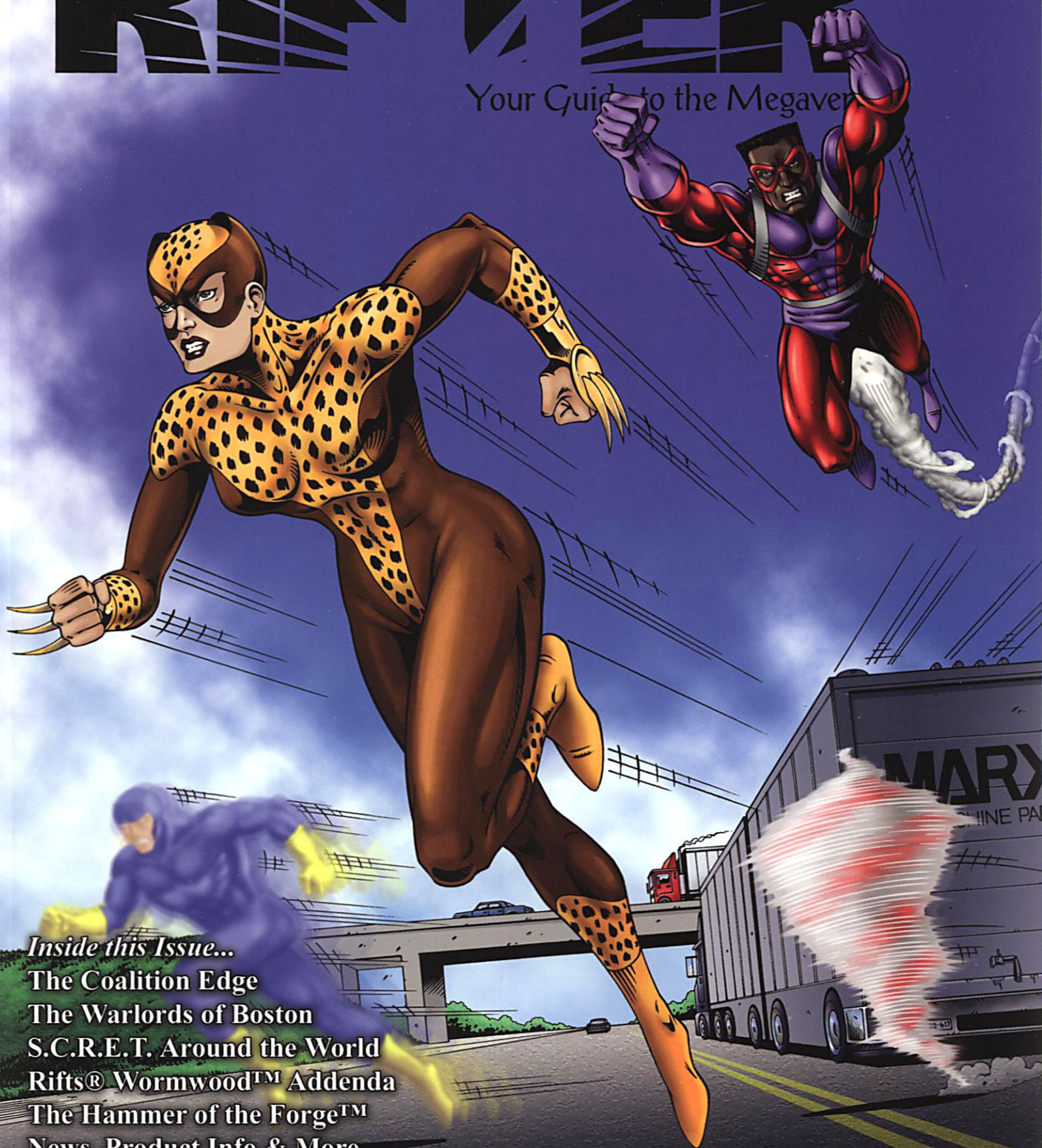


Palladium Books® Presents:

THE

RIFTER®

Your Guide to the Megaverse



Inside this Issue...

The Coalition Edge

The Warlords of Boston

S.C.R.E.T. Around the World

Rifts® Wormwood™ Addenda

The Hammer of the Forge™

News, Product Info & More

long Apollo

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

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



The Rifter® Number 42

Your guide to the Palladium Megaverse®!

First Printing – April 2008

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Palladium Books® Presents:

THE RIFTER #42



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.

– *Kevin Siembieda, 2008*

Contents – The Rifter® #42 – April, 2008

Page 6 – From the Desk of Kevin Siembieda

Publisher, Kevin Siembieda wrote this editorial piece about a week before Palladium Books' move from Taylor, Michigan, to its new home in Westland, Michigan, roughly 25 miles from the old office. This got him thinking about change and transition. About the new Palladium Headquarters, about upcoming books and about the promise of the future. It also got him thinking about his lifelong friendship with ailing friend and game designer, Erick Wujcik.

