative powers. They were subjected to torturous experiments to extract any biological information on them and to find out all they could about the alien invaders. Unfortunately, it was discovered that the longer the creatures were there on Rifts Earth, the more of their minds and memories they lost. The Black Faeries were especially susceptible to the mental destabilizing effects of the environment, turning them from the disciplined soldiers they were into insane killing machines. The Neuron Beasts fared only slightly better, with them losing all memory of where they came from and any life they had, other than the life they experienced after coming through the Rift. And even then their memories were a bit fuzzy. By the end of the interrogation, all the CS scientists uncovered was that the creatures were from a single society where the Neuron Beasts ruled supreme and the Black Faeries were their lessers and minions. Clearly, more study was required.

When the next first quarter moon was out, another group came through the active Rift. Like before, when the standard complement of two Neuron Beasts and 32 Black Faeries emerged they seemed to be rational, disciplined and well organized. Unlike last time, the plan wasn't to wait and see what they were going to do. This time the Coalition team decided to try a risky move that could jeopardize their mission and lives. One of the scientists, Dr. Thomas Yoshida, walked out and said "Hi!" in their native tongue to see if he could talk the information out of them. The rationale was that if they lost their minds the longer they stayed on Earth, then the most logical time to get any information out of them was while they were still sane. In response, one of the Neuron Beasts snapped its fingers and pointed to the scientist. Like the trained attack dogs they were, the Black Faeries flew over to him, snagged him up, and took the foolhardy doctor through the Rift! Before anyone could do anything the alien explorers retreated to their home dimension. They considered sending the security team after them, but the uncertainty of what laid beyond the magic veil made the team decide to cut their losses.

This tragic incident triggered a series of investigations and official inquiries that saw the program shut down for over a year while everything was gone over with a fine tooth comb. The scientist they lost may have been young, but was one of the top men in his field and his loss was a big hit to the project. After all had been disclosed and all the cover-ups were unveiled, disci-

plinary action was sent down from the Emperor himself. How they could be so ineptly stupid was beyond him and heads rolled over this blunder. Though the scientists were irreplaceable and couldn't be dealt with too harshly, their security team was a different matter. Those in charge of protecting the study group were arrested and sent to jail for the next 12 years of their lives and the chief of security was sentenced to death for allowing the incident to happen in the first place. Even the project leader, Dr. Colonel Kimberly Laredo, got a little burned by this gap in judgment and was reduced in rank to Lieutenant Colonel as punishment. By the year's end the entire security staff was replaced by members of the Coalition Special Forces to ensure that nothing like this happened ever again.

When operations were re-launched in the St. Louis area, the new procedure and modus operandi set by Lt. Colonel Laredo was to capture the Neuron Beasts and company that came from the Rift and extract as much information as they could before their memories faded. This new plan worked well and allowed them to gather a fair deal of information. However, nothing was sure and all intelligence was speculative at best. They needed to catch a break or the whole effort was doomed to failure. That break came exactly 28 moons after the Yoshida incident.

With lasers, knockout gas, Neural Maces and net guns at the ready, the security team and scientists waited for the moment to come. Like clockwork, out came the creatures they were looking for from the shimmering curtain of the Devil's Gate. Unfortunately, what came through the Rift this time was a huge force of 24 Neuron Beasts and 384 Black Faeries. Far too many for them to attack, forcing the CS researchers to let the demons go and call in New Chillicothe's battalion of SAMAS to deal with them. As the army of demons went off, one of the Black Faeries dragged behind and split from the group. Seeing a golden opportunity, the Special Forces security team moved in and jumped the loathsome monster, flailing away with Neural Maces and shooting electrically charged nets. They might have beat the creature to death if it didn't moan "...please, no more..." in their own language of American. When they did, the back of the Black Faerie split open and out crawled Dr. Yoshida! Before any questions could be asked the exhausted doctor of parapsychology collapsed.

When Yoshida came to, it took him half a year to come back to his senses. Till then, all he could do was drool, scream and rock himself to sleep in the fetal position. The man had gone through hell and was incapable of telling his story just yet. It took six months of intensive psychic psychiatric care to bring him back to a more lucid state and another 12 years of therapy before he could lay off his calming medications. What he experienced on the other side of the Devil's Gate changed him forever. But even so, he learned the truth behind the Neuron Beasts.

Incident Report: SL/DG Yoshida, 67-10-23 (Ultra Classified!!!)

According to Dr. Yoshida's ultra classified report that he filed 18 months after his return, the Neuron Beasts are actually a race called the Sah'Karren. A race who has devoted their entire society to two pursuits: the advancement of Bio-Magical technology, and the subjugation of all other species they come

across to ensure that they are the masters over all. To this end, they have dominated most of their world and destroyed all who stood in their way. They are relentless, genius, and unfeeling in this pursuit. And those who they do not destroy, they enslave and subject to unbearable torment for years, decades, or longer so they will serve as their emotional nourishment in lieu of conventional food.

The *only* people who have stood in their way of absolute control were a diverse society of Faerie Folk who called themselves the Sha'lee. The Sha'lee organized a resistance force that thwarted the Sah'Karren's every move against them and into their territory. Their use of Faerie Magic defied much of their known science at the time and confounded the merciless attackers. This advantage the Faerie Folk held over their would-be conquerors enabled them to hold off any advances for over 300 years. Unfortunately, the advantage couldn't last forever. With the advent of Bio-Magical technology, the Sah'Karren unleashed their new weapon of war, the Black Faerie.

Poetically enough, "Black Faerie" is not only the name given to the horrid looking beasts of magic found on Rifts Earth, but also happens to be what their Sah'Karren makers called their minion creations. Using their own DNA mixed with select genetic strands from several of the Faerie Folk, the Sah'Karren managed to create a race of soldiers who could fight the various Faerie on their own terms. And just to add a touch of terror to the war, the Black Faeries were engineered so they naturally feed on the flesh and blood of other Faeries. With such ghastly creatures to fight their war for them, the Sah'Karren advance could begin anew.

But not wanting to leave their agents of terror unsupervised, the Sah'Karren decided that they had to send some of their own along with them. So they went back to their new science of Bio-Magic manipulation to formulate a way to temporarily mutate *themselves*, to re-forged their regular soldiers into more combat worthy forms. In their new forms they could use magic innately, draw upon powerful psionic energies, and would have regenerative flesh that was as resilient as their toughest armor. This new combat form was what would become the visage they'd be recognized as on Earth, the Neuron Beast. With these two new advanced soldiers, the renewed Sah'Karren offensive laid waste to the lands of the Sha'lee and made it seem as if victory was at last assured. However, events from afar would change everything once more.

When the Great Cataclysm occurred on Rifts Earth, the release of magic energies sent shock waves throughout the Megaverse. Those shock waves were felt as far away as Karra, the Sah'Karren home world, strengthening the few Ley Lines of their lands – particularly those in the Faerie lands. This turn of events gave the Sha'lee access to more power to craft their weapons of magic and renewed their nexus points' ability to form Rifts to other worlds. Facing new and more powerful Faerie weapons of war was bad enough, but the Sha'lee having access to allies and sympathizers on other worlds was much, much worse. With their vast riches in gold and precious jewels, the Sha'lee were suddenly capable of hiring the most powerful of mercenaries, buying the most destructive of portable weapons (technological, magical, and TW), and able to flee to alternate dimensions in tight situations only to return later to resume the war. Again, magic had breathed fresh life into the Faeries' abil-

ity to defend themselves. So much so that the Sha'lee had taken back what they lost and began their own offensive to dole out some retribution and revenge.

After much research, the Sah'Karren managed to track the source of the additional magic energies that flooded their land back to their single flash point. To one particular nexus point on the edge of the battle lines. With a concerted military effort, they took the land inhabited by the nexus point and secured it with as much personnel and resources as they could spare. More study revealed that this particular Rift opened regularly every 30 de'sex and 51.2 yans (a little less than 2.2 Earth days), and stayed open for exactly 1.2 de'sex. When it did, a fresh supply of magic energies recharged the Ley Lines it connected to, and those connected to them, and so on. It was quickly determined that in order to defeat the Sha'lee, win their long and laborious war, and save themselves from the genocide they would surely meet at Faerie hands, they had to find a way to either collapse the nexus point, block the energies that flowed through it, or somehow harness it for their own uses. But without knowing more about the world that laid on the other side, the secrets its inhabitants held about the magic energies, and how their physiologies interacted and coped with the environment's dimensional properties, they were forced to work in the dark. Without these findings and analyses the Sah'Karren would have nothing to work with, with their own super science of Bio-Magic Tech. This meant that they would have to send in an expedition every time the Rift opened to the source of the magic wellspring that gave the Sha'lee their power, and bring back life-forms to study and perform experiments on. With nothing to lose and everything to gain, they decided to send in a team of research scientists, at least one command officer and a support group of 16 Black Faeries for each of them, through the Rift, hoping they would return with much needed specimens and answers. At first they sent in large formations hoping to offset any hazards they might meet. But when they failed to return over the years, the leaders of the Sah'Karren scaled back the efforts to minimize their losses, only sending in large groups when they felt they could afford to. However, out of the thousands of times they've tried, and the tens of thousands they have lost in this seemingly futile but essential quest, only one expedition has ever had a small degree of success.

After over 33 years of sending research teams in of varying sizes with not a single one returning, one of them finally returned successfully. After the team of one transmuted scientist and one military officer went through with their entourage, they started to take scans and get their bearings before moving on. But before they did, a brave but foolish native approached and said "Hello" in the native tongue of their enemy, the Sha'lee. It didn't occur to them at the time that that also happened to be the language their servant Black Faeries spoke (genetic memories, like dragons) and this creature was attempting to address them in what he might have assumed was their own language. Instead they concluded that there must have been a stronger connection between the inhabitants of this world and the Sha'lee than previously thought. With a snap of its fingers and a telepathic command, the scientist ordered the Black Faeries to collect the specimen and retreat through the Rift while it remained open, before their luck changed.

As soon as they could, the Sah'Karren's top scientists began to run a series of tests on the subject. Unfortunately for the collected specimen, the Sah'Karren do not feel or register pain like most sentient creatures, therefore the concept of anesthetics to dull any pain for the alien subject never occurred to them, not that they would have cared even if it did. The tests were excruciating beyond any words can describe, and after each one they would use healing Bio-Magical machinery and psionics to make the subject fit and ready for the next experiment. They learned much from their examinations and continued torturing him around the clock for over a month. And just when a breakthrough seemed imminent, the unthinkable happened.

Through magical and psychic surveillance, the Sha'lee learned about the existence of the test subject and their enemy's intent. If their assumptions were correct, and the Sah'Karren usually were, then the Faeries could not allow the tests and research to continue. Quickly they devised a plan and made three talismans; one containing the spell of Teleport: Superior and the other two loaded with the spell of Annihilation. Using their surveillance methods to get a fix on their target site, they teleported a commando squad into the facility near the testing area, used one of their Annihilation talismans to destroy the computers that contained much of the experiment's findings, one to completely destroy all traces of the subject's genetic material from his holding cell, and used the last to teleport themselves and the test subject out in the confusion. Killing him was not an option because the Sha'lee felt themselves above that and the Sah'Karren could use even the slightest remains of his body to salvage their studies. So instead they took him with them.

The test subject, who called himself Doctor Lieutenant Thomas Yoshida, was grateful to be rescued from his cruel captors and thanked his liberators profusely. However this didn't last long. The Faerie Folk who harbored him turned out to be only slightly more humane than the Sah'Karren, but not much. The little creatures interrogated Yoshida for days, getting all he knew about his previous captors, Bio-Magic tech, him, his home world, and things he had no idea of. They were relentless in their inquisition, often beating and poking him with sharp objects. In the end, all they really gained was the setback they dealt to their enemy and next to nothing from Yoshida.

Over the next month the Sha'lee fed and sheltered their captive, doing what they could to keep him out of their nemeses' hands. They allowed Yoshida to ask them a few questions about the Sah'Karren, or Neuron Beasts as he called them, their history, and why he was so important. And though they were fountains of information, the Faeries were also callous and mischievous creatures who delighted in using the things he told them and extracted from his thoughts and memories to pull heartless pranks on him. Their favorite was to induce a vision of him waking in his home, safe and secure, and then twisting and distorting the dreamed reality into a horrific vision until he would scream for mercy. And every time they played that game, his mind could never get used to it, believing it was the real thing every time. It got so bad for him he began to reflexively and unconsciously moan "...please, no more..." when the faux reality became too nightmarish time and time again.

After 51 long and excruciating days on this hellish world, his jailers came to him and told Yoshida that they had a plan for how to keep him out of their enemy's clutches and get him

home at the same time. Using the magically preserved, hollowed out shell of a slain Black Faerie as a disguise, he was to use the Ley Line levitation trick he learned years ago as a paranormal researcher (see RCSG O.C.C.) and join the pack of other Black Faerie the Sah'Karren were about to send through the secured Rift. They would take care of getting him there and helping him blend in, but the rest was up to him. After he made it to the other side, all he'd have to do is slip away from the pack and escape. In return for their magnanimity, he had to promise to stop the Sah'Karren from ever bringing back another specimen from his dimension, especially those of his race who had a link to his world and its Ley Lines.

All of the preceding was in Dr. Yoshida's highly classified report once he gained his sanity again. In response, four major conclusions were made:

First of all, though Yoshida spent only 60 Earth days of time in the other dimension, which was corroborated by his wristwatch and psychic powers of Sense Time and Total Recall, the reality was that he was away from Rifts Earth for just under 2 years and 2 months! After factoring in Yoshida's testimony that he was there for exactly 52.9 of their days and not the 60.4 his watch said, they deduced that the world of Karra had a 27.4-hour day. According to Yoshida, its inhabitants split the day into 16 time increments called "de'sex" (both as a singular and plural) with each of them being divided into 256 (16 squared) smaller time increments called "yans." Apparently, the Sah'Karren use a number system based on the number 16, the number of fingers they have on all their hands. Their 201-day year was split into 8 months, each with 25 days except the last in their year, which had 26 days. Based on their year being about a third shorter than Earth's and the constant hot, mucky air Yoshida complained about, they figure that the planet Karra has an orbit similar to the planet Venus, but lacks the noxious atmosphere. But the most interesting conclusion was that the other dimension has a sluggish temporal flow with roughly a 1:12.986 time ratio of Earth's. That explained the discrepancy of why the Neuron Beasts and Black Faeries had been reported to be a problem for as long as anyone could remember, while at the same time the Sah'Karren had only been sending expeditions to Earth for 33 of their years at that point.

Another thing they concluded was that even though it is against CS policy to make deals with the supernatural, like Yoshida did, for their own sake it would be best if the CS prevented the Neuron Beasts from making their way back to the Rift with any human specimens. This was an easy mandate to enforce considering the mentally destabilizing effects Earth's environment had on them. However, it was decided that it would be much less of a drain on their resources if the Coalition's troops used a different tactic other than engaging the Sah'Karren with overwhelming forces. Instead, the standard protocol is to engage the band of demons long enough to become a tempting specimen and then lead them on a wild goose chase. The chase need only last until the environment makes the demons forget why they were giving chase in the first place, what they were sent to this dimension to do, and who they even are. And because the Sah'Karren never make it back to the Rift to report what is happening, they never get a chance to learn from their continually repeated mistake of falling for this trap. After the environment has altered the demons' minds, they in-

variably split up and go their separate ways, making them much easier to deal with.

The Neuron Beasts that roam the Earth are not in their original forms. The natural form of the Sah'Karren is a large, thin bipedal humanoid creature with four arms, a thick tail and reptilian features. Unlike their Neuron Beast combat form, they are not M.D.C. creatures, but instead as frail and fragile as any human. Despite their diet of emotional energy that they siphon like a Psi-Stalker consumes P.P.E., they have no "known" access to magical or psionic powers of any sort beyond their mysterious brand of pure science called Bio-Magic tech, which the CS suspects utilizes elements of fifth and sixth dimensional mechanics. This means that either the Sah'Karren are roughly five hundred years ahead of the CS technologically, or more likely that they have a larger range of senses that allow them to perceive those upper two dimensions, making it easier for them to understand their functions and principles. In any case, it has been determined that the reason why the Neuron Beasts behave the way they do on Earth is dictated by several factors. First, their sense of pain is not like other creatures'. They may register damage to their physical bodies, but the agony and debilitating effects are simply not present in their physiologies. Not having such sensations, it is little wonder why they do not even comprehend what they do when they harm others. Inflicting pain on others for nourishment is less intentional and more instinctual for them, while possibly learning how to deliberately cause more anguish to alter the taste or make it more palatable on some level like seasoning of some kind. Also, even in their natural form, the Sah'Karren are a morally and emotionally bankrupt race devoid of strong feelings. They may have emotions, but they are so blunted and muted they have little to no place in their thinking process. This is why they have no compunctions about physically altering their own bodies to such an extent, sending their own off to die again and again through the Rift, or even being sent off on such a mission for the greater good. And lastly, because of the mentally deteriorating effects of Earth's environment on the Neuron Beasts' mind (and more so on the Black Faerie), not only do they lose their grip on sanity and memory, but also the bulk of their advanced knowledge. And since at least half of those sent through the Devil's Gate are scientists, that constitutes a lot of knowledge. Cruelly enough, all their know-how doesn't just fade away. It's forever on the edge of their thoughts, taunting them with their own ignorance. With this vague shadow of Bio-Magic tech and their society's accomplishments with it mocking their very existence, the majority of them attempt to start from scratch and reconstruct their understanding of their super science. This is what draws the Neuron Beasts to other living beings of this world and encourages them to study their biological makeups. Unfortunately for the Neuron Beasts (but fortunately for the world), their mental instability makes them incapable of ever regaining the fundamentals of the six-dimensional science while away from their own dimension.

The last thing the CS High Command concluded was that if the Sah'Karren could crack the mysteries of magic and psionics through pure science, so could they. Though they were reluctant (and still are) to practice and develop a form of science called "Bio-Magic Technology," they elected to start a research branch of the military to take a closer look at the scientific implications of Ley Lines, Rifts, magic, psychic powers, and the supernatural in general. This scientific core would look into ways to contain

and control Ley Lines and other manifestations of magic through scientific means, as well as research new ways to combat forces that use magic energy in all their various forms. Based on this fourth conclusion, the Rifts Control Study Group was officially formed and funded in the early months of 68 P.A. And though the Old Chicago ruins proved to be an excellent study ground and closer to Chi-Town, the old original base camp used for the Neuron Beast studies was selected as the RCSG's main base of operations and was expanded to further facilitate their work. This was mostly so they could take captive the occasional Neuron Beast scientist and pump it for all the information they could on Bio-Magic tech, and how their war goes with the Sha'lee.

Fort Laredo

By the summer of 97 P.A., the base camp used by the RCSG had become woefully inadequate for their needs. Up till then they had amassed a mountain of scientific data on thousands of species of D-Bees, demons and monsters and how they interact with and use magic energy. They had even discovered several interesting leads on P.P.E. energy manipulation techniques, but nothing overwhelmingly promising. But despite these findings, their equipment, facilities, and power limitations kept holding them back. And if that weren't bad enough, the base camp's defenses were too impotent to fend off a sizable attack for long. A deficiency that had cost them the lives of many important researchers. What was needed was a new base of operations. Hearing their plea, the ever patient and hopeful CS Executive Council and Emperor chose to do just that and ordered that a new and modern military base be constructed with the researchers' special and specific needs in mind. On September 10, 98 P.A., ground was broken on the construction project on the new base that would come to be known as Fort Laredo, named after the original Neuron Beast research project's leader.

Finished on January 13, 106 P.A., Fort Laredo is a large military base along the lines of a CS fortress city in appearance, but much smaller. The complex has four levels above ground and four more below, providing the scientists with all the space and power they'll ever need. And on the off chance they actually manage to outgrow this base, the underground sections can be expanded laterally out from under the surface structure as well as downward, adding new levels. However, this is unlikely to happen anytime soon. Each level has roughly a million square feet of space on the main floor and has an average ceiling height of 30 feet (9.1 m), allowing them to erect entire buildings in the levels that doubled and tripled the amount of usable work space they have. It will take a long time fill up that much space.

Following the general plans and schematics that have worked so well for CS bases in the past, the first three levels above ground function as a military base with many troops, armored vehicles, 'bots and power armored units at their disposal. The ceilings on the ground level provide a 45 foot (13.7 m) clearance so even the Coalition's largest robot vehicles can come and go with no problems, but ground based power armors are also kept and deployed from here as well. The second level only has a 20 foot (6.1 m) ceiling and is designed to accommodate small, one-man aircraft and power armor like Warbird Rocket Cycles and SAMAS. Bay doors allow them to take flight immediately

from this level so they do not have to be slowed by the ground-based units on the level below. The third level serves as the barracks, recreation and living space for the soldiers and pilots stationed here. As usual, there is a degree of segregation that keeps the Grunts away from the sleeping quarters of the Pilots, the Pilots away from the augmented soldiers' (Juicers & 'Borgs) sleeping quarters, the augmented soldiers' sleeping quarters away from the Dog Boys', and so on. This helps keep the peace and prevents any rivalries from getting out of hand too often. However, they do all conjugate and intermingle in the recreation areas and food courts, so incidents do happen from time to time. Above the base on the fourth level are the living and recreation areas for the research scientists who spend much of their time working down below and the officers who coordinate and command the military operations of the base. The living conditions on the fourth level are a cut above the more Spartan quarters and facilities on the third, giving them access to slightly more luxuriant pleasantries and accommodations than those of the enlisted men.