Page 8 – News & Coming Attractions

Palladium has moved. The Robotech® RPG is a smash hit. Palladium has a lot of big plans this year, including three new role-playing games. You heard right, THREE new RPGs: **Robotech® The Shadow Chronicles®**, **Dead Reign™** (post-apocalyptic zombies!), and the long awaited **Warpath: Urban Jungle™** (a modern, gritty game of modern combat). Not to mention sourcebooks for **Rifts®**, **Palladium Fantasy®**, **Heroes Unlimited™**, **Nightbane®**, **Robotech®** and other game lines.

Page 12 – S.C.R.E.T. Around the World

Optional Source Material for Heroes Unlimited™

Glen Evans offers his ideas about S.C.R.E.T. – the Superbeing Control, Retrieval and Elimination Team, and how S.C.R.E.T. agencies around the world operate to keep super-villains and rogue heroes under control.

Canada S.C.R.E.T. – page 13.

Canada S.C.R.E.T. Vehicles – page 15.

Cyberworks Network – page 15.

United Kingdom S.C.R.E.T. – page 21.

U.K. S.C.R.E.T. Vehicles – page 23.

Russian S.C.R.E.T. – page 27.

Russian S.C.R.E.T. Vehicles – page 31.

The Black Steel Guard – page 36.

The Others 37.

Artwork by *Brian* and *Allen Manning*.

Page 38 – The Wormwood Addenda

Optional Source Material for

Rifts® Dimension Book One: Wormwood™

Braden Campbell presents a fascinating look at the world and history of the hellish dimensional realm known as *Wormwood*.

Part One: The Sundering of the Realm – page 39.

Part Two: The Faith Divided – page 41.

Map – page 41.

Part Three: The Golden Age Ends – page 42.

Part Four: The Tribulation Begins – page 44.

Artwork by *Kent Burtles*.

Page 45 – The Coalition Edge

Optional Source Material for Rifts®

Matt Olfsen takes a look at the advantages held by the Coalition States over other nations and organizations.

The Coalition's solution to a world without satellites – page 47.

The Digital Battlefield – page 51.

Electronic Aided Artillery – page 55.

IAR-2C "Abolisher" – page 58.

The Soldier's Edge – page 61.

RFE Digital Dog Tags – page 63.

FASSRR-100 Skelebot RECON Rat – page 65.

Artwork by *Charles Walton* and *Mark Dudley*.

Page 67 - The Torque of Amemait

Optional Adventure Source Material

Suitable for the Entire Palladium Megaverse®

Aaron Corley reveals the tale of chaos god, Amemait, also known as "the Devourer," and how the ancient relic of this dark god affects any who try to use it.

Artwork by *Kent Burtles*.

Page 74 – Warlords of Boston

Optional Background and NPCs

for the Nightbane® RPG

Dale W. Glaser presents information on a notable Nightbane gang operating in Boston. He offers stats of key individuals as well as their motives and aspirations. Ideal as NPCs and source material to enrich your campaign. Visiting Boston anytime soon?

Adventure ideas are found on page 82.

New Morpheus Tables are found on page 83.

Artwork by *Mike Mumah*.

Page 84 – Under the Skin

Optional Rules and Ideas

for the Palladium Fantasy RPG® and Rifts®

Joseph Larsen takes a fascinating look at the disgusting and strange craft of using the hides of demons and other creatures to create enchanted leather armor and items.

Plus a look at Bio-Alchemy and the mysterious and mystical human(?) beings known as the *Kezel*.

Artwork by *Nick Bradshaw*.

Page 93 – The Hammer of the Forge™

Chapter 42: Yet Another Movie. The latest chapter in this ongoing series written by *James M.G. Cannon*. Read and enjoy.

Artwork by *Apollo Okamura*.

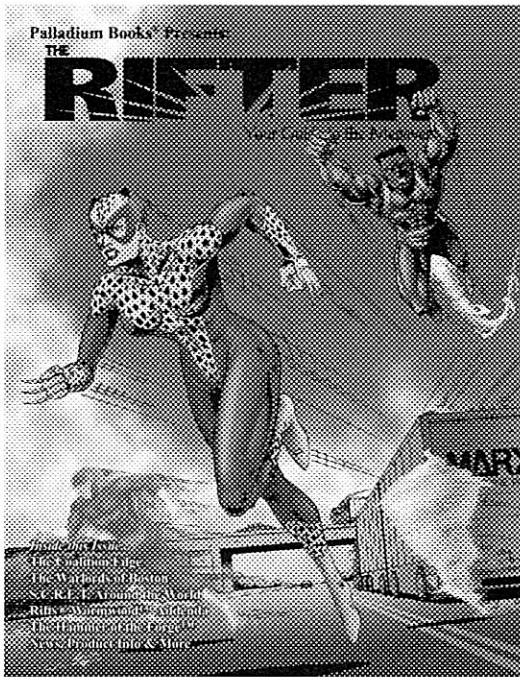
The Theme for Issue 41

The theme for this issue is transition, transformation, change, and secrets. Lots of secrets and hidden truths.

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®.

When are YOU going to submit an article, adventure, place or characters to The Rifter®?

We are always looking for material for *Rifts*®, *Heroes Unlimited*™, *Palladium Fantasy RPG*®, *Nightbane*®, *BTS-2*, *Chaos Earth*™, *Ninjas & Superspies*™, *Splicers*™ and others.



The Cover

The cover is something different. We took an old, *Kevin Long*, black and white illustration of the *Masters of Speed*, and had *Apollo Okamura* apply digital colors to it. The end result is a cover by two different generations of fan favorites. Cool, eh?

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.

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The Rifter® #43

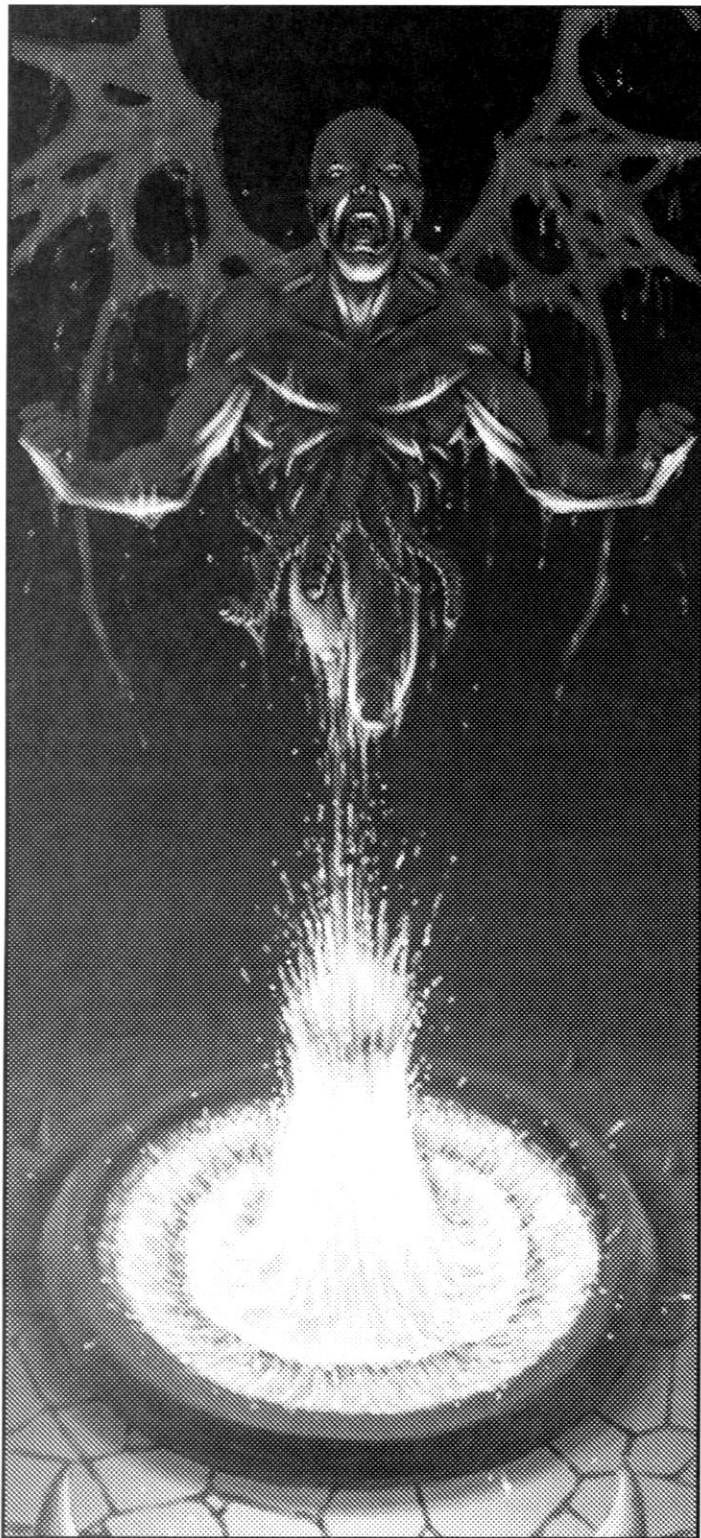
It’s time for Palladium’s third annual Swimsuit Issue. Like last year, we intend to present femme fatales – female heroes and villains – for Palladium’s many game settings and RPG lines; *Heroes Unlimited*™, *Ninjas and Superspies*™, *Nightbane*®, *Rifts*®, *Palladium Fantasy RPG*® and others.