People and Places of Note

1. Military Complex: The military forces that operate out of Ft. Laredo have been charged with the duty of controlling the Saint Louis area and eliminating all significant threats that come through the Devil's Gate arch. The reasoning for this is two fold. First, it relieves the limited resources of the New Chillicothe and the state defense force, who have many other things to worry about than what crawls out of East St. Louis. Secondly, by taking care of the many creatures that come out of the Devil's Gate, they can maintain the secrets they've learned about it without fear of some hothead from elsewhere shooting his mouth off and divulging observations about what happened. Should the Neuron Beasts learn of their origins, it's quite possible that at least one would attempt to complete its mission and that is something the CS cannot permit. As long as the Sah'Karren do not have any data or specimens to work with, they can never use their Bio-Magic tech to overcome the environmental effects of Earth (and this dimension?) and thus will never be able to send in a significant invasion force. The following is a breakdown of the CS forces stationed at Ft. Laredo.

Level One (Ground Armor):

PA-100 Maulers- 64 (used by heavy infantry soldiers)
 PA-200 Terror Troopers- 160 (One Company)
 PA-300 Glitter Boy Killers- 160 (One Company)
 UAR-1 Enforcers- *none*
 IAR-2B Abolishers- 12
 IAR-2C Abolishers (*New*)- 48
 IAR-3 Skull Smashers- 48
 IAR-4 Hellraisers- *none*
 IAR-5 Hellfires- 64
 CR-003 Spider-Skull Walkers- *none*
 CR-004 Scout Spider-Skulls- 32
 CR-005 Scorpion-Skull Walkers- *none*
 Skelebot Force:
 FASSAR-20 Old Style- 6,200 (One Division)
 FASSAR-30 New Style- 7,680 (One Division)

FASSAR-40 Hunters- 640 (One Battalion)

FASSAR-50 Hellions- 1,920 (Three Battalions)

Mark V APCs- 24

Mark VII Slayer APCs- 24

Mark IX EPCs- 100

Mark IX MLVs (*being phased out*)- *none*

Mark XIII Dragoons (*New*)- 8

CTX-20 Grinning Skull MBT- *none*

CTX-50 Line Backer Hover Tanks- 48

CTX-52 Sky Sweeper Anti-Aircraft Tanks- 16

CTX-53 Ballista MAATs (*New*)- 8

Level Two (Airborne Units):

PA-06A Old Style SAMAS (I.S.S.)- *none*

PA-07A "Smiling Jack" SAMAS- 60 (Two Platoons)

PA-08A Special Forces "Striker" SAMAS- 120 (One Company)

PA-09A Super SAMAS- 160 (One Company)

AAA-PA-101W Death Wings (combat model)- *none*

AAA-PA-102W Death Wings (recon models)- 40 (One Platoon)

CS Command Cars- 50

CS "Scarab" Command Cars- 20

CS Skull Patrol Cars (I.S.S.)- *none*

Sky Cycles (I.S.S.)- *none*

Scout Rocket Cycles- 60

Warbird Rocket Cycles- 160

Wind Jammer Sky Cycles- *none*

Level Three (Soldiers' Barracks and Living Area):

Regular Soldiers (Grunts, Military Spec., Tech Officers...)- 640 (One Battalion)

Special Forces (Commandos, Special Forces, Rangers...)- 240 (Two Companies)

DSD Forces (CS Juicers, 'Borg Strike Troopers...)- 640 (One Battalion)

Mutant Animals (Dog Boys, Kill Hounds, Battle Cats..., one out of eight of which are Psi-Stalkers)- 2,560 (One Brigade)

Psi-Battalion (Major & Master Psychics – *Psi-Bat Sigma*)- 514 used to support the troops in the field, provide special security against the supernatural, and to contain & control the various test subjects.

In addition to all these units, there is also a full Regiment (2,560) of RCSG scientists on the grounds and in the area, conducting experiments and studies. None of them are ever allowed to go off on their own without at least a full strength Squad as their chaperones.

2. Sickle Field: The roof level of the base serves as a secured airfield for VTOL aircraft of all sizes. However, unlike many other Coalition airfields, this particular one was not made to service military attack aircraft. Its sole purpose is to provide a secure landing place for transport vehicles, not bombers or fighters. Once a month, large vessels like Sky Lifter APCs, Death's Head Transports, or a small fleet of Deathbringer APCs come and land on the roof's considerable landing pad to bring in fresh food, armor, equipment, weapons, various chemicals for

all their scientific and military needs, and, of course, mail and care packages from home. However, this does not mean that there are no military aircraft here. In a hangar on the north side they keep two Deathbringer APC transports and a squadron of 8 versatile Spider-Skull Dragon Wasps. They are kept for defensive purposes, but are frequently used because of their utilitarian design aspects.

3. Base Defenses: Like all fortress cities and major bases of Coalition design, Fort Laredo has a circular defensive wall that slants in, giving it the look of a gigantic, flat-topped Aztec pyramid of sorts. The purpose of the walls is to keep the people inside safe and the undesirables out. The walls are five feet thick and have Twenty Ablative Layers to them. Every 10 by 10-foot layer of wall has 300 M.D.C. (again, that's *per ablative layer*). If someone actually blasts a 10x10 foot (3x3 m) section with 6,000 M.D. of damage in 20 or more attacks (see below), they have accomplished what few have ever done and made a hole in the outer wall of a CS military base that allows them to enter. Because of the layered architecture, a damaged 10x10 foot layer of wall can be replaced by a crew in a few minutes of the order being given to do so, though they usually take their time about things if the situation isn't urgent.

CS Ablative Armor is more than just an economical way of making large, thick walls that are easy to repair. It is a revolutionary defense that makes it very hard to penetrate a fortification's defenses. Through the use of spacing between plates made from ordinary, economical M.D.C. materials and a little high-temperature insulation, damage is prohibited from passing from one sheet to the next. All the individual armor plates have the ability to absorb and disperse all the damage done to them in excess of their own M.D.C., disallowing any excess damage to pass on to the next layer! In other words, if an attack exceeds a layer's 300 M.D.C. by any amount (up to 600 M.D.C.), even if the armor plate has been whittled down to its last point of M.D.C., though that layer can easily be destroyed on the next hit the next layer beneath will still be unscathed and stand ready to take a pounding. (Though not common for vehicles and structures, this works similar to the "Last Bit of Armor Protection" rule on page 355 in *Rifts® Ultimate Edition*. In this case, the "carry-over" damage dissipated is up to 600 M.D.C. per 300 M.D.C. ablative plate, for a total of up to 900 M.D.C. absorbed by each plate.) This is why they use this method of multi-layered armor on the Coalition's protective walls. It's cheap to construct, maintain and repair, and it's extremely effective. To punch a through an entire section of wall, one basically has to blast it with *at least* as many attacks as the wall has layers, no matter how much Mega-Damage is in the attack. Against mass numbers of small units like an invading army, this kind of defense is only a slight improvement over conventional Mega-Damage armor and concrete. But against catastrophic damage caused by frighteningly powerful assaults, the ablative armor will hold up against attacks that would normally blow through a conventional wall of comparable thickness in one blast like a shotgun through a sheet of rice paper.

Because attacks can come from the inside as well as from without, the floors and ceilings of every level are also armored, effectively making up four layers of ablative armor between each and every level. In addition to that, there are several internal blast walls throughout the levels that are made of three lay-

ers of ablative armor to contain any internal explosions. In an emergency, the blast walls instantly seal off all areas to completely contain any bio-toxins detected in the air or to trap someone in one place. Should terrorists ever find a way to get a bomb into the base, these measures can minimize and contain the damage should the bomb be explosive, chemical, biological, or even magical in nature. And since these blast walls also seal off every section, making each an enclosed structure onto itself, magic spells with vast area effects that can not penetrate them (just like with vehicles) will be contained to a small section of the city. In fact, since most of the base is sectioned off in this way at all times, no magic can penetrate the base's inner areas in any way, shape or form. (Note: Just like how the Coalition can't figure out how to make Glitter Boy chromium armor, only a small few people even know of the special construction technique for ablative armor, much less its very existence, which for the time being, is among the Coalition's most highly-guarded secrets.)

The **Fort's Foundation** is a super thick layer that supports the mass of the entire base and acts as a buffer from the earth. Located beneath the subterranean level of S-4, this layer is made up of M.D.C. reinforced concrete, several layers of ablative armor, and over a thousand base-isolation earthquake-slides. But the most important among these features are the slides. During the 12 P.A. attack on Chi-Town, courtesy of the Federation of Magic, the original fortress city was nearly shaken apart and destroyed by several Earth Warlocks using an onslaught of Earthquake spells on the ground on which the foundation rested. This led to the development of architecture to counter this vulnerability. What came as a result of this was a foundation of multiple layers that can move independent of each other, allowing them to slide side to side apart from each other and the structure above. Because of this feature, which is utilized on all of the Coalition's fortress cities and many buildings in their towns, the Mega-Damage from the Earthquake spell is negated. Those in the city do experience some shaking, but the magnitude is significantly reduced. What they'd feel from an Earthquake attack spell would amount to a magnitude of 2.5 on the Richter scale. Enough to knock over some small loose items, but nowhere near life-threatening.

Another line of defense is the **A.M.I. (Anti-Magic Incur-sion) Ring**, which only a small handful of people in the entire Coalition States even know about. Though it is not widely known, in the legendary surprise attack by the Federation of Magic, their first wave came in the form of shock-troopers who attacked the people of the city...from the inside out! Using a plethora of Teleport: Superior spells to bypass the walls (enabled by a little covert scouting), they put a battalion of mercenary marauders into the heart of Chi-Town's population centers (the spell's spatial-warping nature allows it to ignore the normal rules that prevent other magicks from penetrating enclosed structures). Their mission was to cause chaos and inflict as many civilian casualties as possible, tying up the humans' resources and serving as a diversion while the second wave attacked from outside the city walls. Thousands upon thousands died as a result of this vulnerability in the city's defenses. And even for decades after the brutal Campaign of Blood that followed, this remained a weakness that scores of the Coalition's enemies took advantage of, sometimes causing catastrophic amounts of damage and loss of life. It wasn't until 59 P.A. that a secret research think-tank within the CS finally discovered a

way to put an end to these teleported attacks. With a little “outside consulting” (some suspect with the Vanguard), the anti-magic scientists of what would later be considered to be the infancy of the Rift Control Study Group figured out a way to generate an energy field that resonates on the psychic plane and acts as technologically-based circle of protection. Even though they didn’t (and still don’t) fully understand how the thing works, they did know that it functioned as advertised, and that was good enough. Needless to say, this discovery changed everything. Using this breakthrough they embarked on the secret construction of a gigantic ring surrounding the entire city, but buried thirty feet (9.1 m) underground. The project was spun to the public as nothing more than an expansion of the city’s sewage pipe system, and nobody ever thought the wiser. Even most of the people on the project didn’t suspect a thing. The moment the A.M.I. Ring went online, half of all attempts to get into the city with teleports that otherwise would have worked, *failed instead*. The same was true of other supernatural means of gaining entry, including those in Astral form, Psi-Ghosts, those using 4th dimensional powers, non-corporeal Entities, and even those attempting to Remotely View the city’s innards. Over the years, the system’s efficiency has risen to an impressive 95%! And of those that do successfully get in, the system sends an alarm to the appropriate authorities (including the NTSET) with the general location of where the intruder appeared. Since the system’s remarkable implementation at Chi-Town, A.M.I. Rings have become standard features for all Coalition fortress cities and major bases, all secretly installed by members of the RCSG using various mundane pretenses. And if that weren’t enough, most cities have multiple sets of rings, one inside the other in elaborate, crop-circle-like formations for added security. No two cities’ setups are the same. New Chillicothe, for instance, has three large, concentric circles inside one another, and ten smaller circles dispersed between the lines of those, with six just inside the main outer ring and four more between the two inner rings. This is considered to be a “light security” arrangement. Chi-Town’s and Fort Laredo’s “maximum security” setups have an elaborate matrix of more than a hundred rings. Not only do the Fort Laredo rings help keep the bad guys out, but they also help prevent the test subjects from escaping from the secret research base.

Game Mechanics Note: After normal rolls to determine a spell’s or power’s failure, if any, a roll of a “*Natural 20*” on a 1D20 will allow the intruder to bypass the outermost A.M.I. Ring, gaining entry to one of the outer areas of the city just inside the first ring. Roll again for each ring in the way, depending on how deep into the city one is trying to get. Any roll of a 1-19 will result in the caster, psychic, or Entity being stopped dead cold and bounced 2D10x100 yards/meters out from the city’s outer perimeter ring and landing somewhere out in the ‘Burbs! It is this massive repulsive effect that boggles the minds of the materializing casters and weightless psychics more than anything else. All they know is something very wrong just happened and things did not go as planned, having that, “*What the hell just happened!*” expression on their faces.

The ADC’n’C Building is where the fort’s defensive weapons are coordinated from. Because the CS only has so many people to fill their ranks, they made sure that their cities’ defenses could be operated by just a few, leaving the rest available to go out and engage the enemy straight on. Fort Laredo’s sys-

tem is no different. Consequently, much of their defenses are fully automated while receiving the benefit of human input and strategy from those in the command and control building. And to the detriment of all who dare challenge the sovereignty of the Coalition’s cities, these automated systems are ever vigilant 24/7, are lightning fast on the draw, and fear nothing.

Located in the center of the Automated Defense Command and Control building, safe and sound down on level S-4, is where these defenses are coordinated from. At the core of the building and the system itself is an artificial intelligence super computer named J.C.K.3-J (or Jackie-J as she calls herself... yes, the computer has adopted a female persona) that continually monitors the sensor data gathered from the base’s numerous and redundant sensory systems. These systems include Aegis radar, CECS-7 telemetry, thermal-graphics, optical sensors (full spectrum) with image recognition and IFF systems, auditory systems that can hear and identify the sneeze of a hatchling dragon at 20,000 feet (6096 m), radio emissions detectors, analyzers & triangulators, and other systems that are too classified to mention. With all this cross-referenced data the super computer A.I. can tell the difference between an I.S.S. Old-Style Sam from a superficially identical SAMAS by the differences in the radio frequencies of its communications and radar, any transponder ID codes concealed in its radio or radar emissions, whether it is sharing any of its sensor data with those around it and the fort itself, squad icons and ID numbers painted on it, as well as any minute differences in the temperature at which its jets are burning. All this information is made available to the human officers there on duty along with recommendations from the computer, Jackie-J. From there it’s up to the top officer to either take time to have someone ward it off with a threat over the radio, fire a warning shot, or give the order to Jackie to open up and blow it out of the sky. However, in an emergency, and in the instances where there would be too little time for a judgement call or procedure, Jackie-J has the power and authority to open up and destroy anything she perceives as a threat to the base. Such instances include the detection of a stealth missile that closed in dangerously close before the optical sensors or thermo-graphics detected it, sneak attacks organized and launched from the surrounding forest at point-blank range, or perhaps an ancient dragon teleporting over the city to launch a terrorist style attack. This doesn’t happen very often, but when seconds count, Jackie has the entrusted autonomy and ability to act in less than a split second’s notice. And when she gives the order to fire, the computer will usually assign two to three weapons to every target because Jackie likes redundancy. Bigger and scarier targets will be given more attention, earning themselves ten to twenty weapon systems being trained on them.

Due to the limitations of science, Jackie cannot control all the weapon systems at once. The super computer could, but nowhere as efficiently as is needed. This limitation is not rooted in the Coalition’s quality of computers (they make some of the best in the world), but more so because of one simple principle. Light and electricity travel at the speed of light and no faster. In other words, in the time it would take remotely lock a weapon system on a target through miles of wires or fiber-optics, confirm that it is on target, and then send the command to fire, the target could have moved out from where the weapon was zeroed in at. This is more so true with small, fast-moving targets like SAMAS and similarly popular flying power armors.

To counter this limitation, each and every automated weapon system has its own A.I. brain equivalent in intelligence to a Skelebot and its own sensor package for targeting purposes. It is Jackie-J's job to give them the orders of if and when to fire and who to shoot at, like the General she is. As Jackie keeps track of what all is out there, she gives out target assignments to the thousands of individual weapon brains, which carry out her orders to the letter. The weapon brains in turn report back to Jackie if and when they have destroyed the assigned target, if the target has fled out of its effective range, or if it itself has been damaged or is out of ammo and can not carry out the assigned task. Of course, Jackie is well aware of what they will report before they call in with the update, but, again, Jackie likes redundancy.

In addition to the weapon brains, Jackie-J has control over a work force of over a battalion of Skelebots. These robots are used primarily as reloaders. Several of the weapon systems use munitions and require reloading. It is the job of these robots to bring ammunition up from storage and reload or exchange the magazines so the weapon brain can continue to fire as soon as possible. Using radio relays inside the fortress, Jackie can direct Skelebots as needed individually or in groups. And though their programming is geared towards their logistic task, they are equipped with CP-30 laser pistols (kept in shoulder holsters) that have been modified to accept their energy link for unlimited firepower. With a single order from Jackie, they can be sent to repel any intruder in the fortress. Also, unknown to all but a few, Jackie-J likes to keep around a platoon of her "personal" Skelebots near her person for self defense, just in case. But in the event that Jackie-J goes insane, is controlled by an outside force, or turns against the CS, the Skelebot workers can be destroyed with a self-destruct signal from the ADC'n'C building.

In the event that Jackie is down, damaged or somehow out of commission, the officer in command can give the order for some or all of the weapon brains to fire at will. This is not a good defense and is only done in an emergency. Even though the weapon brains can tell the difference between CS forces and others, they tend to fire on things closest to them and not take out the most dangerous targets first, as Jackie would have them do. However, in Jackie-J's years of service there has never once been a problem that took it off line.

Jackie-J also aids the RCSG scientists with their tests and studies, lending them her impressive computing and deductive powers. This is possible and not a distraction from her defensive duties because of the computer's ability to do over a billion tasks and programs simultaneously.

Note: Jackie-J is the standard model city defense computer for most of the Coalition's fortress cities. They differ only slightly as they are custom fit into the number and types of weapons and sensors at their command unique to each city. The very existence of these artificial intelligences is a highly guarded secret.

The following is a list of the most common weapons in the defense screen that dot the exterior walls. These weapons are typically too big to mount on a vehicle, and comparing them to normal vehicle weapons is like comparing a cannon on a tank to the cannon emplacements on the Maginot Line or the battleship Missouri. Also, these weapon systems are typical of those in use on other major military bases and the Coalition's fortress cities,

though their numbers may differ depending on the city's size. And remember, Fort Laredo is only a mid-sized outpost and much smaller than even the smallest of the Coalition's fortress cities. The bigger cities like Waukegan in the state of Chi-Town can have as many as twenty to fifty times as many weapons as listed here.

350mm Heavy Plasma Rocket Shell Cannons (4): These weapons are similar to those in the turrets of the Deathbringer APC except they are significantly larger and fire a projectile that is considerably more powerful out to much greater ranges. They are primarily used to engage ground targets that are a threat to the fort or Coalition interests before they can threaten the base or interest itself. However, the big guns can also be used to support military units in the field. The CSN is thinking about adapting these big guns for use on their capital ships for the anti-ship/monster and shore bombardment roles, since they have a much greater range than the C-406, don't require any expensive booster systems, and have an acceptable rate of fire. Fort Laredo has 4 of these cannons, one on each of its top level's four corners.

Primary Purpose: Long-Range Defense and Deterrence.

Secondary Purpose: Infantry Support Fire.

Mega-Damage: Does 1D4x100+100 M.D., plus everything within 125 feet (38 m) takes half damage (as normal), while everything out to 250 feet (76 m) takes one-quarter damage.

Rate of Fire: Twice per melee round, every 7.5 seconds.

Effective Range: 125 miles (200 km)!

Payload: Each cannon has an automated magazine that contains 120 rocket shells. A crew of Skelebot workers can bring up more shells from storage and reload the magazine in 30 minutes using specialized equipment. Under combat conditions, a double-sized work crew can keep the flow of munitions to the guns going non-stop.

CM-1000/2000/4000 Missile Launchers (32/8/4): These systems were made to send a wall of missiles towards the enemy and overwhelm any defenses. They come in three different varieties – the CM-1000 units fire short-range missiles, the CM-2000 fires medium-range missiles and the CM-4000 launchers fire long-range missiles. Fort Laredo has 32 CM-1000s, 8 CM-2000s, and 4 CM-4000s, with 8, 2, and 1 on each of its four sides respectively.

Primary Purpose: Short, Medium or Long-Range Defense (depending on the unit).

Secondary Purpose: Anti-Aircraft/Monster and Anti-Missile.

Mega-Damage: Varies by missile type. Most commonly used are Heavy HE, Plasma, for normal usage, Proton Torpedos for anti-air situations, and Fragmentation to counter damage-negating magic defenses like the spell "Impervious to Energy."

Rate of Fire: The CM-1000s can fire volleys of 1, 2, 4, 8, or 16 short-range missiles. CM-2000s can fire volleys of 1, 2, 4, 6, or 12 medium-range missiles, and CM-4000 units can fire volleys numbering up to 1, 2, 4, or 8 long-range missiles.

Effective Range: By missile type.

Payload: CM-1000 batteries have a magazine of 160 missiles, CM-2000 batteries have a magazine of 120 missiles, and the CM-4000 batteries have magazines that hold 80 missiles. Using

specialized equipment, a Skelebot work crew can change magazines in two minutes.

SPB-400 Super Particle Beam Cannons (24): These medium-range weapons were made with one goal in mind: to be able to blast *anything* out of the sky in as few shots as possible. Consequently, they are power-hungry cannons that have a greater emphasis on destructive power than rapid-fire capabilities. Each cannon is eighteen feet (5.5 m) long and weighs twelve tons, making them unsuitable for most vehicles. And even if they did mount the cannon on a tank or 'bot big enough (like a Skull Smasher or Grinning Skull MBT), the power demands would all but cripple the vehicle when the big gun fired, even if it had an extra nuclear power generator. Fort Laredo has 24 of these cannons, 6 on each of its four sides.

Primary Purpose: Medium-Range Defense.

Secondary Purpose: Anti-Everything!

Mega-Damage: 1D6x100 M.D. per blast!

Rate of Fire: Three times per melee round. Any faster and the thing begins to melt down! Given that, in an emergency the cannon can fire at the rate of 6 times per melee round. But at that pace it will be non-functional and completely useless after 60 seconds of sustained fire. Understandably, the *ONLY* time when Jackie will give the order for the weapon brains to fire at their self-destructive rate is if and when the final collapse of the city's defenses is imminent, when there's nothing to lose.

Effective Range: 15,000 feet (4,572 m).

Payload: Every SPB-400 weapons system has its own devoted heavy-duty nuclear power system, giving it unlimited firepower and a 20-year energy life.

TVP-60 Pulse Laser Batteries (28): In essence, these are the same common T-60 lasers found on vehicles such as the Mark 7 Slayer and CTX-50 Line Backer. However, the TVP versions are three times larger, have a superior range, and fire pulsed shots of 2 to 6 blasts at a time! Their size and tremendous power demand make them unsuitable for use on vehicles, but ideal for bases and fortress cities that have vast space and huge energy reserves. Fort Laredo has 28 of these cannons, 7 on each of its four sides.

Primary Purpose: Medium and Short-Range Defense.

Secondary Purpose: Anti-Aircraft and Anti-Missile.

Mega-Damage: A single shot does the usual 1D6x10 M.D., a dual-pulse blast inflicts 2D6x10 M.D., a triple-pulse blast does 3D6x10 M.D., a quadruple-pulse blast does 4D6x10 M.D., a quintuple-pulse blast does 5D6x10 M.D., and on its most powerful setting the cannon can fire a sextuple-pulse blast doing 6D6x10 M.D.! But note that the more powerful the shots get the longer the cannon has to cool down between each pulse.

Rate of Fire: The automated unit can fire up to 10 single shots per melee (best for when accuracy is deemed more important than firepower). Thereafter, cooling periods have to come into play, slowing the rate of fire a little more with each increment of power used by the weapon system. Using pulsed shots the cannon can fire 6 dual pulses per melee, 4 triple pulses, 3 quadruple pulses, 2 quintuple pulses, or 1 sextuple super blast.

Effective Range: Five miles (26,400 feet/8,046 m).

Payload: Every TVP-60 weapon system has its own devoted nuclear power system, giving it unlimited firepower and a 20-year energy life.

Quad-Laser Turrets (320): These point defense weapons are more or less a quartet of CP-40 pulse lasers bundled together to fire in unison. They are mainly used to take out airborne targets that get too close to the fort, but they are also excellent for engaging ground based targets that attempt to overtake the city, especially power armor and soldiers. All the other weapon systems can also engage ground based targets, but the quad-lasers were specifically designed for this purpose. Fort Laredo has 400 of these cannons, 100 on each of its four sides.

Primary Purpose: Point Blank and Short-Range Defense.

Secondary Purpose: Anti-Personnel.

Mega-Damage: 2D6x10+10 M.D. per quad-tri-pulse (or domo-decca-pulse)!

Rate of Fire: 10 quad-pulses per melee round.

Effective Range: 2,000 feet (610 m).

Payload: Effectively Unlimited.

C-420R Rail Gun Clusters (320): Inspired by the main guns of the Warbird Rocket Cycle, these turrets have three multi-barreled rail guns that fire in conjunction with devastating results. These weapons are considered to be essential to the defense of the city because some magically enhanced opponents are immune to energy weapons, even the SPB-400's all powerful super particle beam blast. However, kinetic attacks are another story and can rip such creatures of magic apart in seconds. This is why the CS armed forces usually carry a mixed assortment of energy and kinetic weapons, particularly Skelebots. Fort Laredo has 320 of these cannons, 80 on each of its four sides.

Primary Purpose: Short-Range Defense.

Secondary Purpose: Anti-Personnel.

Mega-Damage: 3D6x10 M.D. per burst of 120, 40 from each.

Rate of Fire: 7 triple bursts per melee round (the heavier motors and recoil suppression system slows it down by 30% compared to other systems).

Effective Range: 4,000 feet (1,219 m).

Payload: Each system has a large ammo drum that holds 180,000 rounds giving the guns 1,500 bursts! Enough for over 53 minutes of continuous combat! Using specialized equipment, a Skelebot work crew can replace the drum in two minutes if already on hand with a spare.

4. Level S-1: On this first subterranean level, most of the live "subjects" are kept and cared for. Creatures of all kinds are stored here in a zoo-like menagerie of sterilized torment. The reason why the RCSG keeps this zoo is because these creatures can channel magic at will through either some innate genetic memory and/or by biological design. This makes them very interesting on a scientific level because, in a manner of speaking, they are examples of how science can control magic through biology. And that is what the RCSG is all about, understanding and controlling magic through scientific means.

The specimens are kept in cages made of transparent ceramic M.D.C. walls (200 M.D.C. per wall) that have touch sensitive neural shockers that render them unconscious should they even brush up against the walls. Each cell has its own self-contained environment tailored to each specimen's biological needs, but this also serves as a means of curbing the use of magic. Those that are particularly dangerous are restrained with anti-magic prison armor (see **Rifts® Siege on Tolkien One**), and in the cases where even that is insufficient, the creatures are rendered

unconscious through a mixture of chloroform gas in their breathing air or a continuous debilitating neural charge that runs through the floor.

Though they have a wide variety of magic and supernatural creatures here that they use for experimentation, their prized subject is a Spectre called Subject M5-539387, more affectionately known as Billy Bob. Billy Bob's cage is a specially designed and crafted 20x20x20 foot (6x6x6 m) box that allows people to look in, but the Spectre can not see out. This negates the creature's ability to direct any of its powers at those beyond the one-way transparency. The inner walls of the cell are lined with telekinetic force fields produced by experimental CS Psionic machinery. The TK Force Field generators are still much too large and demanding for them to be used on vehicles, and too small to be used as a shield for a large complex like a fortress city or even a single building, but perfect to cover this large immobile cell. This is an essential part of the cell because without the barrier of psychic energy there, the Spectre could just escape through the astral plane. That they can't allow to happen because a significant portion of their breakthroughs have come at the expense of Billy Bob's manipulations.

In the South Wing of the level is the dissection rooms and morgue. This is a place of dread for the captives of level S-1's zoo. All of them, at one time or another, have put the pieces together to figure out what the South Wing is and what it means to be sent there, and their keepers make no secret of this. Knowing that makes them easier to control, more sedate, and much more cooperative. After a subject has lost its usefulness, has been used up, or becomes too uncontrollable, it gets sent to this area for scientists to see what they can discover from it postmortem. And though they can learn a lot through the dissection of the subjects, they much prefer to use live subjects because magic and P.P.E. flow much more readily through the living. However, this is a necessary facility that helps them to understand many things, including figuring out what the cause of death was on some experiments gone awry.

Up in the North Wing is where the data is collected and examined after the tests and experiments are conducted on the subjects while in their cages. The only testing that isn't done with the creatures secured in their cells is conducted with them sedated and unconscious and with a squad (or more) of security guards standing ready to blow it to pieces. However, most procedures can be performed with them in their cells through remote-controlled robotic tools and sensors.

Over in the West Wing of the level, there is a small but efficient medical emergency room with a staff trained in multi-species medical treatment procedures. This is so when accidents happen, be it a guard beating down a subject a little too hard, genuine mishaps, or the occasional suicide attempt, the subject can be treated and made healthy enough to undergo further tests and experiments. The many creatures of level S-1 see this as both a blessing and curse. It allows them to remain relatively healthy during their short to extended stay there, but it also robs them of their one means of escape – death.

5. Level S-2: This entire level is dedicated to the development of experimental machinery designed for but one purpose: to disrupt, absorb, or deflect magic energy! This area of science is a relatively new one that has yet to develop anything useful beyond laboratory conditions. However, the steps they have

made so far have been exceedingly inspired and show strong promise for the future.

The following is an assortment of some of the most promising devices and inventions that are being experimented with right here on Level S-2.

MAD-X229: Using the fundamentals of CS Psionic Machine tech (like those in WB: 12 Pyscape), the experimental Magic Absorption Device model X229 could prove to be a valuable weapon in a decade or two. Based off of extensive studies made on Psi-Stalker volunteers and their ability to siphon the P.P.E. off magicians or supernatural creatures, this device can suck out 2 P.P.E. from a person every second its beam is directed at the target. As usual, the target must be bleeding, even if it's just a pinprick, for the P.P.E. to be drawn out. Otherwise, the beam only gives the target a warm, tingly feeling and nothing more. The current version of this anti-magic weapon weighs 3 tons and is the size of a truck, making it unsuitable for even field tests.

LLED-X390: Using the sum of the advanced scientific data on P.P.E. and energy field interactions they "extracted" from many Neuron Beasts before their brains turned into slop, the RCSG has come up with this gem. The Ley Line Energy Dam X390 consists of a series of 100-foot (30.5 m) pillars spaced exactly 62.937 feet (19.18 m) apart along the half mile (800 m) width of a Ley Line. When activated, they make an energy field that can actually block the flow of energy and dam up the entire Ley Line, completely obstructing the flow of P.P.E. down the line! So far, they have been able to dam up a Ley Line for 0.1108 seconds, just long enough to see a brief flicker in the river of magic. After that brief period, the system overloaded and the pillars burned out and then exploded. The next generation of the LLED, the X392, is expected to have an operational life of a quarter second. Their long-term plan is to have a unit with an operational life span of one day in 50 years, and a unit that can dam a Ley Line indefinitely may be ready in a century.

YC-75 NPrB: This is the RCSG's greatest success to date, as well as their greatest controversy. Inspired by stories and D-Bee testimonies of normal men slaying dragons in other dimensions with much weaker ambient magic levels, the scientists of Level S-2 got the idea of finding a way to expel P.P.E. saturation from M.D.C. creatures of magic. The idea is that if they can be temporarily deprived of the energies that make them resilient to normal weapons, the monsters can be reverted to an extremely vulnerable state, reverted back into S.D.C. creatures. The Normalizing Psi-Rad Beam takes advantage of supernatural creatures' susceptibility to radiation, but also gives an extra oomph with a current of pure psionic energy. If hit with a beam from this heavy, tripod-mounted weapon the creature must make a save vs Lethal Poison. A failed save means the magically M.D.C. creature will be reverted to a more vulnerable S.D.C. state (M.D.C. x 100 = S.D.C.) for 1D4x4 seconds (up to one full melee round)! After the duration has expired, use the conversion equation in reverse to determine its remaining M.D.C. The S.D.C. reversion doesn't really help attackers do more damage, since the creature still has its equivalent M.D.C. in S.D.C., but there are a few other side effects of the beam. The creature loses its supernatural attributes, robbing it of its superior strength, so its bites and kicks do damage on the S.D.C. scale. Also, without its supernatural Physical Endurance, the loss of 1,000 S.D.C. in

one attack (only 10 M.D.) or more is an agonizing experience, making it lose initiative and one melee attack due to the shock to its system. And yes, creatures that have had all their P.P.E. expelled from them do NOT have any P.P.E. reserves to fuel magic, though other sources may still be tapped. This is also applicable to their I.S.P. and psychic powers. However, do note that the beam must strike the target's person, not any protective armor or a force field (if any), otherwise the beam does nothing (Called Shots can be used to bypass partial armor). Also, after any supernatural creature has gone through this ordeal, it has a temporary immunity to the beam's effects, giving it an additional +6 to save vs Lethal Poison against this attack for a number of hours equal to the points of supernatural P.E. the victim has. Should it fail to save again, the creature will receive another +6 (+12 total) to save thereafter for the duration. This further limits this weapon's practicality, making it less than the war winner the CS High Command hoped it would be.

To give the beam its psionic energy burst, much of its internal components are made of a combination of crystals and circuitry, making this technology dangerously close to Techno-Wizardry! Also, in addition to a new-styled energy canister (10 shots), the YC-75 NPrB requires the user to be psychic and pump in 16 I.S.P. (or 8 P.P.E.!) per shot, thus making it even more related to TW weapons. Despite the monumental success this experimental weapon represents, it is dependant on principles that are precariously close to TW tech, which is making the CS High Command nervous and uncomfortable with its deployment. However, the RCSG is quick to remind them that that is the purpose of their organization: to understand magic and the paranormal, and define it in purely scientific quantifiable terms. Everything in this weapon has been proven to be based in science and not mumbo jumbo magic. Still, their less learned superiors are leery.

Future generations of this weapon in the distant planning stages, which are expected to advance once every decade or two, will be far more potent than this prototype. It is hoped that the final and ultimate version of this weapon will be able to impose a complete S.D.C. reversion where not only does the target get robbed of its M.D.C. and supernatural attributes, but also gets reverted to its Palladium World S.D.C. score, which is significantly less than the straight M.D.C. to S.D.C. conversion. Such a weapon would give the CS the power to topple beings who would call themselves gods!

6. Level S-3: The entire level of S-3 is dedicated to the pursuit of pure research in regards to energy fields in all their varying forms. Using late 21st century unified field theorems and "extrapolated" scientific principles from aliens from technically advanced worlds, everything from photons and chi, to tachyons and P.P.E., to gravity and I.S.P. are experimented with to see how they interact with each other. Down here everything is pure science and theoretical work that won't bear fruit for decades or longer. The level of science this Think Tank is working with is equal to that of the Kittani and beyond, and in time, will help produce wonders that will outshine anything the technologically-stunted Atlantian apes ever had. But for now, the vast majority of their findings have no applications in the real world and only hold academic scientific interest.

7. Level S-4: In the deepest level of the complex is where the most sensitive equipment and facilities are kept. To give the

level an added degree of security there is a 40 foot (12.2 m) stratum of dirt and rock between it and level S-3. That way, if the rest of the base is blasted to the point of collapse, an invader could be fooled into thinking that there are only three basement levels to the base. It being 190 feet (58 m) below the surface enables them to keep this level secure and safe from all but the most powerful of surface attacks. In case of attack, the scientists can come down here and remain safe from all harm inside one of the many bunkers. The bunkers are made of triple layer ablative armor and are stocked with emergency reserves, portable back-up generators, radios, weapons, medical supplies, and food and water for up to 1,000 people for up to nine months. Also on this level is the base's main nuclear power generators which give them more energy than a base ten times Fort Laredo's size normally has.

The hub of the level is occupied by a fortified building where their super computer Jackie-J resides. Like other bases, this J.C.K. series 3 computer coordinates the actions of the automated defenses like a General over her troops. But in addition to that, Jackie-J has other duties that make good use of her computing abilities. Scientists on levels S-2 and S-3 are all given headsets that allow them to talk to Jackie and ask her questions. In turn, Jackie can provide them with data from other studies and projects, run complex mathematical formulas, project likely outcomes to experiments, and much, much more. Because of this scientific supportive role, Jackie has developed the knack of carrying on over a hundred coherent conversations simultaneously and can do so while performing her other duties at the same time.

The entire East Wing of the level is occupied with a fully functional, state-of-the-art hospital nicknamed Mo' Side Hospital by the troops. The hospital has emergency, trauma, and surgical areas to handle any situation, complete with bionics, cybernetics and bio-synthetic facilities. This allows them to attend to the wounds any of the soldiers may incur in the line of duty, as well as to attend to scientists hurt because of an experiment gone wrong. For recovery periods and those who have to say for any duration, there is a total of 120 dual occupancy rooms and 30 private rooms patients can stay in.

Doctor General Thomas Yoshida

Doctor Yoshida's experience on the world of Karra has left him a hard and diligent man, making him the perfect man for the position of commanding officer of Ft. Laredo and the RCSG. After a 13 year sabbatical, which allowed him to get the psychiatric help he needed after his ordeal at the hands of the Sah'Karren and Sha'lee, Yoshida returned to his post in the RCSG and has been a devout researcher and field scientist ever since. In his following 39 years of service to the CS and its scientific pursuits, Yoshida has quickly risen to the rank of Major General and has been placed in command of the entire RCSG. However, though he could easily move into a more opulent living space and office in Chi-Town, he prefers to stay in the more meagerly adorned accommodations of Fort Laredo where he can still take part in the fieldwork and studies.



Race: Human (Japanese).

Alignment: Unprincipled, with Diabolical leanings towards the supernatural.

Attributes: I.Q. 23, M.E. 13, M.A. 17, P.S. 8, P.P. 10, P.E. 13, P.B. 11, Spd 12.

Hit Points: 58, S.D.C.: 44.

Height: 5 feet, 9 inches (1.75 m), **Weight:** 143 lbs (64 kg).

Age: 74

Description: Thomas Yoshida is a man with classic Japanese facial characteristics. Thanks to CS medicine, though he is 72 years of age, he only looks as though he were in his early 40's. Yoshida has never taken any extraordinary measures to keep himself in shape, usually relying on a lot of walking for his exercise. Because of this, he has a small, underdeveloped musculature on his small framed body and is not the greatest of fighters.

Disposition: Yoshida has not cracked a smile since 63 P.A. when he finally got home after his ordeal. All his humor and childish behaviorisms have become dormant and have yet to awaken to this day. All he is capable of emoting is minor satisfaction, sadness, wrath, and fear. Though his life-altering experience is 47 years gone, he is still terrified of dark and warm, humid places. Despite that, he has come to terms with his past and stopped living there a long time ago, though he still daydreams about sending a few super nukes through the Devil's Gate for a little payback. Even so, the man can't even sleep unless the lights are at least dim and the thermostat in his room set to a brisk 60 degrees F. On a professional level,

Dr. Yoshida is a patient man who takes things in stride, never getting too upset over setbacks and failures. He is in this for the long run, and is more than willing to wait and work for another 100 years to accomplish his and the RCSG's goals.

Experience Level: 13th level RCSG Scientist.

Skills of Note: Speaks and is Literate in American, Spanish, Dragonese, Euro, Sah'Karren, Sha'lee, Faerie Speak, Gobbely, Creole and Demongogian, all at 98%, Lore: Geomancy & Ley Lines 98%, Lore: Demons & Monsters, D-Bees, Magic, and Psychics, all at 98%, Chemistry 98%, Biology 98%, Botany 98%, Chemistry: Analytical 98%, Criminal Science & Forensics 98%, Field Surgery 97%, Pathology 98%, and Medical Doctor 98%/98%.

Combat Skills: Hand to Hand: Basic, Kick Attack: 1D6 S.D.C., Critical Strike on a 19-20, Body Flip/Throw, Critical Strike or KO from behind. W.P. Energy Rifle, Handguns, and Heavy Military Weapons.

Attacks Per Melee: 6

Combat Bonuses: +6 with energy rifles & handguns, +4 with heavy military weapons, +4 to roll with punch/fall/impact, +2 to strike, +2 hand to hand damage, +3 to parry, +3 to dodge.

Preferred Weapons: Dr. Yoshida feels safer with his trusty, dusty TX-5 Pump Pistol at his side or within reach. He used to walk around with a C-14 Firebreather and a bandoleer of plasma grenades, but he's become a bit less insecure in his old age.

Cybernetics: Has a Bio-System left forearm and hand due to a suicide attempt with a Vibro-Knife while in a psychotic depression many years ago.

Psionics: Minor, with the powers of Sense Time and Total Recall. The latter of which is a power he wishes he never had.

Allies of Note: His chief of security, Colonel Bell, and his superiors who will come to his defense due to his exemplary work and loyalty to the CS. Others under his command will also come to his aid due to him being a competent and wise leader.

Enemies of Note: In his opinion, potentially everyone. In reality, very few. Those who know of his work inside the CS have the highest of security clearances and believe in his work. Those who know of his work outside of the CS tend to despise him and are either in a cell on level S-1 or on the run from a CS death squad. In either case, they don't tend to live long.

Colonel Logan Bell

Ever since the accident that led to Dr. Yoshida's abduction through the Devil's Gate Rift, all matters of security have been headed up by members of the Coalition's Special Forces to ensure nothing goes wrong. The current head of security and defensive operations of the base for the past two years is a hard man named Logan Bell. And under his watch, not a single scientist has gone missing nor has there been a single security breach of note. This is because Bell is meticulous and thorough in all of his duties and demands the same level of attention and competence from his underlings.

Years and years ago, Bell started out as a CS Ranger and knew every square inch of Minnesota by the age of 23. He and



his squad were most commonly deployed as monster hunters, tracking down creatures who terrorized the Chi-Town farmlands and retreated to the west. But after one mission where he was the sole survivor of a horrific trap, Bell decided he had enough and quit, but it didn't take long before he got restless and reentered the military. When he did, Bell decided to apply for the Special Forces to see if he had what it took to be in the elite branch of the CS military. He graduated in the top 10% of his class and turned out to be among the best the Coalition had ever had.