- **Dangerous and deadly women from across the Megaverse®.**
- **Complete stats for each femme fatale, making them ready to use NPCs and villains.**
- **The next, epic chapter of *The Hammer of the Forge*™.**
- **Source material for the entire Palladium Megaverse®.**
- **The latest news and coming attractions. And maybe a big announcement.**
- **New contributors and fun. Please join us.**

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

One game system, a Megaverse® of Adventure

From the Desk of Kevin Siembieda



Transition

A great many changes are going on in Palladium's corner of the Megaverse®. Most of them are good, some of them very good, and some are sad. Overall, excitement at Palladium is high.

A new place to weave our magic

Palladium Books is moving. Taylor has been Palladium's home for 16 years. Those of you who have come to either of the *Palladium Open House* gaming events know what a fun place it was. Big and spacious too. We loved it here and hate to leave, but the simple fact is we can save a lot of money moving to a new, somewhat smaller building.

Consequently, the move is a good transition. We save money, and it gives us a chance to reorganize, consolidate and upgrade. We've added pallet racks and a forklift to our warehouse operation, the building is newer, and it is more centrally located for most everyone who works at Palladium Books.

Although the move is lots and lots of work, we're all looking forward to a new beginning at our new home.

It was also another opportunity for members of the Palladium family to gather and work together. What am I talking about? The 30-40 fans (*Palladium Muscle*) who will have helped us make the "Big Move." Your time, help and muscle were greatly appreciated. I want to make a special nod to *Todd*, *Lucas*, and *Eric*, who all worked like mules for a period of several days over a week or two period, to *Carmen* for driving the semi-truck and trailer (and saving Palladium several hundred dollars), and the Palladium crew who put up with my stress, yelling and exhausted blithering.

New Address and Telephone Number as of April 2, 2008:

Palladium Books® Inc.
39074 Webb Court
Westland, MI 48185
(734) 721-2903 (help & order line)
www.palladiumbooks.com

New Books, New Games, Bold New Adventures

We feel like Palladium is embarking on a new era of creativity and ideas. That our move to new offices and warehouse marks a new beginning that will rock your imaginations and the gaming world.

While many game companies are running away from role-playing games, Palladium intends to introduce their magic to new generations of gamers. I've said it before and I'll say it again, role-playing games are NOT dead or dying. RPGs may be changing (take a look at our manga-sized *Robotech® RPG*, for example), but fading away? I think not. At least not at Palladium Books.

We are seeing more and more new faces joining the Palladium RPG community every day, as well as many long-time gamers getting back into gaming. Here at Palladium Books, we have zillions of ideas swirling around our heads for countless

new RPGs and sourcebooks. In fact, all of us at Palladium are more excited about role-playing games than ever. If all goes well, before long, we hope to be releasing more new RPGs and sourcebooks than we have in years. And they are all new, fun, daring projects that will make you grin like a monkey or howl with excitement. Titles that push the envelope or take old ideas in new directions.

So look to Palladium for your RPG fix and unleash those imaginations.

Here's just a tiny taste of what we have planned for 2008.

Robotech® The Shadow Chronicles® RPG shipped March 20, 2008 and should be hitting store shelves a few weeks before the release of this issue of **The Rifter®**. The new Robotech® RPG is updated, improved and jam packed with new information, new art and new approaches to gaming. The manga-size is comfortable and portable. The book is a meaty 336 pages and brings the thrill of Robotech® to a new generation of gamers as well as to long-time fans of the original anime series. Check it out, because we're confident you'll like what you see. Almost immediately after it was released, fans began to rave about **Robotech® The Shadow Chronicles® RPG**. It's great to be spinning out new Robotech® adventures and sourcebooks.

Dead Reign™ RPG: Palladium's first big leap into the *zombie genre*. We think you'll like our take on zombies. Plus it introduces a couple of Palladium's new, talented freelancers. We hope to see it released by Spring or early Summer.

Warpath™: Urban Jungle RPG: After being delayed for a couple of years, *Jeffry Scott Hansen* and *Carmen Bellaire* are busy trying to get the **Warpath™ RPG** ready for a Summer (Gen Con?) or Fall release. **Warpath™ Urban Jungle** is the story of the men and women who fight the secret war against crime, drugs, terrorism, and darkness going on in the shadows of our city streets every day, but that never makes headline news. A dark, gritty RPG of modern combat and espionage.

The Minion War™ series is the war between the two Hells: Hades and Dyval. Hades came out last Summer, now, finally, the other books in the game series are about to be released, one after the other. **Dyval™, Dimensional Outbreak™, Armageddon Unlimited™, Heroes of the Megaverse®, and Megaverse® in Flames™** should ALL come out this year, with Dyval being released the end of April or early May, and the others following quickly thereafter. Hell on earth and across the Megaverse® has never been so fun.