Bell proved his worth fighting a guerrilla war against Tolkeen, years before the official conflict began, during the war against magic forest commandos, and after during the clean up stage to take out those who were planning small unit terrorist actions against the CS. He and his team were awarded many times over for excellence in the field and for going well above and beyond the call of duty. But after having fought in the forests of Minnesota for over ten years, Bell decided to put in for easier and less hazardous work where he would have a warm bed to sleep in most of the time. So he put in his application for the Emperor's elite security guard and crossed his fingers. Bell's application was denied, but not for a lack of qualifications. Others had their eyes on him and felt his services would have better use for their top-secret programs.

Informants working for both Doctor General Yoshida of Fort Laredo and Doctor General Rita Koniff of Sector Zeta, notified them of the Colonel's desire to get into security work. Before the pixels on his paperwork were dry, both of them were fighting over this extraordinarily talented man. Both could see that

he would make a first rate head of security and would be very useful for other classified roles as well. After a fierce battle of favors, string pulling, and payoffs, it was Dr. Yoshida who won out. And to date, Yoshida has been very pleased with his decision in placing his confidence in Bell and his talents.

Race: Human (mixed heritage).

Alignment: Principled (a good man who has done evil things for "the better good").

Attributes: I.Q. 16, M.E. 14, M.A. 25, P.S. 20, P.P. 20, P.E. 22, P.B. 13, Spd 27.

Hit Points: 91, S.D.C.: 83.

Height: 6 feet, 5 inches (1.9 m), **Weight:** 242 lbs (109 kg; and not an ounce of fat).

Age: 54, but looks like he is in his early 30s.

Description: Bell is a big man who looks like he could rip the arms off a grizzly bear. Having a mixed bloodline, Logan has the best of all worlds going for him. His eyes are ocean blue and offset by his glossy black, wavy hair that he's let grow out to a medium-short length that can be styled as he pleases. But since Bell's had a buzz cut for the majority of his life, his hair is untrained and must be held in its style with mousse and hair spray. His large framed body is highly developed and rippling with bulky muscles, wrapped up in a medium olive/tanned skin. And his impressive stature of 6 feet, 5 inches is only surpassed by his ruggedly handsome face that is squarish in shape, set with a small, narrow, hawk-like nose, squared jaw and manly chin, and narrow, naturally squinting and mean-looking eyes. In conjunction with Bell's presence and confidence, the man carries himself with pride and conviction.

Disposition: Logan demands absolute perfection from the men and women who serve under him. This does not mean that that's what he expects to get though and accepts "good enough," but not an ounce of effort less. In fact, that has been his credo for as long as he can remember, "Good enough is good enough." He is happy with a 95% effort (plus or minus 5%) and results, so long as it is good enough for the job at hand. This degree of accepted error has allowed him to do a near perfect job with a minimum of stress and allows him to avoid being an annoying perfectionist. Thusly, Bell is an easygoing man who is not unduly abrasive to his underlings and coworkers and is well liked by all in general. However, Bell does have a slow-burning temper that makes him a bit obsessive and coldly focused like the killing machine he was trained to be. Those who earn his wrath *will* eventually be killed or meet an unfortunate fate. Maybe not immediately, maybe not even in a year's time, but eventually, they all do. Professionally speaking, Bell is a dispassionate man who is impersonal, methodical, and the consummate authority at what he does.

Experience Level: 5th level CS Ranger and 14th level CS Special Forces!

Skills of Note: (MOS is in Espionage) Radio: Basic 98%, Radio: Scramblers 98%, Speaks American and Gobblely 98%, Land Navigation 98%, Intelligence 98%, Lore: Demons & Monsters 98%, Wilderness Survival 98%, Detect Ambush 98%, Detect Concealment 98%, Disguise 70%, Escape Artist 80%, Forgery 50%, Pick Locks 60%, Sniper, Tracking 98%,

Camouflage 98%, Trap Construction 91%, Trap/Mine Detection 98%, Dancing 98%, Play Musical Instrument 98%, Hunting, First Aid 98%, Identify Plants & Fruits 98%, Preserve Food 98%, Skin & Prepare Animal Hides 98%, Track Animals 98%, Pilot: Hovercraft 98%, Jet Pack 98%, and Automobile 98%.

Combat Skills: Hand to Hand: Commando, Boxing, RPA: Elite with all SAMAS based power armors and 11th level ability with CS triple-digit ground power armor, Paired Weapons, Body Flip/Throw, Body Block/Tackle, Backward Sweep Kick, Disarm, Karate Kick: 2D6 S.D.C., Automatic Dodge, Critical Body Flip/Throw, Jump Kick, Death Blow on a 18-20, Automatic Body Flip/Throw. W.P.: Energy pistol, Energy rifle, Heavy M.D. weapons, Rifles, Blunt, and Knife.

Attacks Per Melee: 8 normally, 13 in his Striker Sam or 12 in his Terror Trooper PA!

Combat Bonuses: +7 to strike with energy pistols, energy rifles & rifles, +5 with heavy M.D. weapons, +5 with blunt weapons & knives, +2 on Aimed shots (Sniper skill), +4 on initiative, +4 to Automatic Body Flip/Throw, +6 to roll with punch/fall/impact, +3 to strike, +9 hand to hand damage, +10 to parry (+15 with blunt or knives), +10 to dodge, +2 to disarm, +5 to save vs Horror Factor, +6 to Automatic Dodge.

Preferred Weapons: When out of the base, Bell is sure to be in a suit of Striker SAMAS armed with a CTT-P40. Other than that there is no way to distinguish him from all the other Special Forces SAMs that fly from the base. In and near the base, Bell uses a paired set of C-5 Pump Pistols that he swings around almost as good as a Gunslinger. On his utility belt he keeps six speed loaders full of normal TX explosive rounds and two filled with Neural Slugs. His body armor is a standard suit of CA-7 armor, but has no name or rank on the outside so he can not be singled out.

At times Bell has been known to use a 7.62 mm Remington 700 bolt-action rifle with a digital X40 telescopic, thermographic, laser targeting sniper scope (+3 to strike, plus a +4 Aim bonus and +7 from W.P. skill for a total of +14!). He uses this attack for sniper work against soft targets like people's heads when they take off their helmets, and other ideal targets of opportunity. When he does, he uses WI-10 Ramjet rounds that do 1 M.D./3D6x10 S.D.C. and have maximum range of 6,000 feet/1829 m (twice that of normal rounds).

Cybernetics: Amplified Hearing, Clock Calendar, Gyro-Compass, Oxygen Storage Cell, and Toxic Filter. Bell preferred to use an optics band over the option of getting an cybernetic eye.

Psionics: None.

Allies of Note: His entire security team is true and devoutly loyal to him. Others, like Doctor Major Snow and his boss, Doctor General Yoshida, also enjoy his company and would go to bat for him.

Enemies of Note: None who believe him to still be alive.



Doctor Major Victoria Snow

By all her colleagues, Dr. Snow is considered to be the most talented mind in the field of magic energy as it relates to other forms of energy and biological life forms other than human. Her understanding of P.P.E. as a natural, untapped form of energy for technological use is unparalleled in the Coalition States and borders on the supernatural. However, even she has no idea how to convert magic energy into electric or kinetic energy to produce any usable mechanical work products. The only known way to do that so far is through the illegal craft of Techno-Wizardry, which Snow has dabbled in... all in the name of science, of course. However, unlike real Techno-Wizards, Victoria examines every element of what goes into the techno-magic hybrid machinery to see how they work instead of taking parts of it on faith. Whereas a Techno-Wizard might use magic spells in the creation of his devices without being able to explain how or why they work, Dr. Snow stops to investigate the cause and effect of everything that goes into the machinery and circuitry. Everything from the gemstones, to how they absorb the imprints of the spells that make them function, from how they store P.P.E. or psychic I.S.P., to how the energy is transferred through the device to produce the desired effect. She also studies how the crystals dialogue with the technological circuitry even though there is no rational explanation for that thus far as to how they do it. And though there still is much that she does not understand, every day she gets that much closer to the proverbial

Holy Grail. So far, her work has allowed the researchers and developers on level S-2 to create the controversial YC-75 NPRB with a lot of her direct help.

Victoria started her career as a member of Chi-Town's core of scientists reverse engineering alien tech that soldiers found in the hands of their enemies. And though she was very good at her job, Victoria felt like she was only seeing half the picture. In time, she became discontented with her labors and was getting fed up. One day, after 12 years on the job, a TW Firebolt Musket found its way onto her workstation. This weapon intrigued her more than anything before, mainly because for the life of her she couldn't figure out how the darn thing worked! Not even with her well-honed Psi-Tech powers. Eager to find the answers, this sent her on a private mission to learn more.

After taking a leave of absence from her work at Chi-Town, Snow made her way north to New Lazlo and hooked up with a small Techno-Wizard workshop. It was there that she slowly learned how to craft the amazing TW machines and forge their potentially limitless applications. After she picked up all the basics she could from her fine and kind teachers, she packed up her bags and went further north to the Mecca of Techno-Wizards, the heart of the enemy, and the place no CS citizen has any place in, the great kingdom of Lazlo. Once there, it only took her a few weeks to find employment under a master Techno-Wizard who went by the name of Kabish Zheim. There, Snow made some of the most notorious kinds of TW weapons, armors, devices and vehicles used by D-Bee kind and "scum of the Earth, race-traitor sympathizers." It took all of Victoria's strength to do it, but she tamped down her bile and greeted them all with a firm handshake and friendly smile. But her years of suffering by their presence was all worthwhile because at the end of every day she got to watch the master at work, allowing her to learn some of the most secret and guarded tricks of the trade. Every now and then, Kabish would even invite her over and gave her some hands on instruction. After eight years in Lazlo, Victoria had acquired all the knowledge the master Techno-Wizard had to teach her, and it was time for her to move on.

Victoria decided it was time to go home to her old job and try to apply her new trade to her labors. However, things didn't go quite as planned. Upon reaching the gates and presenting her CS ID card, she was arrested on the spot. The Dog Boys on duty instantly noticed that her P.P.E. levels were much higher than a non-spell caster's should have been, even a master psychic's like herself. By day's end she was tried and convicted of being a magician and for consorting with demons and monsters, and by morning was on a transport destined for a hard labor prison camp. As she sat on the uncomfortable bench of the transport, shackled to the floor and clad in anti-magic restraints, Snow was sure that the remainder of her life would be unpleasant in the extreme. Her only comfort and solace came from the knowledge that her life wouldn't linger on for much longer than a few years in the barbaric prison, or so she hoped.

Upon arrival she was surprised to not be welcomed by a pack of snarling Dog Boys, but instead by a man in uniform with a Rift Control Study Group patch on his sleeve. As her shackles were being removed the man explained that he was sorry that one of his associates couldn't get to her before she went through the indignity of having to endure her trial and prison processing.

Before Snow could ask any questions, the man told her that she had exactly three choices before her at that point. 1) She could accept his invitation to enroll as a member of the RCSG and become an intricate part of humanity's future; 2) she could go to prison and serve her sentenced 50 years to life; or 3) she could elect to be painlessly shot through the head then and there. Given her options, choice number one seemed to be the way to go.

As it turned out, her forced enlistment and stationing at Fort Laredo let Victoria do exactly what she wanted to do in the first place: experiment on TW machines to see how they use, store, and work with the energies pumped into them. Using her Psi-Tech powers to understand all there is to know about how the machine aspects work, and her Techno-Wizardry skills to see what is happening with the unconventional components, Dr. Snow *is just now beginning* to understand how everything works together and why. In addition to that, Victoria's RCSG scientific training helps her to see how the paranormal energy flows from one component to another and why. After *another* decade of work or two at Fort Laredo's unique labs, she is confident that she will have the answers that the RCSG is looking for. However, as much as her superiors love the work she is doing for them, she and they disagree on a few points. For starters, they see her relatively fast timetable for the project being a bit ambitious and unrealistic. They feel that a fifty-year timetable is more pragmatic. Another place they disagree is, where the majority of the RCSG has come to believe the notion of magic and psionics as being the qualities of the fifth and sixth dimensions, Victoria thinks otherwise. Dr. Snow believes that the fundamentals of so-called "magical physics" actually extend from the fifth spatial dimension all the way up to the 11th! She has little to no evidence to accredit her claims, but everything she's learned so far tells her that the power of magic draws upon everything the universe has to offer on *all* the levels it has to offer.

Race: Human (Caucasian).

Alignment: Anarchist with Miscreant leanings when it comes to her work.

Attributes: I.Q. 22, M.E. 20, M.A. 10, P.S. 9, P.P. 14, P.E. 14, P.B. 15, Spd 18.

Hit Points: 56, S.D.C.: 39.

Height: 5 feet, 6 inches (1.67 m). **Weight:** 135 lbs (60.75 kg).

Age: 54, but looks like she's in her mid 20s.

Description: Having picturesque beauty, long blond hair, hazel brown eyes, a slender figure and a fair complexion, Victoria is more attractive on the outside than she is on the inside. Her charming appearance has helped her slide by a few minor infractions as a youth, but do little for her in the intellectual think tank called Level S-3. However, her comeliness has permitted her to woo one very important, powerful and dangerous man, Colonel Logan Bell, head of security and all Special Forces operations at Fort Laredo.

Disposition: Victoria Snow has always been a bit of a renegade. She seldom plays by the rules and is unwilling to let the opinions of others get in her way. In the pursuit of her controversial brand of science, Snow uses spell casters, psychics, and creatures of magic to produce magic energies, by force if necessary, for her to conduct her experiments. At heart, she isn't an evil person, though she does get carried away when it

comes to her work. Victoria has always been a risk taker and an ambitious learner, which is why she is so proficient in her many crafts. At the core of her being she is wild at heart and loves to defy authority. But at the same time she recognizes the fact that she needs to behave and be productive so she doesn't end up in the prison she was sentenced to ten years ago. Even so, Victoria doesn't mind because the opportunity of working at Fort Laredo allows her to pursue her interests in earnest.

Experience Level: 12th level Psi-Tech, 9th level Techno-Wizard, and 7th level RCSG Scientist!

Skills of Note: Speaks and is literate in American, Techno-Can and Dragonese 98%, Techno-Wizardry Engineering 98%, Basic Electronics 98%, Electrical Engineer 98%, Basic Mechanics 98%, Weapon Engineer 98%, Biology 73%, D-Bee & Alien Biology 68%, Demon & Monster Biology 63%, Cross-Species Pathology 83%, Lore: Geomancy & Ley Lines 73%, Multi-Dimensional Physics 42%, Unified "M" String Mechanics 49%, and Theoretical Mana/String Harmonic-Manipulation Engineering 32%! *Note: As it can be clearly seen in this skill list, Doctor Snow has been given access and been allowed to learn fields of science that are completely unheard of beyond the Coalition's most secret think tanks. This is but another example of the riches of information the CS is withholding from the world, gathered from Pre-Rifts archives and developed on their own.*

Combat Skills: Hand to Hand: Basic, RPA: Elite with everything found on the North American continent! Kick Attack: 1D6 S.D.C., Critical Strike on a 19-20, Body Flip/Throw. W.P.: Energy Pistol, Energy Rifle, Handguns, and Blunt.

Attacks Per Melee: 6 normally or with psychic powers, 11 with flying PA & light ground 'bots, and 10 with ground-based PA, heavy vehicular 'bots & heavy ground 'bots.

Combat Bonuses: +6 to strike with energy pistols, energy rifles & handguns, +5 with blunt, +4 to roll with punch/fall/impact, +2 to strike, +2 hand to hand damage, +3 to parry (+8 with a blunt weapon in hand), +3 to dodge.

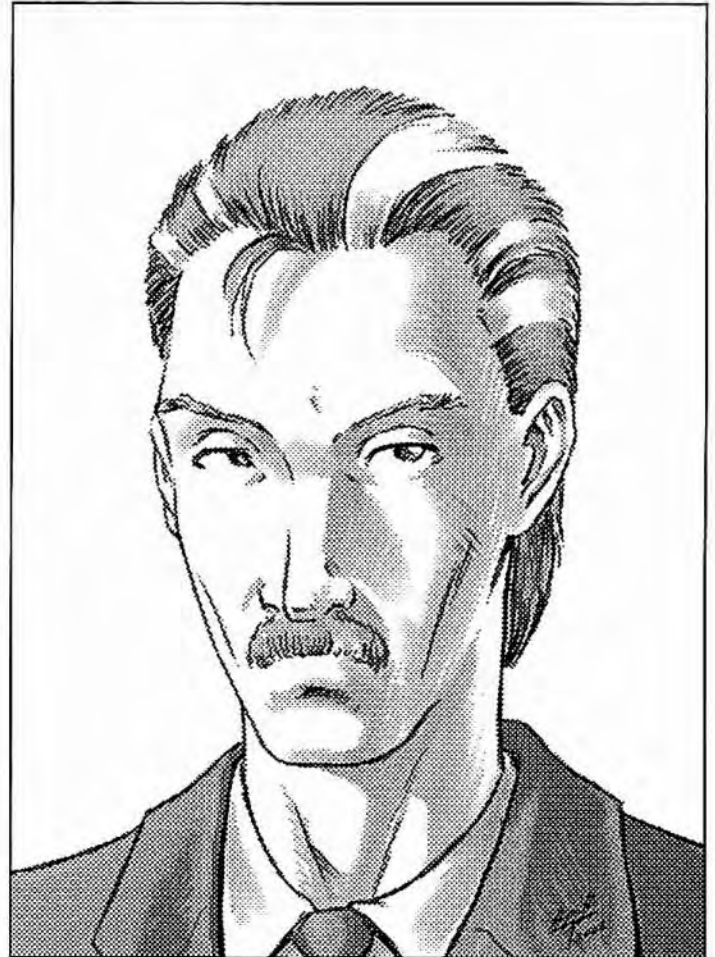
Preferred Weapons: Victoria's favorite weapon is a chrome-plated, highly polished, old-fashioned C-18 because she likes its cosmetic styling over the newer, more powerful weapons the CS has to offer. On the rare occasions she goes into the field, she likes the styling and capabilities of the Glitter Boy Killer. She has her own personal suit that she has personally "modified" with God-knows-what and her superiors aren't asking. All anyone knows about it is she does all its maintenance and the Dog Boys on base don't like its smell. Other than that, and her powerful psionic abilities, she is unarmed and unarmored most of the time. But then again, that's what bodyguards are for.

Cybernetics: None.

Psionics: Master Psionic Psi-Tech. Has the powers of Telemechanics, Machine & Electrical Diagnosis, Soup-Up Machines, Mental Link to Machines, Telemechanic Mental Operation, Telemechanic Paralysis, Telemechanic Possession, Machine Ghost, Object Read, Speed Reading, Total Recall, See Aura, Sense Magic, Mask I.S.P. & Psionics, Mind Block, See the Invisible, Sense Dimensional Anomaly, Telekinesis, Alter Aura, Impervious to Cold & Fire, Night Vision, Electrokinetics, Mind Bolt, Psychic Body Field, and TK Force Field. I.S.P.: 220.

Allies of Note: Colonel Logan Bell has had a thing for her the day he came to Fort Laredo and has been pursuing her romantically for over a year. With so much as an innuendo she can have him do just about anything she wants, from getting her a snack from the food court on level three to snapping the neck of anyone who so much as annoys her. At Victoria's request Bell has had a team of four Special Forces bodyguards assigned to her who function as her personal goon squad. Also, her superior officers often look the other way on her infractions of CS law because of the outstanding work she does, which gives her the freedom to do as she pleases.

Enemies of Note: Every subject she has strapped to a table so it can "donate" some raw P.P.E. or I.S.P. for her research would love to see her dead. However, there is little they can do to her in such a controlled environment, and only a very small few have even seen her face and none know her name.



Doctor Lt. Colonel Franklin Forrester

Toiling away and conducting his experiments in the North Wing of level S-1 in lab D-13, Franklin is the head doctor in charge of inventing technological applications from the data he and the level's staff collects. Known for his controversial approach and results, the good Doctor Forrester has come to an epiphany regarding his area of study. Pain equals P.P.E.! He has discovered that the emotional torture of sentient creatures en-

ables his equipment to detect their personal P.P.E. and auras so they can be further studied and analyzed. To this end, he has instituted many methodical ways to cause emotional distress in his subjects. This can range from random electroshock treatments while allowing the other subjects to watch, using mind altering chemicals designed to bring out anger, sorrow, and a feeling of great loss, as well as simple conversational methods with a few choice props. His colleagues have called his approach Operation: Deep Hurting in jest, though even they are a bit sickened by the way he conducts himself with the valuable test subjects. Regardless, he gets results, and that keeps him in control of his own little world. Needless to say, Franklin is not a kind man and enjoys his work far too much.

Race: Human.

Alignment: Diabolic.

Attributes: I.Q. 18, M.E. 8, M.A. 24, P.S. 7, P.P. 9, P.E. 8, P.B. 10, Spd 14.

Hit Points: 43, S.D.C.: 22.

Height: 5 feet, 11 inches (1.79 m). **Weight:** 129 lbs (58 kg) soaking wet!

Age: 48 (looks like he's in his early 30s)

Description: Franklin is scrawny looking man with a pasty complexion and an odd looking, narrow face. His hair is medium length, brown with a few white streaks and wildly out of control. He also sports a mustache that also has a single white streak in it that is slightly off center. And if that weren't bad enough, he also has a penchant for the color green. Everything he wears is green, from his lab coat and wrist-watch, to his socks and underwear.

Disposition: Franklin is a petty man with control issues. He is a sadist who takes great pleasure in what he does and gets a sense of accomplishment out of the scientific results his cruelty extracts. In his private life he enjoys being pampered and doing feminine things like getting a facial or having his feet rubbed. Though, even then he can be an insensitive and callous man who takes delight in making others feel bad. If not for a certain Colonel Bell keeping tabs on him from time to time, Franklin would eventually do or say the wrong thing to the wrong person and get his head violently removed.

Experience Level: 10th level Rogue Scientist, 5th level RCSG Scientist.

Skills of Note: Speaks and is literate in American and Euro 98%, Psychology 98%, Criminal Psychology 98%, Biology 98%, Interrogation Techniques 79%, Torture Methodology 74%, Medical Doctor 98%, Read Sensory Equipment 98%, Chemistry 98%, and Lore: Movies & Video Entertainment 54%.

Combat Skills: No Hand to Hand skills, but does keep in shape (laughably) with his Boxing exercises. W.P. Energy Pistol.

Attacks Per Melee: 3

Combat Bonuses: +5 to strike with energy pistols, +2 to parry, +2 to dodge, and +1 to roll with punch/fall/impact.

Preferred Weapons: Knowing that someday he is bound to say the wrong thing to the wrong person, Doctor Forrester keeps a concealed Wilk's 210 pocket pistol on his person for protection 24/7, and he sleeps with an NG-LP 45 under his pillow.

Cybernetics: None.

Psionics: Minor psychic with the powers of Empathy and Sixth Sense.

Allies of Note: The closest thing he has to a friend is his servant, a pudgy, white-haired, Dwarven worker slave named Ti'Veos who allowed himself to be talked into an unheard of 30-year contract of servitude! Other than that, very few people tolerate Franklin on a personal level and even less can say they even vaguely like him. However, this has not stopped the head of security from giving Forrester some extra looking out for. Head of security Bell even spars with the doctor in the boxing ring once a week. Bell looks out for Franklin because he sees it as part of his job, and sees him as someone who needs the protection from himself. He spars with him because Bell gets a cheap thrill out of knowing he could kill a creature as vile and despicably evil as Forrester anytime he wanted to, but also likes to pat himself on the back for not doing so at the same time. Dr. Forrester, on the other hand, considers Bell to be a good friend, even though he isn't.

Enemies of Note: Doctor Forrester has angered so many people just in the four years he's been at Fort Laredo, should he be found dead and dismembered in a pool of his own blood, just about everyone in the base would be suspect.

The Devil's Gate

The Saint Louis Arch has been transformed into a Rift that is permanently open, but not to any one place. It is suspected that the Rift is somehow connected with the moon's cycle, because it opens to 28 dimensions over a 28-30 day period. Every sliver of the moon's phase brings a corresponding doorway to a particular dimension. Why this is, the CS will probably never know, but they are learning. The following is a listing of some of the more noteworthy dimensions the Devil's Gate leads to.

The world of Larmenta is a place living in the past. Great cities and kingdoms were constructed by their equally great ancestors, who held themselves up to the highest of expectations. But over the last 20 generations, their society has been becoming more and more lackadaisical and gradually losing their ambitions. In their minds, all the great things worth doing have already been done, all the grand triumphs already won, all the noble causes already fought. So they sit content in their own filth and do as little as possible to get by.

This is the world of the Larmac, which explains a great deal about why they are the way they are. And though a few get the ambition to explore the Megaverse through the Rifts that naturally open on their world, most are victims of random Rifts that sweep them through the Devil's Gate. During the 12th day of the lunar cycle, Larmac virtually rain out of the Devil's Gate, depositing between 500 to 1,000 of the confused creatures on Rifts Earth in a day's time. Regardless of why they end up here, their slothful natures always catch up with them, making the Larmac just as productive and aspiring as they were on Larmenta, which is next to none.

Boskovisk is a dirty wasteland, filled with generations old survivors of a war centuries gone by. A war so terrible that the people of the world are just now beginning to recover. The living conditions in the inhabitable parts of this world are squalid, shoddy at best, and impoverished, disease-rampant ruins at

worst. Those who live here yearn for a better life and pray that their sons and daughters have even a slightly better life than they did. But change is slow in coming and the flimsy government is incapable of improving their quality of life and living conditions any better or any faster. Even by their most optimistic estimates, it will take their civilization another hundred years before they can start rebuilding the infrastructure of their cities.

This is the world of the Qvazffx'uvqb (unpronounceable by humans), or as they're called on Earth, the Quick-Flex Aliens. And those of the world of Boskovisk have discovered an amazing phenomenon at their North Pole. Apparently, for the past 290 years (slightly faster temporal mechanics than Earth's), a strange dimensional gate opens leading to another world. Wild stories and cults have formed around myths and stories about the paradise that lies beyond the portal's shimmering blue veil. Consequently, pilgrimages of large people looking for a better world and a life less harsh have been flocking to their North Pole to throw themselves into the unknown. On the other side of the Devil's Gate, the RGSC scientists have been witnessing swarms of 3,000 or more Quick-Flex Aliens running out of the Rift every new moon for the past 34 years! To date they estimate that about 1.4 million of them have trampled their way through the Rift, with no sign of slowing. Of course, nowadays, this results in a massacre once a month, as the vast majority are killed by Coalition sentries.

Sirius B. To the people of Rifts Earth, the realm of outer space is an unreachable height they may never attain. This has prevented them from putting satellites, space stations, and hypersonic transports in orbit. The riches of the solar system and beyond could belong to the people of Rifts Earth if only they could go beyond their own atmosphere. And in spite of the containing efforts of the people in orbit, the CS could come knocking on their back door in the distant future.

In the course of coming to Midgaard, the Godling Va'Korra took an unintentional detour to a world in the same galaxy. A planet around the smaller star of a binary system pre-Rifts scientists called Sirius B. The Godling came to this place because of some inexplicable link it has (or will have) to Earth. What she found was a place of striking natural beauty and an aquatic civilization of kind and benevolent people. These technically advanced beings inhabit the world's oceans and allow the lush surface forests to remain wild and unadulterated. It was for these forests that Va'Korra stayed for a bit and to take some time off from her quest. After a three-day camping trip, she then proceeded to Earth.

This is a significant place for the CS, because it is a destination in their own universe that is only 8.6 light years from Earth in the constellation of Canis Major. They currently plan on taking advantage of this place to develop experimental spaceships. The plan's agenda calls for them to establish a base there in 50 years, and hope to have some kind of FTL space travel in 100. However, these are long-term plans that could be subject to change, pushed forward by as much as 70 years, or set back by as much as 200 years. Only time will tell how this avenue of opportunity will develop.

The world of Gra'van has been experiencing a strange phenomenon ever since the Great Cataclysm on Earth. Once every 16 days (slow rotational period, but similar temporal mechanics to Earth's), people and animals begin to mysteriously disappear

into thin air. The planet's many scientists can't explain it and have no way of stopping these disappearances from happening. If they had a greater understanding of the supernatural and metaphysical, they would discover that their world has an invisible network of Ley Lines. But unlike those on most other worlds, their Ley Lines are not fixed in place in relationship with the surface. Instead, the lines slowly drift and rotate over the globe randomly, creating new and temporary nexus points as they shift. Because of this unique form of line-tectonics, when a Rift forms at one of these briefly existing nexus points, the Rift itself moves across the land sucking up all that's in its path. Fortunately, no more than three Rifts open at a time, so the loss is minimized. Unfortunately, the nexus points are drawn to the P.P.E. of large concentrations of people, like cities and towns, so when a Rift does open, there are no less than 100 people in its path.

This is the world of the people called the Va'Grr, or the Vanguard Brawlers as they've been called on Rifts Earth. Aside from its strange Rift problem, there are other things that make this world a dangerous place to live. Because of the Va'Grr people's violent tendencies, they are a race that is constantly at war with itself in one way or another. This makes long-term scientific progress slow going, and peace impossible to maintain for any significant length of time. However, this does not mean that this is a people who dread their lives or the world they made. The Va'Grr actually like their home world and don't really want to change a thing about it. But then again, those who are deposited on the other side of the Devil's Gate are in no hurry to get home again, either. A more apathetic race would be hard to come by.

Faquin (Fah'koo'en). Given that Ley Lines are in essence fortified by the life forms that surround them on a given world, there are some Ley Lines and Rifts that have no reason for being where they are. The super-nexus point on the desolate world of Faquin is an aberration that has no right to exist, yet there it is nonetheless. Located on the equator of the second planet of solar system A-77294928509 of the CCW controlled portion of the Anvil Galaxy, this Rift could someday give the people of Earth a reliable gateway to the same universe that is home to Phase World. Unfortunately, it could also serve as a convenient passage for an invasion of Earth from the Tansgalactic Empire and the Kreeghor. However, since the Rift didn't exist prior to 300+ years ago, better than a thousand years after the uninhabitable planet was initially surveyed and then written off as of being of any use, the people of Earth are safe for now.

The reason why the Devil's Gate accesses this particular Rift, one that effectively leads to nowhere, is because Va'Korra wanted it to. When she opened the Rift to vent the superfluous P.P.E. from Earth at the time of the Great Cataclysm, she didn't want to attract any attention to herself. Such an event would create a P.P.E. flare a thousand feet high and draw all sorts of attention. The idea was to conceal her actions by having the extra supernatural energy go someplace where it wouldn't be seen. And though the Godling didn't survive her attempt to ascend to Godhood, the Rift to this place remained open and is still accessible through the Devil's Gate.

Because nothing has ever come out of the Devil's Gate on the tail end of the full moon, scientists from the RCSG were curious to see what was on the other side. So they decided to send

in a Skelebot probe and programmed it to return the moment the Rift reopened. One moon cycle later, the Skelebot probe returned with all of its collected data. From what they could discern, the world on the other side had no atmosphere whatsoever, had a daylight surface temperature of 190 degrees Fahrenheit (87.7 C) and a nighttime temperature of -160 F (-106.6 C). The stars did not align with any known configurations, but the passage of time seemed to be no different than that of Earth. This makes this world ideal for a cross-dimensional base to protect the CS from threats on the other side. The Coalition's long-term plans have the foundation of the base slated to be constructed in 150 years, after they've gotten a good handle on space travel (FTL or not) at Sirius B, if ever. The last thing the CS would want would be to make a base on an alien world that may draw attention to it from potentially hostile aliens, and have no military spaceships to defend it.

Rifts Earth? During the tail end of the last quarter of the moon's phase, the most horrible and demonic of creatures of all slither, walk and levitate their way through the Devil's Gate. Everything from wayward Splugorth Minions to undead dragons to Demon Lords and forgotten gods have come through to bring terror to the land, not caring where they are or who they harm. Though creatures, D-Bees and monsters come through from other dimensions during the other phases of the moon, those who come from here are some of the worst the Megaverse has to offer.

The Rift shifts to a world that terrifies the CS more than anything else, before or since the exploration of the paths the St. Louis Arch leads to. But the CS didn't know just how horrible until they sent in Skelebot probes, programmed to observe and evade the inhabitants. Initially, none of the probes ever came back, so there was little information the scientists of Fort Laredo could gather or analyze. That is, until someone got the idea of sending in a specially programmed Hellion Skelebot. The quick and agile robot was able to go in, gather enough data to be of use, and make it back in one piece. Even so, the Hellion was severely damaged and required a complete overhaul before it could be sent back in. After six successful missions with the Hellion Skelebot probe, the best and brightest of the CS could finally put the pieces together and discern exactly what was on the other side. And though their conclusions are frightful and disturbing, they are indisputable.

There are two possibilities of what is in this dimension. First, it could be an alternate universe that runs parallel to Rifts Earth's, but with a twist in history. The second possibility is that this *is* the same Rifts Earth that the CS inhabits, except in the not too distant future (100 years, maybe 1,000). Either way, what the Hellion brought back was images of a shattered world where the sky is always black and the stars are never seen. A world where the great fortress cities of the CS are in ruins and their towns are smoking craters. A land where the only humans around are either poorly treated slaves, or livestock waiting to be eaten. A place where demons of all description roam about and rule the chaotic land and revel in anarchy. And just like their land, this land too is crisscrossed with Ley Lines and Rifts that allow creatures and monsters to spill in and flood the land with the pestilence that they are.

However, as frightful as this place is to the CS, it also represents a fantastic avenue of exploration for them. As informative

as the Hellion Skelebot probes had been, the CS Executive Council decided to up the ante. Because the Devil's Gate in that dimension is not protected or guarded in any way, they have started sending in recon teams to gather more intelligence. The goal of these missions is to find an elderly human who knows what happened and how the CS fell in that universe (or timeline). They also hope to discover the date to determine if this place is just a parallel universe or their own future. Either way, they hope to uncover what went wrong so they can prepare for it and avoid this fate.

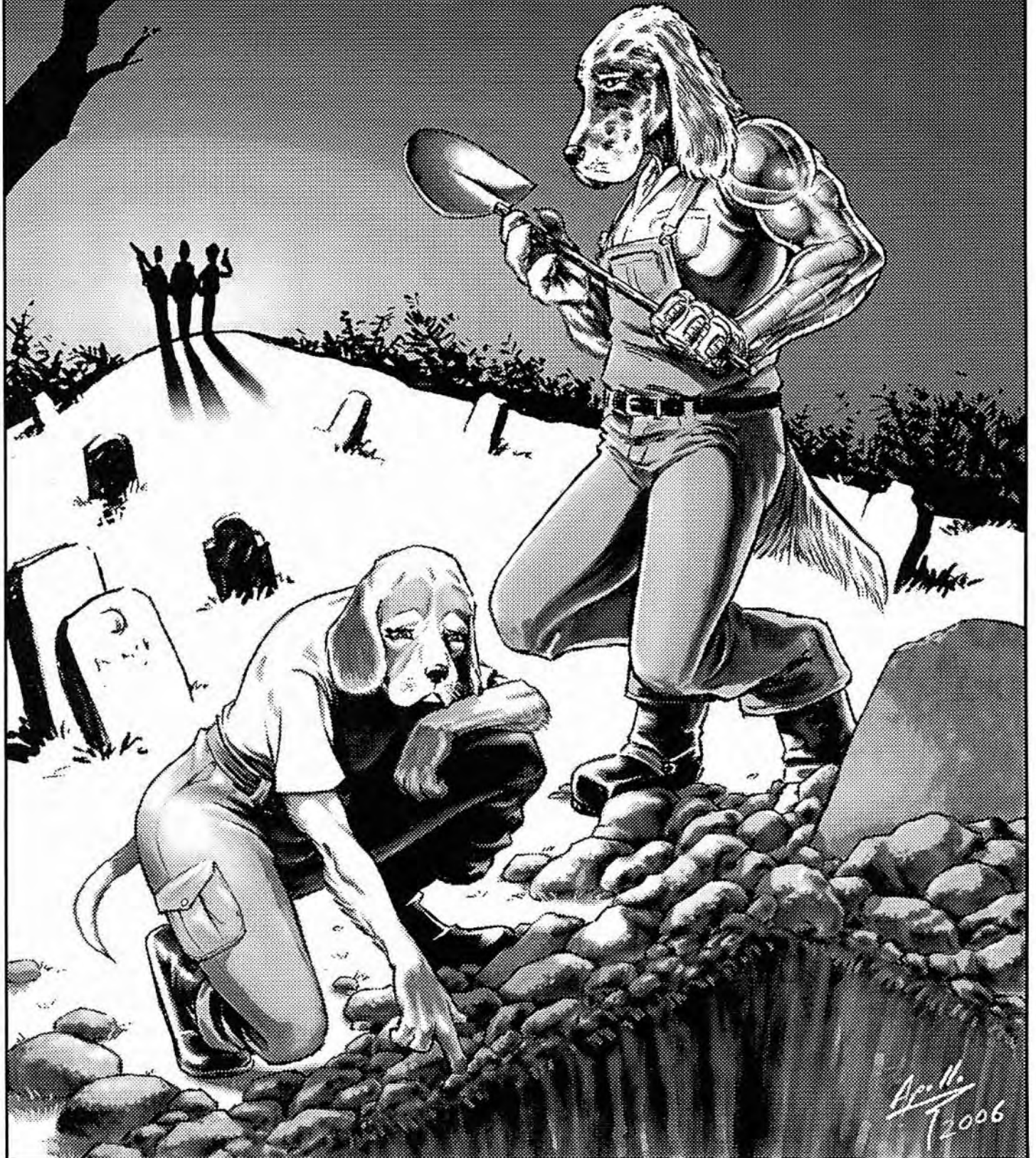
The man in charge of this highly classified expeditionary team is Lieutenant Colonel Lexington Ortega. Having a long and successful tour of duty overseas, working with the NGR's covert operations division against the hordes of the Gargoyle Empire, Lt. Col. Ortega is extremely adept at infiltrating demonic cultures. In fact, several members of his team were some of the best people he worked with in the NGR, who he secretly recruited when this assignment came up. Together, he and his team share rotations in the hellish dimension. One team typically spends a moon phase or two in the other dimension, gathering intelligence and occasionally retrieving humans who may hold some useful secrets in the corners of their minds, while the other recoups and goes over the findings of previous missions. They try to build on their successes and learn from their failures, that is, when they come back at all. But so far, of those who failed to return, none have allowed themselves to be taken alive, so the CS is not yet at risk of being discovered. However, some of the demons are getting curious about where these humans, armed with weapons, equipment and elaborate mechanical disguises not of their world's origin, are coming from.

The biggest risk the recon teams take is being tracked back to the Devil's Gate and to Fort Laredo. Most of the time this can be taken care of by using counter-tracking techniques. But that is not enough. Everyone attached to this assignment knows that in the event of imminent capture or termination, they are duty-bound to forfeit their lives. Because it is known that if the human brain is intact, should one of them die for whatever reason, the secrets their minds contain can be revealed through Necromantic magic, a sensor in each soldier's helmet continually monitors his pulse. Should the grunt's pulse ever stop for more than three seconds, it will detonate a small fusion block molded in the back of the helm, which will completely *mist* the soldier's head, and part of his chest as well! This explosion is contained inside the helm and will not harm those nearby. Each member of the expedition/recon team is also given a cyanide-filled Bio-System tooth that they are obligated to chomp on in the event of imminent capture and interrogation, which will give them a quick and painless death, and will soon after trigger the explosives in their helms.

The reason why the Devil's Gate opens to this hellish place is because of one simple fact – even Godlings as powerful as Va'Korra can make a wrong turn now and then. After figuring out that she was in the wrong place, Va'Korra pulled a U-turn as fast as possible.

FAMILY BUSINESS

A Rifts® Short Story by Jason Marker



Family Business

A Rifts® Short Story

By Jason Marker

It was the kind of day she loved. The kind of early spring day where the sun was high and hot in a clear blue sky but the breeze was cool. She turned ten in January of that year, and ten was too young to be lying in a small oak casket with a broken neck on a fine April day. The undertaker closed the casket, covering her pretty face that showed such a look of peaceful sleep that it was said in town that his art had never been better. He laid one huge hand on the coffin for a moment, then turned to the pallbearers and motioned them forward.

They came, the four of them, disconsolate in their dark suits and their red-rimmed eyes, and took their positions: The two brothers, barely into their teens and shattered at the loss of their beloved sister. The father, his broad ebon features set in a stoic mask. The grandfather, the tired warrior, the lines in his aged face made all the deeper by this new grief.

They gripped the brass rails and hoisted the little coffin onto their shoulders. They followed the undertaker out of the house to the waiting hearse. The ancient Cadillac idled there in the street with the April sun mirrored in its black flanks. They slipped the coffin into the car and stepped back as the undertaker swung the huge door shut with a subdued click. He said a few quiet words to the father, who turned and walked with his retinue to the waiting and equally ancient flower car.

At the cemetery, the coffin sat on a pedestal at the side of the grave, surrounded by flowers and wreaths on stands. The preacher said a few words from Corinthians as the coffin was lowered, then gave the funeral rites. He finished by throwing a handful of earth onto the coffin, the noise on the wood like a drum in the quiet cemetery. At this the father's shoulders sagged, he buried his face in his hands and he began to weep. The grandfather, stooped and gray, put his arms around his only son, then turned him gently away from the grave and led him home.

* * *

At seven in the morning, Gideon's was packed with the usual collection of breakfast regulars. The jukebox belted out honky-tonk as Jenny and Emma passed back and forth through the kitchen doors with plates full of eggs and grits and sausage. They weaved effortlessly through the tables, delivering hot food and fresh coffee and avoiding the hands of overly-friendly patrons.

"There's few things finer'n Texas in June," said a voice from the crowd. Gideon shoveled another forkful of eggs into his mouth and felt he couldn't agree more. He was tall and lean, with the wavy white hair with black ticking that spoke of his English Setter roots. Long, salt and pepper hair flowed from his tail and the back of his right arm. His left arm was cybernetic from the shoulder down, a reminder of a youthful transgression. His ears were long and black, and swung like little pendulums

every time he dipped his head to his breakfast. Black fur outlined his hazel eyes and contrasted with his white muzzle. This morning he was wearing a blue cotton work shirt cuffed to his elbows over a white t-shirt tucked into a pair of faded, well worn dungarees. A wide, black leather belt circled his waist, and his battered black harness boots were hooked on the small rail that ran around the bottom of the barstool.