Also coming: A host of sourcebooks for **Rifts®, Palladium Fantasy RPG®, Heroes Unlimited™, Nightbane®** and much, much more.

A Sad Change

Not all changes are wanted, welcomed or expected. Some just flat out tear your heart out.

For those of you who may not have heard, **Erick Wujcik** is dying. Cancer in the liver and pancreas is bringing my beautiful friend's life to a premature end.

Erick, age 57, is the genius behind role-playing game titles such as **Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles® RPG, After the Bomb®, Road Hogs™, Ninjas & Superspies™, Mystic China™, Rifts® China 1 & 2, Revised RECON®, and Am-**

ber Diceless™ among many others, as well as contributions to a dozen other RPG books from Palladium alone.

Yes, Erick Wujcik is a game design genius. A true genius. But most of you should already know that, so I'm not going to talk about his career triumphs or all the great RPG books that bear his name. They speak for themselves. I want to talk about *my friend*.

Erick is one of my closest and dearest friends. He helped keep me and Palladium Books® going when besieged by treachery and crisis. He helped keep me sane and focused during my divorce, and he is one of the greatest friends anyone could ever want. Smart, funny, warm, supportive, and blessed with an infectious imagination (and smile).

Erick and I challenged each other's ways of thinking and approach to gaming. Our imaginations soared in conversations that could last an entire day. We encouraged each other's imaginations, and we talked and laughed about everything under the sun. The camaraderie made each of us better. Better game designers. Better writers. Better friends. Better people.

December, 2007, Erick was told that, barring a miracle, he had less than six weeks to live. Well, he got that miracle these past four months. Chemotherapy that had only something like a 20% chance of working, extended his life. It bought him time to visit China one last trip, to host his 57 year birthday party with 150 friends and family members. It bought him time to say goodbye to everyone he loves and to put his affairs in order as best he could. It was a miracle welcomed by us all.

Sadly, like all great and wondrous things, that miracle and Erick's time with us is fleeting. The chemo has stopped working. Erick's condition deteriorates with each passing day, and his time with us seems to be coming to a quick end.

I don't know if I could ever find the words to express my love for, and appreciation of, Erick Wujcik. He's just one of those people who defy a simple description. Heck, there must be close to a thousand posts on the commemorative blog, **erickwujcik.com** – and while many serve as a tiny window into Erick's life, they only skim the surface of this noble and brilliant human being.

Erick's declining health has already had a profound impact on me . . . on all of us who know and love him. His passing, which I fear is inevitable, and probably all too soon, will be shattering.

I just can't imagine a world without his smiling face, his sparkling eyes, and that big toothy grin framed within his bushy black beard and moustache. I will so miss sharing new ideas and getting his e-mails with a link to the latest crazy thing he thought I'd like to see and read about.

I will miss you, my dear, sweet friend, but you will live on in my heart and in my mind, and in the books that bear your name and genius. You'll live on in my books too, because that part of your mind, ideas and voice shared with me these past decades will still speak to me even when you are gone. I'll think of you every time a new game idea forms in my mind, and I'll let your voice help me push that idea in other directions and way outside the realm of conventional thinking. Till we game again . . .

– Kevin Siembieda, Publisher & Friend, Spring 2008

News & Coming Attractions

By Kevin Siembieda, the Guy Who Should Know

Palladium's New Home

On March 28, 29 and 30, a small army of fan volunteers (about 50 of them) gathered to help Palladium Books move. Our new home is . . .

Palladium Books Inc.

39074 Webb Court

Westland, MI 48185

Online: www.palladiumbooks.com

Help/Order Line: (734) 721-2903

The move has been all-consuming and exhausting for the last three weeks, but as of April 8, 2008, as I write this, we are starting to get back to normal (whatever that is).

Erick Wujcik's Health is Failing

I had a nice talk with Erick Wujcik on April 5, 2008. He sounded wonderful, and was looking forward to visiting with loved ones the following week. I regaled him with stories about **Palladium's big move**, the reaction to our new **Robotech® RPG** and **upcoming projects**. We talked about personal things too, like how despite the fact that his health was failing and he knew he was dying, that he felt at peace, calm and *normal*. "It's weird," Erick said, "I know my situation. The most recent doctor's report was awful, but I feel so normal."

Sadly, Erick's health continues to deteriorate. He is in hospice and, thankfully, is not in much pain. In fact, he's been enjoying reading books and visiting with loved ones.

For those of you who might not have heard, Erick Wujcik is gravely ill from pancreatic cancer that has spread to his liver and other organs. For those of you who would like to post stories about Erick, wish him well, or talk about your enjoyment of his work, you can go to the erickwujcik.com blog, log in and post away.

Gary Gygax Dies at Age 69

By now, I would imagine most of you have heard that the co-creator of **Dungeons & Dragons**, Gary Gygax, has passed away. He was 69 years old and had been suffering ill health for the last few years.

Gary Gygax and *David Arneson* (also in poor health) are the creators of, and masterminds behind, **Dungeons & Dragons**. Gary also went on to found the TSR Company later absorbed into *Wizards of the Coast*.

EVERYONE who has ever enjoyed a role-playing game owes a debt of gratitude to Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson. Without D&D there would never have been a role-playing game industry. No *Palladium Books*, *White Wolf*, *Steve Jackson Games*, *FASA*, *Green Ronin*, *AEG*, or anyone else. No *Knights of the Dinner Table*, no *Shadis Magazine*, no decades of *Dragon Magazine*. Gary and Dave started it all. Their little D&D game exploded onto the scene in the 1970s and created an entire in-

dustry. An industry I have loved and enjoyed, professionally and personally, for nearly three decades.

With *Gary Gygax* gone, and *Dave Arneson*, *Bob Bledsaw* and *Erick Wujcik*, all in poor health, it makes me think about my own mortality and place in the gaming industry. It is strange and disquieting to see so many of the great ones who started this business passing away. I guess that leaves the future to the new generation of gamers and game designers, and those of us who are left, to breathe new life and new adventures into the realms of role-playing. That's my plan anyway.

Rifts® Movie News

The **Walt Disney Company** has *renewed* the **Rifts®** movie option rights to have Jerry Bruckheimer Films (*Pirates of the Caribbean 1-3*, *National Treasure 1 & 2*, *Top Gun*, the *CSI* TV shows, etc.) develop **Rifts®** into a live action, major motion picture.

Toward that end, they have hired up-and-coming writer and director, **Rawson Marshall Thurber** to write the screenplay for the **Rifts®** movie. Rawson and I have exchanged a number of e-mails, and I sent him a box of **Rifts®** titles.

Personally, I'm very excited about Rawson working on the **Rifts®** screenplay. I like him, I think his ideas are on the right track, and he is an experienced gamer who used to enjoy playing **Rifts®**. The fact that Rawson knows and loves **Rifts®** as only a gamer can, should make him the ideal candidate to write an impressive screenplay. At least, let's hope so. Of course, only time will tell if this budding, new force in Hollywood can write the screenplay that compels Jerry Bruckheimer to make a **Rifts®** movie.

Rawson Thurber's *breakout movie* was the comedy, **Dodgeball, an Underdog's Tale**. His current film, in post production, is **The Mysteries of Pittsburgh** (an adaptation of a novel). In addition to his work on a **Rifts®** screenplay, he has been tapped by Universal to write and direct the film adaptation of **Magnum P.I.**, and is doing a comedy for Dreamworks.

Robotech® RPG is a success

Well the speculation is over. **Robotech® The Shadow Chronicles® RPG** shipped on March 20, 2008, a week before Palladium's big move, and people love it.

There had been plenty of speculation about the smaller manga size, how Palladium was going to present the material, what the updates and changes might include, and how the game would be received by the fans.

They love it!

The overwhelming majority are very happy with the new **Robotech® RPG**, and many people have been surprised by how much they like the manga size. They didn't know what to expect prior to release, but once they saw it and held it in their hands, they have found the smaller size to be comfortable, easy to use, easy to read and easy to carry. In short, most gamers love it.

They also enjoy the new *Quick Roll Character Generation Tables* (create a character in 15 minutes), the wealth of new information, the new artwork, layout and updated data.

Sales via individual mail and online orders shattered all previous records and left them in the dust. Palladium has NEVER

seen so many mail orders for any title. Meanwhile, distributors began to place reorders just a few days after the RPG shipped; always a good sign.

We hope to see new **Robotech®** sourcebooks released in short order, with the **Macross Saga** and **Robotech Masters** sourcebooks out this Summer and the **Deluxe, 8½ x 11 (hard-cover?) Edition of the Robotech® The Shadow Chronicles® RPG** making its debut at *Gen Con* this August.

By the way, you Southern Cross fans will be happy to know we plan to give the **Robotech Masters** sourcebook the royal treatment: in-depth coverage, new and updated information, and all new artwork. Writer, *Jason Marker*, is already doing research for this sourcebook.

We are thrilled to be working on **Robotech®** again, and are having a blast making it even better the second time around.

Don't take my word for it, run out to your local game store and take a look at a copy for yourself. If they can keep it in stock.

Coming Attractions

Now that the Palladium crew is getting settled into its new office and warehouse, we hope to get back to a prolific schedule of RPG releases. We are geeked about the future of RPGs and have a zillion ideas for new games and sourcebooks.

Here is what we have planned in the tentative order of release.