Bela ran the bar, where Gideon sat, with the single-minded efficiency that her Beagle ancestors had perfected over a thousand years of tracking small, fast things through the brush. Bela was short and compact, with tight muscles and a constant slight grin on her canine face. She had the classic Beagle coloring of black, white and brown with the soulful brown eyes so common to her breed. She wore her white t-shirt tucked into black cargo pants, and the heels of her Psi-Corps issue combat boots rang on the floor as she rattled back and forth behind the bar with her coffee pot. She had come up the mutant railroad about a year previously, escaped from a Coalition "Sweep and Clear" squad out of Lone Star. She was an excellent tracker and an outstanding member of the Lone Star K-9 Corps, but her natural Beagle affability and a deep compassion caused her to question her orders, and eventually led to her going AWOL and falling into the Underground. She showed up in Atchinson flat broke and looking for work one day, and Gideon immediately took her under his wing. He put her to work tending the bar and waiting tables. Once she made a little money, she rented out a shop front on Church Street and opened a tracking and bounty hunting business. She did good work, but clients were scarce so she still slung beer and coffee for Gideon between contracts.

Gideon pushed his empty coffee cup away and Bela was there in a heartbeat with a pot of Bully's Extra Robust, a flavorful and powerful coffee known throughout the Empire to tarnish spoons in seconds and kill small animals.

"You're the best, Bela." She flashed a toothy smile and scooted on down the bar, filling other cups and keeping up a rapid-fire running dialogue with her regulars. Gideon took a pull at his coffee and returned to his breakfast with gusto. Now as he sopped up the remains of his eggs and salsa with a biscuit, his hackles rose and a picture of a careworn face formed in his mind's eye. He sniffed the air with his delicate nose and spun to face the door as boot heels sounded on the front steps.

Sheriff Jim King entered the room to a chorus of good mornings and friendly nods. He paused a moment to doff his hat and return the pleasantries, then approached the bar. King was tall and lean and weathered by a lifetime of duty and labor in the Texas sun. His mouth was turned down and framed by a salt and pepper moustache worn long in the style of the day.

"Morning, Jim. How's law enforcement today?" asked Gideon as the Sheriff took a seat and laid his hat on the bar before him.

"Gideon," said King by way of greeting, "you remember that young Jackson girl died here back in April?"

"Willie's granddaughter? Yeah, I remember. That was a terrible blow for her daddy after losing Delia back in, what was it, oh-five? Oh-six? Why do you ask?" The sheriff paused and thanked Bela as she delivered coffee to the lawman with a cheerful "good morning."

"Well, Galen called in to the station around five-thirty this morning. Seems there was some trouble up at the cemetery. Me

and Deputy Smith went over for a look and we find the grave all dug up and the little girl gone. Someone come in and stole her body, Gideon." He took a sip of his coffee and shook his head. "I don't know what this old world is coming to when a little girl can't rest in peace. I just come over to talk to Bela and see if she could do a little tracking, but I see she's busy. If you'd send her around to the station after her shift I'd sure appreciate it."

"Sure, Jim," Gideon replied and nodded his head. He held Sheriff King in high regard. They had worked together often in the past, Gideon acting as a Special Deputy when his unique talents were needed, and he respected King's professionalism and compassion. He was a fitting replacement for the late and greatly lamented Sheriff Ned Sixkiller, an Apache and himself a man of great compassion and courage. Ned's young, orphaned daughter Molly, a powerful psychic in her own right, had also found a home under Gideon's roof.

"Anything else I can do to help?" he asked the Sheriff.

"I don't know, Gideon. I've got a bad feeling about this whole situation. Things like this never end well."

* * *

Noon found Gideon and Bela crouched beneath a hickory tree in the little town cemetery examining the recently exhumed grave of the Jackson girl. After her shift was over at ten-thirty, Bela and Gideon walked uptown to the sheriff's office and Sheriff King filled them in on everything he knew, which wasn't much. No witnesses and little in the way of tracks. The two Psi-Hounds left Sheriff King and proceeded to Galen's Funeral Parlour on South Main. There they spoke with Galen the Undertaker, who gave his account of discovering the crime in his deep and dolorous voice.

Galen was "from out of town," as they said in the Empire. The big alien was near eight feet tall. Pale and thin with a long, serious face, but broad shouldered and immensely strong. His slow, deep voice was perfect for consoling the bereaved, and he was never seen in anything less than his severe black suit and somber blue cravat. Galen seemed to come from a people predisposed to work in the funeral industry, and he was a consummate professional.

Now there they were, Gideon sitting cross-legged on the grass, holding the broken haft of a shovel they had found loosely in his lap, Bela sniffing the ground and searching all over for a sign, and Galen hovering over them like an immense and pale raven. Gideon sat and muttered to himself, his eyes rolled back in his head, as Bela shooed Galen away from a promising track. He focused his mind's eye on the wooden haft and tried to form within it a picture of its last owner. After a few minutes of this, his eyes snapped open and he came around with a grunt.

"Hey, back already?" Bela said. "Did you get anything?"

"A little," said Gideon, getting up and shaking off a little vertigo. "How about you?"

"I tell ya, Jim's a hell of a good lawman, but him and Smith made such a mess of this place I'm not sure I could track them back to the office."

Gideon smiled.

"I'll take that as a no then. Where's Galen?"

"I sent him inside after he stepped in my third sign. I mean really, its not like I'm trying to do a job here. And yes, I have found a little. Looks like there were three, maybe four of them, humans. I got a good boot print over here and a scent I could probably follow to the town line if I was lucky. How about you?" Gideon stretched and looked down at the piece of wood in his hand.

"Four of 'em. I could only really see the one. Tough looking type had a tattoo on his forearm. Some kind of symbol I didn't recognize. I tried to get a feeling as to where they are now, but no go. Let's head back to the bar; I want to get this symbol on paper before I forget it. Then we'll head up to Body Armor and see if Carlos or Sam recognize it."

Gideon and Bela headed back to the bar and grill with their new information. Jorge was manning the bar with the cool professionalism that amused the regulars so much. Bela checked up on him as Gideon ran to his office and tried his best to recreate the symbol he had seen in his vision. It was a backward S shape canted a little on its side, thick around the curves and thinner out at the ends. On the top curve were three filled ovals, and on the outside of the bottom curve there were four. Gideon tossed his pen down on the desk and sat back in his chair, contemplating the symbol.

"Weird" he muttered to himself. He tore the picture he drew from the top of the pad, folded it and stuffed it in the pocket of his work shirt. He got up and headed downstairs to fetch Bela. Gideon entered the bar again and spied a strange thing. Three elderly black men in slacks and rumpled linen shirts were sitting at a table by the jukebox drinking highballs, their hats set before them. They were Damon, Ray-Ray and Slim, old friends of Willie the barber. They had served in the Range Wars with Willie and were hardly ever seen outside of the barbershop where they hung out, told lies, played dominoes and generally enjoyed being retired all day. Gideon approached the table and they looked up to greet him.

"Afternoon, gentlemen." Gideon called.

"Afternoon, Gideon," was their chorused and uncharacteristically subdued reply.

"Y'all are in early today. What's the story?"

"Well, you heard about what happened with Willie's grandbaby, ain't you?" asked Damon, his antique cybernetic eye gleaming like a coal in the dim light.

"Yeah, I heard about that. Damn shame."

"Sure enough is," said Slim. "Once Willie got wind of it he closed the shop and headed out to James' place. Since then we've been finding our own entertainment."

"Well, you fellas stay out of trouble now," said Gideon, and he turned away from them and walked to the bar, where Bela was badgering Jorge about his pour and his organizational skills. Gideon watched for a moment then weighed in.

"Bela, will you leave that boy alone? He's doing just fine." Jorge turned to Gideon and gave a slight bow from the waist.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Gideon," he said in his heavily accented English.

"*Buenos tardes, Jorge.*" Gideon replied in his passable Spanish. "*¿Cómo es usted hoy mi amigo?*"

"*Bueno*, Mr. Gideon. Miss Bela was just giving me a lesson in keeping the bottles in order behind the bar."

"Well, Miss Bela is a little particular," said Gideon, casting a sidelong look at Bela. "Don't you worry about her, though. You're doing a fine job. Bela and me will be out the rest of the day, *amigo*. Molly will be in around four thirty to spell you. If you need any help, you know Bully's good for it."

"Thank you, Mr. Gideon, I will do my best," Jorges replied, and moved down the bar to help a patron. Gideon turned to Bela.

"You done bothering the employees?" Gideon asked Bela, arching a brown eyebrow.

"Yeah, yeah. You know how much I hate things being disorganized back there. I can never find anything after Jorges and Molly come through."

Gideon laughed and clapped her on the shoulder.

"Come on, let's go."

* * *

Body Armor Tattoos was toward the end of Easy Street, next door to Fitz's diner and across the street from Mrs. Goldcap's boardinghouse. Gideon pushed open the door and he and Bela entered into the riot of sound and color that was the shop. Flash covered every available surface, sharing space with shrunken heads, carved wooden idols and prints of what Gideon knew to be pre-Cataclysm "pin-up" art. Rock and roll music belted from the speakers hung here and there, accompanied by the incessant drone of the tattoo needle. Sam, one of the two owners, was currently putting the name "Fellina" on a banner that surrounded a large red heart on the inner forearm of a Tolliver Ranch cowboy. Sam's partner Carlos was standing at the counter sketching in a large sketchbook. He looked up and smiled, gold incisors framing brilliant white teeth. He was a burly, dark-skinned man with a pointed goatee and slicked-back hair. Tattoos of every description covered his arms and what could be seen of his chest.

"*Perro Grande*, and the lovely Bela," Carlos greeted them. He had a voice like honeyed sandpaper.

"Afternoon, fellas," replied Gideon. He got a howdy from the cowboy and a laconic "yo" from Sam. He propped his elbows up on the chest high counter and hooked a boot on the tarnished brass rail that ran along its base. Bela wandered over to a shrunken head and began examining it.

"When are you gonna get some ink there *Perro Grande*?" the big man asked. Gideon looked at his arms with exaggerated scrutiny, the right one covered in thick white hair speckled with black, the left one made of metal. He turned them over, turned them back and looked back up at Carlos.

"Where am I gonna put it then?"

Carlos laughed. "If it's not ink, what can I do for you today?" Gideon fished the folded sketch out of his pocket and smoothed it on the counter.

"You ever see anything like this before?" Carlos picked up the paper and studied the picture.

"This sure looks like one of mine. Let me think," he cocked his head to one side then snapped his fingers. "Got it. This guy comes in two, maybe three months ago shooting his mouth off. Said he was a big-time arms runner trying to rustle up some

business down the Empire. Arms runner my eye, if this guy was a major fixer then I'm Sailor Freakin' Jerry. He had two-bit punk written all over him, a real *pendejo*, man." He handed the paper back to Gideon, and he folded it back up and replaced it in his pocket.

"You seen him since?"

"Nope. Why all the interest?"

"I think he was involved in a grave robbery."

"I heard about that," said Carlos with a low whistle. "That's bad juju digging up graves, man. How'd you get involved in it?"

"Me and Bela are doing a favor for Sheriff King, a little tracking and so on. Anyway, you got a name for this guy?"

"Mac maybe? Max? Something like that. Don't really remember man, sorry."

"No sweat. Thanks for your help."

"Any time, *Perro Grande*." Gideon turned to Bela, who had moved on to a big binder full of pictures of tattoos that Sam had done.

"You ready?" She nodded and snapped the binder shut.

"See you, fellas, and thanks again, Carlos." They headed for the door and as Gideon held it open for Bela, he asked, "Hey Carlos. What is that symbol, anyway?"

"It's an old African glyph," said the big man. "It means 'I fear nothing but God.'"

* * *

Half an hour later found the Psi-Hounds in the sheriff's office. They relayed all the information they had, and the sheriff sat back in his chair and rubbed his eyes.

"So some hood named Mac or maybe Max who claims to be a gunrunner gets a tattoo at Body Armor two months ago, and this selfsame hood previously owned the shovel we found at the scene of the crime. Well, that's a start."

"Wish we had something like a motive," said Bela, who was perched on a stool with her elbows propped up on her knees and her muzzle cupped in her hands.

"Well," said Gideon, "there's two ways to go from here that I can see. First, someone should go talk to old Thrustweight and see if he knows this Mac, or more likely, the guy he works for. Second, we need to talk to Willie's son. I'd wager we'll find a motive at James'."

"Well, I'll take Bela and go visit James," said the sheriff as he stood up. "Gideon, you go and find out what that old Dwarf is hiding in his beard." The sheriff opened a drawer on his desk and fished something out. "I guess I should swear the two of you in. Stand up and hold up your right hands."

The Psi-Hounds stood to attention and raised their hands. "Do you two hereby swear to uphold the laws of the town of Atchinson, Atchinson County, and the great state of Texas, even at peril of your lives?"

"I do," chorused Gideon and Bela.

"Good," said the sheriff, and he tossed them each a badge, a convex star with a banner beneath engraved DEPUTY. "We'll meet back here in a couple of hours."

* * *

The cowbell above the door of the Armoury clanged as Gideon stepped into the quiet gun shop. There were fine examples of conventional revolvers and rifles hung on the walls, along with a few slightly used suits of body armor. Arranged around the room were glass cases set close to the ground. These held a variety of energy and CFT weapons as well as an assortment of knives and Vibro-Blades. There was a counter at the back, and Gideon walked back and leaned his right elbow on it and rang the small bell there.

"Coming, half a minute!" called a gruff voice from somewhere behind the counter. Gideon breathed in the smell of gun oil, old wood and leather. There was a trapdoor behind the counter and presently a gray head appeared climbing a ladder and muttering. Dan Thrustweight had run this shop for twenty years, and had been a mercenary, raider and range fighter for fifty years before that, since he first came to Texas from Colorado. He was a stout, old Dwarf in his autumn years, and silver-bearded, but still keen-witted and able to swing a hammer hard enough to kill a Tri-Top. It was also said that he was the most connected Dwarf in Texas. He mounted a small ladder behind the counter and turned to Gideon.

"Welcome to the Armoury. What can I, oh, Gideon. Sorry, lad, didn't know it was you." He fumbled in his waistcoat pocket and pulled out a pair of half-moon shaped pince-nez and clipped them to his prodigious nose. "Now, what do you need?"

"Dan, I'm in the market for a little information."

"Aren't we all lad, aren't we all?" said the Dwarf, hooking his thumbs into the pockets of his waistcoat and flashing his broad, white teeth at Gideon.

"Well, you see Dan, I'm looking for the kind of information you might volunteer to the law out of a feeling of civic duty," Gideon said, and he tapped the badge pinned to his shirt. Dan's smile faltered slightly.

"Ah, well, that's different. That's a horse of a different color all together." The Dwarf huffed and cleared his throat. "Information like that is a rare commodity, rare as hen's teeth, some might say."

"But not you, right Dan? You wouldn't say that because *you* are an upstanding citizen and a member of the chamber of commerce who executes his civic duty without even a thought of personal gain. Am I right, or am I thinking of another Dan Thrustweight?" Dan narrowed his eyes and gritted his teeth, which made his smile more of a grimace.

"I suppose you're right," he said. "I'm also an upstanding citizen who expects his sacrifice to be remembered. Now, what would you like to know, *deputy*?"

"You know a fella named Mac or maybe Max? Loudmouthed type, has a tattoo on the inside of his left forearm? He might be a gunrunner, or muscle for one. I figured you were the one to go to."

"Mac? No, I don't know any Macs. Maxes either, for that matter." Gideon cocked an eyebrow at him.

"Honest, why would I lie to you, Gideon? I doubt I could get away with it if I wanted."

"True," replied Gideon, and he flashed his own sharp smile.

"What's this about, anyway?" asked Dan.

"I think this character might be involved in that grave robbery last night. I'm helping Jim out with it."

"Ah, now that *is* interesting. That was James Jackson's girl, wasn't it? I might have heard a thing or two relating to Mr. Jackson." Gideon held a straight face.

"Such as?" he asked.

"What's in it for me?"

"My personal thanks, and the thanks of the sheriff and the community." The Dwarf paused, blinked then shook his head.

"Now, this is word around the campfire, mind you. Seems our Mr. Jackson is one of the last independent purveyors of military hardware in this area. He's small, but his few clients are making him a tidy sum. There are certain powerful merchandising concerns who are taking an unhealthy interest in young Mr. Jackson. They would dearly like to buy his contracts, and have contacted him on numerous occasions. He has politely declined each time, but these aren't people who take rejection easily. I've heard it said that if he persists in this, measures might be taken."

"You're joking."

"Gideon," said the Dwarf, placing his hands on the counter. "I am not. I believe that fulfills my civic duty."

"I believe it does," Gideon replied.

"Now if you'll excuse me, I have work to do." And with that, Dan backed off the ladder and disappeared down the trapdoor. Gideon, left all alone in the quiet of the store, showed himself out, and the cowbell clanged in his passing.

* * *

"Albert," said Gideon, staring intently at the cards in his hand, "go fish."

Albert reached through the cell bars and drew a card from the table, squinted at it and said, "Damn." It was at this point the door opened and admitted Sheriff King and a visibly excited Bela. She rushed over to where he sat.

"Gideon, you're not going to believe it! Oh, Hi Albert, been drinking again?"

"Yes, ma'am," replied the drunk. "You wouldn't happen to have the tiniest drop on you would you? I'm terrible parched." But his words fell on deaf ears as Bela's focus jumped back to Gideon.

"Jackson's an arms dealer and the Black Market has been trying to get him to sell out, but he won't, and so now they're leaning on him, and they stole his daughter's body and are ransoming it back to him for his contracts." Bela stopped to take a breath and Gideon held up a hand.

"I know, at least about the arms dealer part. I kind of guessed about the body." He stood up from his game and turned to the sheriff.

"How did we not know what he did for a living?" The sheriff shrugged.

"He's small time, and he's very discreet. He keeps an office in his home but his warehouse is over in Arlen. Seems what he lacks in quantity of clients he makes up for in quality. The Market has been leaning on him for a while but he's been brushing them off until now." Gideon shook his head, a look of disgust on his canine features.

"He's been contacted about a ransom?"

"He's supposed to go to a house in Arlen tonight at eleven, alone and with the contracts, and then he'll get the body back." Bela piped in.

"What do you think, Sheriff?" asked Gideon.

"I think this is bad business. I've advised Jackson not to go, and I'm going to call Sheriff Hamm over in Arlen and get permission to send a few deputies around there to clear this up." Gideon thought this over for a minute.

"Why don't Bela and I go? The two of us will make a lot less show than a whole group."

"I guess," said the sheriff, considering. "All right. I'll call Bill and tell him you'll be acting in an official capacity as sworn deputies. Be careful, now, try to keep the gunplay at a minimum. We don't want to go shooting up somebody else's town."

"Don't worry about it," Gideon reassured the sheriff. "What time is it?" he asked, checking the clock built into his left arm while the sheriff fished his watch out of his pocket by its chain.

"About five," said the sheriff, snapping his watch shut again and dropping it back in his pocket. Gideon looked at Bela.

"What do you say we ride on over to Arlen and grab a bite at DeLong's?"

* * *

DeLong's was the premier barbecue joint in Arlen, and some argued in all of Texas. It was owned and operated by the DeLong family and relied on a sauce recipe rumored to have been handed down since before the Cataclysm. Mr. DeLong, a middle-aged black man and Arlen's self-proclaimed King of Barbecue, held court every day in his converted gas station, dishing out countless pounds of beef smothered in a sauce so good it would make a preacher kick out a stained glass window. Around six-thirty, Gideon and Bela wheeled into the lot, he on his ancient big-twin bobber and her on an equally ancient but terribly decrepit Buell, their exhaust racketing from surrounding buildings. They slid into a spot and killed their engines, Bela's shuddering and dieseling to a stop. They eased the bikes onto their kickstands, hung their goggles from their handlebars, and set about brushing dust and June bugs from their clothes.

"Gah!" said Bela as she dislodged one of the more obstinate bugs from her teeth and spat it out on the asphalt. "These things taste terrible." Gideon nodded in agreement as he fished one out from beneath his right ear.

"Are you going to let Maggie have a look at that thing, or are you just going to let it disintegrate?" asked Gideon. Bela gave him a shocked look.

"Betty is in excellent shape for a motorcycle of her age, I'll have you know."

"That thing's a menace," replied Gideon, and Bela swatted him with her gloves. About this time one of Mr. DeLong's many young and pretty daughters approached, wielding pad and pencil and smacking her gums.

"Y'all need a menu, or do you know what you want?" she asked.

"Two brisket sandwiches with extra sauce and a couple of iced teas, sweet," Bela said.

"Sides?"

"Whatever's good," Gideon told her, and she nodded, put the pencil behind her ear, winked at Gideon and disappeared back into the building.

"So how do you want to handle this?" asked Bela, stretching.

"Simple," said Gideon. "After we eat, I want to make a pass at the house and check it out. Get the lay of the land, you know?"

"Sounds good to me. What do you think we're up against?" Gideon propped his right boot up on its foot peg and crossed his forearms on his knee.

"No idea. I figure they won't have much magic, if any. Other than that they're likely to be heavily armed. We're not going to be able to just kick in the door and holler 'stick 'em up.'"