Dimension Book™ 11: Dyval™ – the Minion War™ is on, and we'll be banging out sourcebooks for it one after another. Dyval is the dimension of Hell at war with Hades. Suitable for use with all Palladium settings from *Rifts®* to *Palladium Fantasy RPG®* and *Heroes Unlimited™*. May.

Dimension Book™ 12: Dimensional Outbreak™. The battle between Demons and Deevils escalates and begins to spill out into the rest of the Megaverse®. The dimensional gateway that is Center on *Phase World* is the first to feel the impact. June.

Dimension Book™ Heroes of the Megaverse®. A sourcebook tie-in to the Minion War, featuring a legendary book of magic almost as famous as the Cosmic Forge. Set in *Phase World®* and the *Three Galaxies™*. June or July.

Rifts® Tales of the Chi-Town 'Burbs™. An anthology book of short-stories that take place in the Chi-Town 'Burbs. Stories by *Kevin Siembieda*, *Jason Marker*, *Braden Campbell*, *Carl Gleba*, *Jeffry Scott Hansen*, *Josh Sinsapaugh* and others. June.

Dead Reign™ RPG. The zombie apocalypse, Palladium Books style. 'Nuff said. June or July.

The Rifter® #43 "Swimsuit" issue. More deadly ladies, NPCs and villains from across the Megaverse® and more. 96 pages. July.

Robotech® The Macross Saga Sourcebook. The First Robotech War. Manga size, 192-256 pages. Veritechs, Destroids, Zentraedi invaders, Rick Hunter and more. July or August.

Robotech® Masters Sourcebook. The Second Robotech War. Manga size, 192-256 pages. The Armies of the Southern

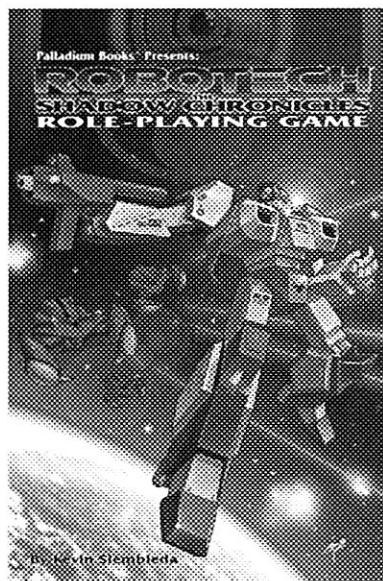
Cross, Veritech Hover Tank, AJAX, Logan, Robotech Masters, Bioroid invaders and more. August.

Deluxe Robotech® The Shadow Chronicles® RPG. An 8½x11 expanded edition. More artwork and information, probably hardcover. August.

Warpath™: Urban Jungle™ RPG. Gritty, modern day combat on the mean streets of our cities in a secret war against terrorism and crime. Summer or Fall release.

Other titles in production not yet scheduled. These titles may be added to those above or may be slated for release in the Fall of 2008 and early 2009.

- **Armageddon Unlimited™** (Minion War™) Fall.
- **Megaverse® in Flames™** (Minion War™ final chapter) Fall.
- **Fleets of the Three Galaxies™**
- **Rifts® Lemuria**
- **Rifts® Delta Blues™**
- **Rifts® Dark Woods™**
- **Rifts® Voodoo**
- **Rifts® Shemarrian Nation™**
- **Rifts® Triax™ 2**
- **Mysteries of Magic™** (Fantasy)
- **Monsters & Magic™** (Fantasy)
- **Atorian Empire™** (HU2)
- **Nightbane® Survival Guide** (Nightbane®) and a few others, as well as a **Chaos Earth™** novel.
- **Chaos Earth™ First Responders** (sourcebook)



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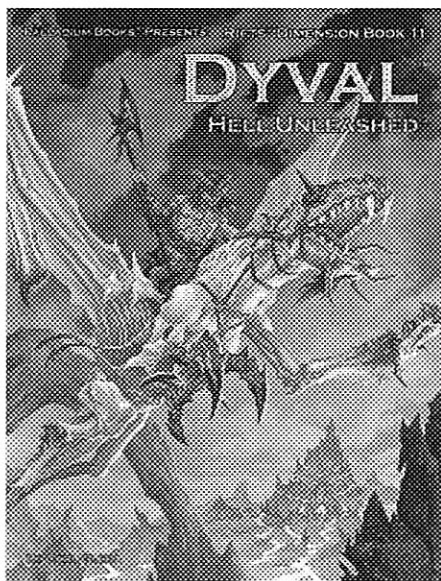
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- This witch casting dark magic will be the cover of the long-awaited **Mysteries of Magic™** sourcebook for *The Palladium Fantasy RPG®*, coming out later this year (written by **Mark Hall**).
- Never before published.

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Rifts® Dimension Book™ 11:

Dyval™, Hell Unleashed

Dyval™ is a dimension of Hell that is a deadly rival of the Demons of Hades. It is also the second book in the Minion War™ series, and is every bit as fantastic as Hades.