They talked for a while about the evening's activities until the food came. Two big, smoked brisket sandwiches covered in the thick, red DeLong's sauce with sides of pinto beans, mustard potato salad and fried okra and two tall, waxed paper cups of strong, sweet iced tea. They tucked into the barbecue and talked about the comings and goings of Atchinson and business at Gideon's. Eventually, they finished, and with the help of some damp napkins, cleaned the remnants of barbecue sauce from clothes, bikes and fur. Gideon took the plates, plastic forks and cups to the big galvanized drum and paid at the window, tipping heavily. He walked back and Bela was pulling on her gloves. She thumbed her starter and the Buell clattered to life. Gideon swung a leg over the bobber, retrieved his goggles from the mirror and pulled them down over his eyes. He turned on his fuel, choked the engine and gave the starter a couple of kicks. The old big twin fired with a bang and a crackle from its open exhausts. The bikes settled into their loping idles and Gideon leaned over to Bela and hollered over the racket.

"You ready?"

Bela flashed him a thumbs up.

"Lead on, Lightfoot." They wheeled the bikes around and rumbled out into the street.

They found the house squatting in a weed-choked lot on a mostly abandoned street at the very edge of town. It was a sagging clapboard shack covered in peeling whitewash. The windows were curtained, and assorted junk and rusted machines were piled here and there in the yard like strange fungus. The few other houses on the street were empty, leaning at drunken angles, their doors gaping at the street, and their lots a constellation of shattered glass and flattened cans. Gideon and Bela left the bikes down the street on the adjacent block and approached the house afoot under the cover of a derelict shotgun shack, kitty-corner across the street. The setting sun pulsed bloated and red over the distant hills and blasted a fiery light down the street, setting things into sharp contrast. Gideon ran crouched and crabwise down the shadow side of the shack, and threw himself down in the dirt next to the ruined porch. Bela stayed at the rear corner of the house and kept watch. Gideon scooted forward in the dust just enough to get his binoculars trained on the target. He popped the lens covers off and scoped out the house. It was mostly still, but Gideon could sense the people inside. He concentrated for a moment and picked up a sense of relaxed confidence coming from the inhabitants. He snapped the covers back over the binoculars and wormed his way back into the shadow, out of view of the house. He crept to Bela and crouched beside her.

"Well?" she whispered.

"They're in there. Let's get back to the bikes." They backed away from the shack and retreated down the block. Gideon relayed what he had sensed and suggested they head back to town. Bela snorted.

"They're sure gonna be surprised tonight."

* * *

At quarter of eleven, Mac had a look of supreme confidence on his unshaven face. It was the look of a man who knew that nothing could go wrong as long as he was around to see that it didn't. He sat on a legless, sprung couch that smelled strongly of incontinent cats, and spun his CFT '86 revolver absentmindedly around his right index finger as Johnny paced around the room. This was all going exactly as planned. Jackson would be here in fifteen minutes with the contracts, and they would make the exchange and that would be that. Or maybe, Mac thought, he'd kill Jackson and leave him here to rot with the corpse in the coffin. The boss would love that. This idea made him smile even more. He holstered his revolver and began to whistle tunelessly.

The lights were out and the only illumination in the room was the stray bands of moonlight that made their way in through the moth-eaten curtains. He laced his fingers behind his head, stretched his long legs, and propped his boots up on the little coffin in front of him, one ankle crossed over the other. His boots made a hollow thud as they came to rest on the coffin, and Johnny stopped his pacing and shot Mac a look.

"You ought not do that, Mac," the young man said gravely.

"Do what, Johnny?" he said to his young partner.

"Put yer feet up on the coffin like that. It ain't respectful." Mac rolled his eyes in the gloom and snorted. This was just the kind of thing Johnny always said that got right up Mac's nose.

"Johnny, we dug this coffin outta the ground this morning. I think we done all the disrespectin' we could do already. Besides, I don't think she's gonna mind. You don't mind, do you darlin'?" he called out and thudded a boot heel on the coffin lid a couple of times.

"There, see? She don't mind at all," Mac said, and he laughed as if it were the funniest thing he'd heard all week.

"Well, I just don't think it's right, is all," replied Johnny as he resumed his pacing. Mac looked at his watch and saw it was ten of.

"Okay boy, get over by that window," he commanded Johnny as he got up off the couch and stretched his long frame.

"Mr. Jackson'll be along any minute now and we want to be sure we're ready for company." He walked over and poked his head into the hall. He could just see JC and Rich sitting at a rickety table in the kitchen, talking in fevered whispers about a couple of girls they were going to visit when they got back home.

"Here!" Mac hissed at them. "Y'all quit yer yappin and get ready. You two make sure nothin comes in or out of that door." They both stood and took up positions by the back door.

Mac turned around and walked to the window next to the front door. He nudged the curtain aside with the barrel of his revolver and peeked out into the weedy yard. Nothing moved in

the moonlight. He let the curtain fall back and he settled in to wait. Slowly he became aware of a scuffling sound in the room.

"Johnny!" he hissed. "Be still, boy!"

"I ain't movin', I thought that was you."

"No, it ain't me. Now just be quiet." There was silence for about thirty seconds then the sound started up again.

"Dammit Johnny! I thought I told you to be still!"

"But it ain't me, Mac!" Johnny whispered back.

"Well if it ain't you then who is it?" There was a pause as they looked at each other across the room. Mac could see Johnny's eyes as big as pie plates in the gloom. The boy swallowed hard and said in a barely heard whisper,

"Maybe it's the little girl." Mac sighed in aggravation and threw up his hands.

"Oh Lord, it ain't the little girl, Johnny," he said. "Look, I'll show you." He walked over to the coffin as Johnny watched him like a nervous hawk.

"There ain't nothin' in here but bones and worms, you idgit." As he said this he lifted the coffin lid and turned to look at Johnny.

"See?"

* * *

Ten fifty-five found them back crouched on the far side of the shack from the ransomer's house. A bright full moon glared out of the dark Texas sky like a pale, watery eye. They left the bikes in the same place and retrieved their gear from Gideon's saddlebags. They each had a pair of passive nightvision goggles strapped around their heads, illuminating everything in a grainy, glowing green. Gideon was armed with his massive CFT Dragoon revolver, and Bela had her well-used Wilk's 227 tied to her hip. They also both wore the clamshells, shoulders and forearm guards from the ubiquitous Psi-Hound riot armor. Gideon reached out and could feel the people in the house, exuding the same confidence tinged with a slight agitation. There were no lights burning inside. He consulted his clock one last time and watched as the dim numbers flashed over to eleven. Good, he thought, and he turned to give Bela the signal when a scream rang out from the house followed by a gunshot. They flattened themselves against the shack and there came another scream followed by the report of an energy weapon and the sound of splintering wood and running footsteps. Gideon and Bela froze in the shadow of the shack. After a moment, Gideon peered around the corner. There was no one in the yard and the front door was still shut, but he could no longer sense anybody in the house.

He gave the signal, and Bela sprinted across the street and went to ground behind the rusted carcass of a car sitting on blocks in the front yard. She waited there with her back to the warm metal and counted. At the count of ten she drew her pistol and popped up, propping her elbows on the fender and leveling the weapon at the front of the house, covering the door and windows. On cue, Gideon bolted across the street and hunkered down behind an empty rain barrel at the corner of the house nearest the front door. He peeked out and nodded to Bela. She took the signal and vaulted over the hood of the car and made for the door, while Gideon rolled out from his cover and swung the barrel of the big Dragoon up to cover her.

That's when it hit them. Like a tidal wave, a blast of pure spiritual anger and sadness boiled from the house and broke on the two Psi-Hounds. It caught Bela halfway up the stairs, and she stumbled and sagged on the step, clutching the rail. Gideon was knocked flat and a terrible ringing began in his ears. Following the spiritual blast came a sharp, keening wail that they felt in their bones and which echoed out into the hills. Gideon lurched to his feet and, half blind with pain, stumbled toward the front steps with his revolver straight-armed toward the house. He made it to the stairs and collapsed next to Bela, who was trying to shake off the effects of the onslaught.

"Mother of god!" Gideon hissed. "What was that?"

"I don't know," panted Bela. "We'd better get in there and see, though." Gideon nodded and they struggled to their feet. They took another step up the stairs when a second wave hit them. It was weaker this time, but it still stopped them in their tracks. Gideon tried to sense what was in the house and found that all of his higher senses were dead.

"I'm head blind," he gasped.

"Me too." They looked at each other for a moment, apprehensive, each of them seeing in shades of green. Gideon nodded and they rose and rushed the door together, crashing through and stumbling into the house.

The carnage in the room stopped them short. In the middle of the room was a small coffin, overturned on the bare plank floor, dirt still clotted on its sides. A large, bald man sat slumped against the wall, a pool of blood spreading beneath him. Another man lay face down and still, halfway through the doorway at the back of the room. The acrid smell of gunpowder and the bright ozone smell of an energy discharge mixed in the room. Gideon walked across the room and examined the bald man. He was bleeding from a gaping wound in his throat. His eyes were wide open and his face twisted in such a look of horror that Gideon, who had seen a lot, had to turn away. He shut the man's eyes and lifted his left arm, turning it over. On the inside of his left forearm was a tattoo. A black reversed S shape, half on its side, decorated with little oval shapes.

"Afraid of nothing but God," he muttered to himself, and let the arm fall back into the man's lap. Bela meanwhile had gone to the man on the floor and turned him over. He was young and his boyish features were twisted up in a look not unlike that of his partner.

"What about him?" Gideon whispered, crouching at Bela's side. She just shook her head and closed the man's eyes. The ringing in Gideon's ears subsided and suddenly his senses snapped back. He and Bela stiffened as they caught the scent of something powerful and paranormal in the house. Slowly, the sound of sobbing came to their ears. Gideon edged around the doorframe and looked down a short corridor into an empty room, where a small figure was huddled in a corner. Bela scrambled to her feet and peered around the corner. She gasped.

"Gideon," she hissed. "It's the girl." Bela stalked into the corridor. Gideon lunged at her but missed.

"Bela, get back here!" he whispered. Bela approached the small figure crouched in the corner. It was undoubtedly the mortal remains of the Jackson girl. It still wore the burial dress, a white, calf length linen affair with a scalloped collar and tarnished silver buttons down the front. The dress was smeared with blood and wet earth. Bela could almost feel two minds

fighting inside of it as it emanated alternating waves of fear and malevolence. Whatever it was turned blank white eyes on Bela and huddled closer to the floor. Bela dropped to a crouch and reached out to touch the thing's head. The hair was dry and the flesh cold. It sniffed and wiped its nose with the back of a small, bloody hand.

"Did I hurt that man?" it asked, in a voice like wind in dry corn.

"No, baby," said Bela and caressed the withered head. "Don't worry about it."

"I was so afraid. I remember falling off the horse, then I don't remember anything for a long time. Then that man opened that door and I was so scared and I hit him." At this the thing broke into dry sobbing again. Bela sat and gathered it into her arms. Gideon walked into the room and could feel the seething conflict within the thing that Bela sat rocking and murmuring to. Gideon swung the cylinder out of the Dragoon and dropped it into a pouch on his belt. He retrieved another, this one loaded with nearly pure silver bullets in .45 caliber. He snapped it into the revolver and walked over to them.

Bela looked up at him from the floor. He didn't even have to see the look in her deep, sorrowful eyes to know what she was feeling. He was feeling it himself. Everything in their breeding cried out for this thing's destruction, and yet it wore a guise they remembered well as a laughing little girl with braids in her hair. He hesitated for a moment.

"Gideon," Bela whispered.

"I know."

He placed the muzzle of the big Dragoon against the thing's withered skull and thumbed the hammer back. The sound was huge in the small room. The thing opened its blank white eyes and looked up at Bela.

"Will I go to Heaven this time?" it rasped.

"Yes, baby," said Bela, and she turned her head. Gideon pulled the trigger.

* * *

At dawn they laid her to rest again. After the incident at the house, Gideon contacted Sheriff Hamm of Arlen and arranged for a car to take the body and casket back to Atchinson. Gideon and Bela rode escort for the car in subdued silence. The night was cool and the great bear chased its tail down the horizon. They left the body with Galen then reported to Sheriff King at his office. They turned in their badges and related what had happened. The sheriff shook his head in deep sadness at the whole state of affairs, and thanked them both. Sheriff King told them that the other two accomplices had run all the way to Sheriff Hamm's office and begged to be locked up. He also said that he would not tell the Jackson family any of the details of what went on in the house in Arlen. Sheriff King left to ride out to James Jackson's, and Bela and Gideon parted in silence. She returned to her small flat in Church Street above her shop, and Gideon went to his office at the bar, where he fell asleep on his journal while a tall glass full of ice and whiskey sat and sweated a ring on his desk.

They both turned out in the morning to see her buried again. Sheriff King was also there, speaking in low tones to James Jackson. Willie looked on with terrible grief etched on his el-

derly face, his three friends standing solemn behind him, their hats in their hands. The brothers looked so young and lost, standing near the coffin in their dark suits, searching in silence for an answer to this. Pastor McCallan read from Corinthians again, and said a few words about the enduring strength of the human spirit. He finished with a prayer, and they all bowed their heads. The pastor finished, everyone in attendance said 'amen,' and Galen escorted them all gently from the cemetery.

The Hammer of the Forge™

Chapter Thirty-Seven

A for Vendetta

By James M.G. Cannon

The cyclopean spires of the great and terrible city of Splynn curled up into the warm blue of the sky like grasping tentacles. Sinuous and serpentine, with an overlay of the Atlantean architectural styles that had informed human cultures from the Mediterranean to the Yucatan, the buildings managed to be both inviting and alien, as visually arresting and affecting as the Parthenon or Teotihuacan, and as diabolical as a demon's parlor. Splynn, the city, brainchild of the mad, brilliant Splugorth mastermind Splynncryth, was the heart of an interdimensional empire, fed by the riches of a blasted and broken Earth, all but torn asunder by the devastating Rifts that first led Splynn here, and now made the planet one of the few true nexus points of the sprawling, brawling Megaverse.

In the great central market of Splynn, all things were possible, if a sentient being had the right currency. Said currency might be as gauche as gold, as current as Three Galaxies credits, or as rarified as the souls or blood of sentient beings. Splynncryth was a god of commerce, and trade was the lifeblood of his empire; trade founded on the exploitation of living creatures, natural resources, and the near limitless possibilities of magic.

The streets of the market thronged with representatives from a thousand different species. Here, Kittani engineers showed off their technological prizes, Kydian Powerlords flexed their muscles, massive Metzla hovered over the polished stones of the streets, and lumbering Gargoyles towered over nearly everyone, draped in their huge wings like long, black cloaks. Dragons and giants loomed above even the Gargoyles, while at their feet scurried the lesser races; Humans, Elves, Simvan, Brodkil, Hawrk-duhks and Hawrk-kas, Shaydorians, Cernuns, Sowki, Lizard Mages, Centaurs, and thousands more. Most of them were slave races, either servitors of supernatural masters or about to be bought and sold by such. Others were there to do the buying and selling. The noise created a dull roar that rebounded throughout the city, while the stink of offal, blood, waste, and sweat permeated the market grounds, despite the open sky and frequent breezes. The stench of corruption, of desperation, of evil, could never be washed away.

At the northern end of the market was a broad platform used for impromptu gladiatorial combats, hasty sacrifices, or less savory practices. A heavily muscled Hawrk-ka, beak and claws stained with blood, had just finished dispatching a trio of humans, when a thunderous crack split the afternoon air, and a Rift opened atop the platform. A glowing blue puncture through the heart of reality, the Rift widened, and a blast of cold air whipped across the platform, the Hawrk-ka, and the crowd gathered at the platform's base to bet on the match. Snowflakes fluttered on the warm Atlantean breeze before melting into a fine mist of water droplets.

Rifts were highly regulated in Splynn; indeed, in all of Atlantis. This one was random, unprovoked, and unplanned. It spelled trouble.

Thirteen battered and weary looking humanoids materialized through the Rift, stepping onto the platform, armed and armored with a variety of items that appeared incised with runes.

The Splynn market paused for a moment, observing. Supernatural monsters shifted uneasily, momentarily uncertain at the change in routine. Then someone near the platform recognized the invaders, and the shout, "Atlanteans!" rang out. A thousand more throats took up the call, and all hell broke loose.

* * *

Kassiopaia Acherean, Atlantean Undead Slayer, shouldered her rifle and stepped through the Rift. Tall and well-proportioned, Kassy was normally a striking woman, with pale skin, midnight black hair, and piercing blue eyes. Her body was etched with a whirling mix of mystic tattoos in blue and white that accentuated her classical beauty. But now, she was exhausted. Her hair, pulled back from her face in a ponytail, was straggly and matted with sweat. Blood and other fluids stained her black Atlantean armor, and her reserves of psychic energy were lower than they had been in decades.

She and her squad of Undead Slayers, accompanied by the shadowy wizard, Doctor Abbot, the Celestial Monk, Arwen Griffin, and the Celestine Joriel — Kassy's current paramour — had traveled through a dozen different Rifts, traversed a dozen different hostile realities, and fought and clawed their way to their current destination. Three of their number, Gwydion, Sherlock, and Yoshimitsu, had fallen in the struggle already. Three Atlantean lives, lost for all time. But not spent wastefully;

they were in pursuit of a Shoggoth, one of the servants of the Great Old Ones, now in the employ of a Splugorth, who had kidnapped an entire village from a planet called Adumar. All to seek that which no Splugorth could ever possess: the Cosmic Forge.

There existed a prophecy amongst the pastoral people of Adumar that they would one day produce a psychic of unimaginable power, who would lead the people into the void, to reunite them with the Cosmic Forge. It was well known in the Three Galaxies that a Splugorth named Rynncryyl was obsessed with locating the Cosmic Forge, and it was clear to both Abbot and Kassy that Rynncryyl had sent the Shoggoth to raid Adumar as part of his mad scheme. They pursued the Shoggoth through the Rift it had created, expecting to find Rynncryyl's court on the other side, but instead they had followed a zig-zag trail across the dimensions, always one step behind the Shoggoth, always led into a trap of some kind and forced to fight for their lives until Abbot could pick up the trail once more and open the gate to the next world. It had cost them all a precious expenditure of ammo, blood, and energy. Kassy feared that, once they reached their ultimate destination, they would be too weakened to save the villagers.

Around Kassy and her companions the blue light of the Rift began to fade, the queasy feeling in her stomach stopped, and a new dimension opened up around them.

They stood on a blood-stained platform, decorated with the bodies of three humans. A huge, heavily muscled hawk-man stood nearby, its claws and pinions stained with blood, amber eyes opened wide in surprise. Beyond the platform was a huge mass of sentient beings, from what looked like a thousand different species, most of them of supernatural origin. Some looked to be in cages, or wearing collars, or suited in strange bio-mechanical armor. Kassy saw tents and signposts, the tell-tale marks of a marketplace. Beyond the crowd, huge buildings reached up into the sky, in a variety of architectural styles, but many of them looked Classical in form. Kassy saw pyramids in the distance, shimmering with power. And some of the buildings had a distinctly Atlantean flare. . .

"Hera's Tears!" Kassy spat. She turned briefly to Abbot, the shadowy figure in the trenchcoat and fedora beside her. "Do you know where we are? We're in Atlantis. In that profane, debauched, unholy city of Splynn."

Abbot's orange eyes, his only visible feature, lightened in surprise. "Not Rynncryyl, then, but Splynnryth. Amazing."

The crowd of supernatural beings, momentarily shocked by the squad's arrival, was beginning to recover, and coming to a realization as well. That would spell the doom of Kassy's team. The thirteen of them could hardly fight an entire city or a continent, even if they were in top form. She had to act fast.

Even as someone in the crowd shouted, "Atlanteans!" and the mass of them began to surge forward, Kassy called, "Grenades," and suited words to action. She ripped two thermal detonators from her belt, primed them, and threw them into the surging mass of supernatural monsters in one smooth movement. Her nine remaining squadmates copied her action, and in seconds the ground beneath the platform rumbled with a deafening explosion that shook the entire marketplace. Bodies were thrown aside, buildings shattered, and the platform listed sharply, its supports about to give way.

But the Gargoyles and the Metzlas and the Dragons were barely fazed.

Kassy and her companions were safe behind a screen of shadowy force, erected in a split-second by the quick thinking Doctor Abbot.

"This is bad," Odin said from Kassy's left. The bald, goateed Atlantean held a black mace wreathed in green flames in his right hand. "We didn't even slow down the big ones, and the little ones will just bio-regenerate back to health in a few minutes."

Kassy turned to the wizard. "Well?"

Abbot's orange eyes winked out as he concentrated. "The Shoggoth's trail ends here. This *is* our destination." Orange lights reappeared. "I can track the Shoggoth, but that may not be where the villagers were taken."

A pair of Gargoyles waded through the crowd and began to rain hammering blows against Abbot's shield. Cracks appeared in the shadowy force wall. Metzlas began to raise up into the sky, and Kassy made out Kittani aerial craft and power armor moving into position.

"Do it," Kassy snapped. *Of all the places in all the worlds, she thought, it had to be this one. Atlantis. Home. This is the first time I've ever been here, and I'm not even going to have a chance to enjoy the sights, or stuff a thermonuclear device down Splynnryth's craw. Life is just not fair.*

Kassy touched a tattoo on her shoulder, activating one of the few tattoos she had strength left to use, and a huge white Gryphon with blue eyes and talons materialized beside her. The other Atlanteans summoned up their creatures as well, while Joriel took to the sky under his own power, maroon wings flapping. Abbot rose into the air on a circle of shadow. Arwen hopped up on an eight-legged stallion behind Odin.



As Abbot's shield shattered into a million shards, the Undead Slayers rose up into the air. Kassy's Gryphon led the way, and a multicolored menagerie followed close behind. Odin and Arwen on his green stallion, whose hooves sparked green flames as they struck the air, Jocasta on a giant eagle with red feathers, Diomedes on a glowing yellow sun wyrm, Atlas astride a horned dragon with iridescent scales, Keres on a golden Ki-Lin, her brother Kaesar rode a golden Gryphon of his own, Geb a flying carpet, and the rest of the squad favored a fleet of Pegasi.

Energy blasts and fireballs flashed towards the squad, but their magic steeds ducked and juke, avoiding the fire. More

troublesome were the Gargoyles, Dragons, Metzla, and Kittani taking to the air. Even the statues on the ground were coming to life, spitting magic bolts or stepping off their pedestals to do battle.

Abbot took point, standing atop his flying wedge of shadow, leaning on his cane as the wind whipped at his hat and coat. Occasionally a blast of light would flash near him, but the attack never penetrated the nearly invisible Armor of Ithan spell that enshrouded him. Abbot did not retaliate; Kassy knew that he was saving his energy for the battle with the Shoggoth. It was a wise strategy, especially given how spent the Undead Slayers would be when they reached the beast.

The sky over Kassy darkened as one of the Gargoyles rose above her, its huge wings extended out like a shroud. The massive jaw opened in a savage grin that revealed gigantic teeth. A huge claw swiped at Kassy's Gryphon, but she dodged out of the way. Kassy twisted in her seat, letting the Gryphon do the driving, and sighted down her rifle. A burst of crimson light slammed into the Gargoyle's face, scorching hard flesh and shearing off one of the monster's horns. It howled in pain and fell back, momentarily defeated but not killed. Kassy wished she had a slugthrower with some uranium rounds; the supernatural monsters wouldn't be able to bio-regenerate from a hit with one of those. But all she had were Three Galaxies standard issue laser blasters. She had been depending on tattoo magic and Abbot to deal with the Shoggoth, and had never expected to reach Atlantis.

Kassy again felt a stab of guilt. She was here, in the home of her people, the first of her line to see the fabled continent in untold centuries, and she could do nothing to avenge her people's loss. Splynncryth's hold on Atlantis was too strong, too entrenched, for the scattered Atlanteans to do anything about it. There were rumblings among the clans from time to time about retaking Atlantis, but no one ever did anything. Individual Atlanteans were amongst the mightiest mortals in the Megaverse, but they were not united, scattered across an infinite number of dimensions, and could not gather the strength necessary to unseat the Splugorth. It would take an army of Cosmo-Knights to set the land free of Splynncryth's hold, but that didn't make it any easier for Kassy.

This was part of her unreasoning hatred of Splugorth, even beyond the natural antipathy any sapient being should possess for the demonic creatures. One of them stole Atlantis from the Atlanteans, transformed her ancestral homeland into a paradise for supernatural evil, and made a tidy profit on the whole affair. She knew her fellow Atlanteans felt something similar. How could they not? They had all been raised with the promise that someday, some distant day, Atlanteans would return to their homeland, retake the land they were born to rule, and wipe clean the stain that had darkened Atlantis for too long. And here they were, thirteen Undead Slayers, the elite warriors of the Atlantean race, and nothing could be done. They were powerless.

It made Kassy want to smash something.

Luckily, the city of Splynn provided plenty of targets. Huge Metzla, like modern art versions of beetles, swam through the air, lashing at the Atlanteans with tentacles or unleashing bursts of psychokinetic energy from horn-like prongs. Gargoyles flapped along, snarling and swiping with their claws. Three

Dragons had joined the throng, breathing fire and throwing spells, trying to take down the Atlanteans, so they could dive in and do ruder work with teeth and claws. Kittani, ape-like humanoids known for their technical skill, piloted insect-like suits of power armor and robots that bristled with weaponry. These, at least, were not quite as resilient to Three Galaxies weaponry as the megasteel hides of the supernatural monsters. Kittani armor sparked and came apart and spiraled down to the city streets, emitting great clouds of black smoke.

The Atlanteans unleashed a barrage of fire upon their attackers composed mostly of lasers and energy weapons and a few tattoo-conjured spells. Their mounts also fought back, some with claws or flaming breath or with bolts of lightning from their horns. Joriel darted around the Atlanteans with quicksilver grace, using his wings for balance and the grav drive in his chest for speed and altitude. Everywhere he moved, he sliced through foes with the glowing blue blade in his hand, the psychically summoned blazer that was a Celestine's deadliest weapon, capable of shearing through Cosmo-Knight armor or starship hulls with equal ease.

Arwen hugged Odin's back and muttered under her breath, unskilled with ranged combat. She was deadly in hand to hand, capable of taking on an adult dragon almost single-handedly, but in this situation, she was just another target. Kassy knew the girl chafed at the restriction. Arwen was an action-junkie, a dangerous attitude when combined with her power. Kassy worried about the girl, and hoped that Abbot could curtail some of her more destructive impulses.

Through all the mess of fire and foes, Kassy had to keep one eye trained on Abbot. The wizard moved quickly, buzzing through the air, darting around buildings and under bridges and around statues that reached out to grasp at him. Abbot lived a charmed life, Kassy was certain, and not a single stray blast or claw touched him. The Atlanteans were not so lucky. Kassy's Gryphon took a claw swipe from a Gargoyle before Kassy was able to toss her last grenade down the Gargoyle's throat. The back plates of her blue-black Atlantean armor were scorched from laser fire, and she could feel pain in her lower back where some of the blast had burned through the armor to char flesh.

A Dragon snapped Geb and his flying carpet out of the air in one bite, and Geb was gone before Joriel could dart in and slash at the Dragon's throat with his blazer. That move earned Joriel a swipe from the Dragon's claws that sheared through the Celestine's armor and knocked him from the air.

Kassy bit back a cry and broke formation, heeling her Gryphon towards Joriel as he plummeted. The Dragon wheeled on her, its sinuous neck winding as the huge head surged towards her, jaws parting. A sheet of flame exploded in Kassy's direction. She leaned across her mount's neck as the Gryphon tucked its wings against its body and dropped like a stone beneath the flames. The wings shot back out to catch the wind as the Gryphon continued its dive. It reached out its talons and yanked Joriel out of the air, pulling him up against its chest as it wheeled again and tried to return to the squad, but the Dragon was there.

Baleful red eyes gleamed above the huge jaw as the mouth drew close and prepared to snap closed over Kassy, Joriel, and the Gryphon. Kassy raised her rifle, regretted the loss of her grenades, and uttered a short prayer to Hera and Athena as she saw her death bear down upon her.

And then a wave of shadowlight slammed into the side of the Dragon's head, blistering skin, shattering teeth, and shearing off a section of the Dragon's jaw. Abbott, saving her again, and yet spending precious energy that would be needed against the Shoggoth to do it. He winked at her with those orange eyes of his, and Kassy urged her Gryphon on to meet him.

"We're almost there," he said when she caught up to him. He glanced down. "Is Joriel alright?"

From the Gryphon's claws, the Celestine raised his left hand and gave the thumb's up sign. Kassy blinked back tears. He was an android, but a living creature, built rather than born, a mix of organic and mechanical systems design to create the perfect warrior. Self-repair systems would fix almost any amount of damage, but he was not invulnerable. Kassy wanted to stop, to examine his wounds, to make sure he would pull through, but she knew there was no time.

"You and Arwen will have to deal with the Shoggoth," Kassy said instead. "It will take the rest of us to keep this horde back." She fired her rifle behind her as if to emphasize her words.

Abbot nodded, a movement all but lost at the speed they were moving. "That drum-shaped building over there," Abbot said, pointing with his cane, "is where the Shoggoth went. We need to get inside, and quickly."

Kassy keyed her comm. "Atlas, we need a hole in that drum-shaped building coming up on the left."

Without a word, Atlas broke formation. His dragon darted ahead of the squad and dove for the building, slamming into it at full speed. Rune-etched stone shattered, and the dragon winked out of existence. The squad moved as one and followed Atlas' trajectory, blasting through and widening the hole he created. The animals disappeared, dispelled back to their tattoos, the need for them gone.

The squad formed a perimeter around Kassy as she knelt on the stone floor beside Joriel. His entire right side was mangled, flesh torn from the metal exoskeleton, exposing wires and blood vessels. His face was pale, his eyes bright, but his lips pulled up into a smile. "I'll be fine," he lied. The damage was too extensive, she knew, for his self-repair systems to handle. Joriel struggled into a sitting position. His wings fluttering weakly.

Hot tears burned Kassy's eyes. Joriel reached up with his left hand and brushed them away.

The building shook as their pursuers arrived, slamming into the side of the building or landing atop it. Laser blasts, fire balls, and lightning bolts flashed through the opening in the wall. Jocasta threw up a hastily erected wall of flame to keep the worst of it at bay, but it would not hold for long.

Joriel struggled to his feet. His right wing was torn as well, Kassy noticed. He pulled her up with him. He grimaced, and the light in his right eye sparked and died. "Non-essential systems are shutting down," he said. "Neural system is overloading. Just shut off my pain receptors." Joriel's remaining eye focused on Kassy. "Don't worry about me. I will be fine."

Kassy gripped his left hand hard but said nothing.

Abbot stepped into view. "We need to keep moving, Kassy. If we stay in one place for too long we'll be annihilated."

For the first time, the klaxon sound of an alarm penetrated Kassy's senses. She saw Eyes of Eylor opening up on the marble walls of the building's interior, blinking slowly. They were-

n't doing anything at the moment, except relaying everything they saw to their Splugorth masters, but that wouldn't hold for long. Abbot was right. They needed to get moving.

"Can you keep up?" Kassy asked Joriel.

He nodded sharply. "But my blazer is trashed. I need a gun." She thrust her rifle into his hands, eliciting a grim smile from him.

"Move out, people," Kassy barked. "We still have a village to save."

* * *

The corridors in the building were broad with high, vaulted ceilings. Diomedes, Atlas, and Odin dropped the ceiling over the entryway they used to slow pursuit, and then the squad hurried down the passage, still following Abbot. Caesar and Diomedes, the heavy gunners, brought up the rear, ready to unleash a barrage of laser fire on anything behind them.

But it was from the front that the next charge came. A half-dozen Kydian Overlords, hulking, purple-skinned humanoids in Bio-Wizard armor, came thundering down the passage, weapons at the ready. They were upon Abbot almost before anyone noticed their presence, raising axes and hammers to strike the wizard down, but a violet flash interposed itself between the Kydians and Abbot. Arwen, suffused with light, acted like Abbot's bodyguard. Her fists and feet moved with an adder's speed, disarming or disabling three of the Kydians in as many heartbeats. The other three, realizing the danger, shifted their attention away from the wizard and back to the martial artist, but by then the Atlanteans had joined the fray, and the Kydians didn't last long.

Even as the Kydians hit the floor, a loud crash echoed from behind them, a sure sign that the rubble had been cleared and the horde was after them again. The Atlanteans picked up their pace, moving double-time down the winding corridors. Joriel struggled to keep up, and Kassy lagged behind to stay with him despite his urging.

They found a stairwell and thundered down it, cutting their way through more Kydians, and even one of the dreaded Splugorth Conservators, a multi-limbed, bio-engineered killing machine that took a lot of punishment before going down and wounded both Keres and Odin in the melee. The number of troops began to increase, which meant they were getting closer to their destination.

The stairwell led them down, below street level, into the bowels of the city. Finally, they reached a level swarming with soldiers, and Abbot decided they had made it far enough. He tapped the floor with his cane, and everything went dark.

Except Kassy found that she could still see. It was limited vision, everything in stark black and white, but she could see. And their foes could not. The Atlanteans scythed through the Kydians, Conservators, and Kittanis with abandon, disdainingly ranged combat for something much more up close and personal. Out came the swords and maces and scimitars and axes, and the servants of the Splugorth died in their droves.

Abbot moved through the carnage serenely, untouched and untouchable, until he came to a huge set of doors, incised with runes. He tapped them with his cane, and the doors swung open,

grinding on hidden hinges. Abbot's darkness did not extend to the room beyond, but the Atlanteans no longer needed it. And the creature on the other side looked like it would not be intimidated by the mere absence of light.

The room on the other side was massive, carved with runes and statuary and decorated with Eyes of Eylor. On the far side was another set of double doors, just as massive and impressive as the first. And between the sets of doors stood one of the strangest, most vile creatures Kassy had ever seen. It was fifteen meters tall, or maybe ten. It had a dozen eyes, or maybe only two. Its body rippled with muscles, and was covered with scales. Or fur. It had horns, and then it didn't, and tentacles, and then those were gone as well. It was a shifting, amorphous mass, constantly changing shape and composition, never staying in one form for long.

"The Shoggoth," Kassy said.

Abbot nodded. "Guard the door, Kassy. Arwen, your assistance please." The eager, young martial artist followed Abbot into the room. Abbot's darkness faded, and the Undead Slayers dispelled their personal weapons and took up firearms once more. Even as they did so, a Gargoyle appeared at the top of the nearest landing. With a roar, it leapt down the stairs and landed in front of the Atlanteans, its claws sinking into the stone. Behind it, more Kydians and Kittani and other monsters materialized, screaming bloody murder.

The Atlanteans formed ranks and raised their weapons, preparing to meet the charge.

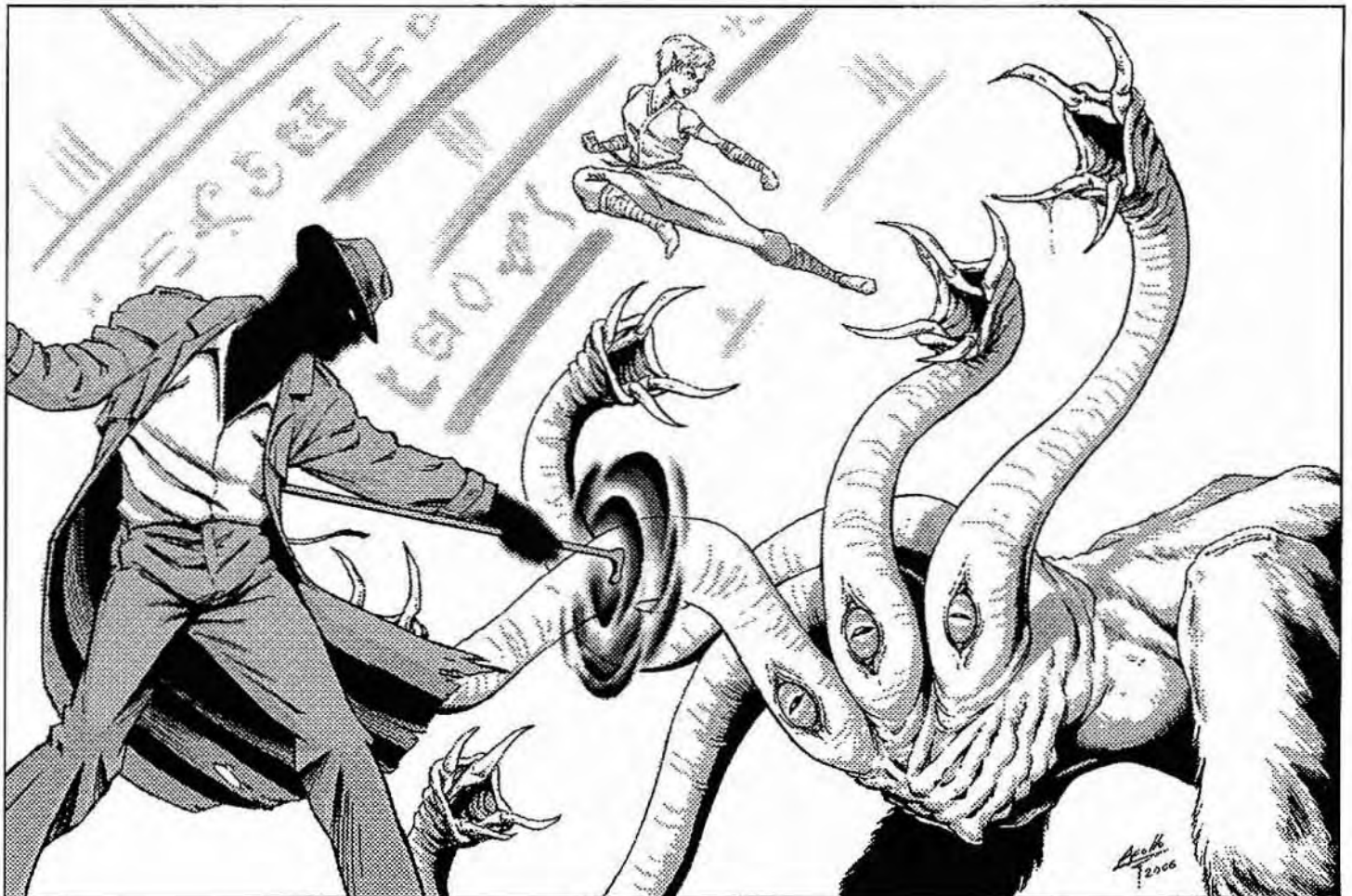
In the chamber with the Shoggoth, Abbot and Arwen cautiously approached the warped beast. For a moment, it looked like a giant frog with a thousand screaming mouths dancing across its skin. Then it was something that looked part rhinoceros and part buffalo, and then a mountain of stony flesh, etched with acid.

"There is still a chance we can avoid any undue violence," Abbot said.

You will not pass, Shadowen. The voice echoed throughout the room, but the Shoggoth's mouth did not move.

"We'll see about that," Abbot said, his voice low. He raised his cane and a beam of darklight shot from the tip towards the Shoggoth. But the creature was ready, its amorphous body flowed around the attack and surged towards Abbot to smash the shadow man to nothing. But Arwen was there, as always, to protect Abbot from harm. She seemed to be in a dozen places at once, blocking and counterattacking the shapeshifting monstrosity, keeping it from tagging the wizard.

The Shoggoth retreated momentarily. Abbot didn't hesitate. He gestured, and all the shadows in the room exploded from every corner and nook and converged on the Shoggoth, nipping at it with semi-substantial teeth. With his next breath, Abbot threw lightning at the beast, and a sheet of flame, and a blast of cold. The Shoggoth roared, wounded, and concentrated an assault on Arwen. With one tremendous swipe it threw Arwen across the room. She slammed into the wall, cracking stone and her head, and flopped to the floor. Dazed, she struggled to rise, but the



Shoggoth was there, ready to drop a hammer blow upon the young martial artist.

Dark light exploded in a wave that inundated the Shoggoth, burning and freezing it simultaneously. The light in the room dimmed, and Abbot's natural darkness deepened even as his eyes blazed even brighter. A gigantic black fist formed in the air and dropped into the center of the Shoggoth's mass, squelching it. Desperately, the Shoggoth began to form psychic shields around its body. The air around it shimmered as it switched to a less physical attack, trying to devastate Abbot with the force of its overwhelming, evil personality. A blast of psychic force washed over Abbot, staggering the wizard.

Arwen regained her feet. Her violet aura, momentarily dimmed, flared to life once more. She launched herself at the Shoggoth, and the creature's psychic shields shattered like stained glass.

Abbot struck again. The huge fist pummeled the Shoggoth, and a sheet of black flames erupted from the ground, scorching its flesh. The Shoggoth howled and lurched backward, contracting in upon itself. Abbot pressed the attack, raising the temperature on the flames with an upraised hand, and dropping his other hand caused the black fist to squash the Shoggoth. With a final yowl, the Shoggoth opened a doorway and slid through it, fleeing the battle.

Abbot whirled and rushed back to the hall, where Kassy and the rest battled against the hordes of Atlantis. All of the Atlanteans were marked with wounds of one kind or another, some of them too damaged to stand. Kassy and Joriel leaned against one another, supporting one another, weapons blazing.

The Splugorth forces seemed largely proof against the barrage, either literally or else capable of ignoring the massive damage done to them long enough to rush in and attack the Atlanteans.

Abbot gestured for the Atlanteans to hurry into the chamber. Kassy saw him and called her people. Some had to reach down and grab fallen comrades, but all of them made it through the doorway. Abbot and Arwen added their own power to the retreat, and as soon as all their allies were safely in the room, Abbot pulled the doors closed with a cantrip. An overeager Sowki got slammed between the doors as they closed, but the rest of their attackers were momentarily trapped on the other side.

"It's done?" Kassy said, breathless.

Abbot nodded. He should have been exhausted himself, given the amount of magical energy he had just expended. But there was something about this world, this dimension, that fed his power. He had always been something of a magical sponge, and could tap ley lines or nexus points from farther away than almost any other wizard he had met, but he had rarely encountered so magic rich an atmosphere before. This world, wherever it might be, was incredibly powerful. No wonder that Spynnecryth had settled here.

Arwen was already pushing the doors on the opposite side of the room, and Kassy saw people in cages on the other side. She hoped Abbot had enough energy left to get them all home.

The Splugorth forces began to hammer against the doors. They would be through soon.

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