Dyval is a hellish dimension very different from Hades, but just as exotic, dangerous and horrible. The Deevil Host, evil monsters and minions, Deevil society, monstrous War Steeds, magic, adventure settings and more. Interest among Palladium fans is high.

- The hellish dimension of **Dyval** mapped and described.
- New Lesser and Greater Deevils along with all your old faves.
- Inhuman minions who serve as the Host.
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- World information and adventure ideas.
- A stand-alone Dimension Book that is also the second step in an epic, five book adventure that spills across the Palladium Megaverse®.
- Companion to **Hades** and the next chapter in the Minion War™.
- Artwork by Nick Bradshaw, Mike Wilson, Mike Mumah, and others.
- Cover painting by John Zeleznik.
- Written by Carl Gleba and Kevin Siembieda.
- 192 pages – Cat. No. 873 – \$22.95 retail. May, 2008.



Rifts® Dimension Book™ 12:

Dimensional Outbreak™

The Minion War™ spills into **Phase World®**, the **city of Center** and the **Three Galaxies™**. The epic scale of the Minion War just got bigger and even the Worlds of Warlock, the Splugorth and Naruni are involved.

- Phase World's *Center* described and mapped. Four new levels, including the Gateland, Central Station, the Spaceport, Repo-Yards, Free Trade Zone, Warlock Market, notable merchants and places of business, and much more.
- Demon Knights, Star Slayers, demonic legions and more.
- Demonic spaceships, magic weapons and new horrors.
- Deevil fortifications and defenses.
- Space spell magic (new).
- Spaceships, power armor and other gear.
- The plot for conquering the Three Galaxies.
- A stand-alone Dimension Book that is also the third step in an epic, five book crossover that spills across the Palladium Megaverse®.
- Artwork by Apollo Okamura, Mike Mumah, and others.
- John Zeleznik cover painting.
- Written by Carl Gleba.
- 192 pages – Cat. No. 875 – \$22.95 retail. June, 2008.

Rifts®/Phase World® Sourcebook:

Heroes of the Megaverse®

War factions from the Hells, Hades and Dyval, have discovered the existence of a great mystic artifact that has been hidden and protected by the Cosmo-Knights of the Three Galaxies. And both sides want it.

The artifact is an ancient Rune Book that contains the names of the 2000 greatest heroes the Megaverse® has ever known. But it is more than a historical document, it is a magic item of unparalleled power.

According to legend, the tome has many great powers. One such power is that reading the name of any one person inscribed, while evoking the proper magic, will give the reader the

knowledge and power of that great hero. And many are the powers of the 2000.

The artifact also has its dangers. It is said if the *List of Heroes™* is wrested from the Cosmo-Knights and kept locked in the pits of Hell, then the Knights and all heroes of the Three Galaxies will lose hope and flounder. If the book is destroyed, it is said, the Cosmo-Knights will cease to exist within a generation and the forces of Chaos shall reign. Needless to say, the Lords of Hell, the Splugorth and many others who serve Chaos would do anything to get their hands on the *List of Heroes*.

Rumor also suggests that the artifact may hold clues to the location of the Cosmic Forge, perhaps in some sort of code or the memories of the heroes who can be evoked. And there are many other tales of cosmic power, healing and knowledge all associated with the book and the ghosts of the heroes named on its pages.

As circumstance would have it, the *List of Heroes* has fallen into the possession of the Player Characters. The question is, can they keep it safe from the forces of two Hells until it can be returned to the safekeeping of the Cosmo-Knights? Or will they misuse it for their own, personal gain? How will this scenario unfold? Who is on that list? Buy a copy, play out the scenario and find out.

Note: This is the Adventure Sourcebook that prints the names of everyone who purchased the *A Megaverse United™* limited edition print. It is also likely to include the names of some winners from the *Heroes of the Megaverse®* character contest as fully stated out characters (heroes and villains).

- Minion War tie-in adventure sourcebook.
- Written by Kevin Siembieda.
- Illustrated by various Palladium heroes.
- 96 pages – Cat. No. 877 – \$14.95 retail. June or July, 2008.

Dead Reign™ RPG

– Zombies coming to Palladium in Summer, 2008

You got your first glimpse of **Dead Reign** in *The Rifter®* #40 – that's only a glimpse of what's to come. Bear in mind that this article was just a look at *part* of the proposed story and setting, with suggestions for using existing rules to play now. The final RPG will provide a rich, detailed post-apocalyptic world and the heroes who have managed to survive.

Dead Reign™ is a game of survival, rescue and revenge. Player characters are both the *hunted* and the *hunters* as they battle the creeping doom and pray for salvation.

- S.D.C. setting.
- Zombies have taken over the world.
- Zombies control the cities. Humans hide in remote wilderness areas.
- Zombies capture, keep and breed humans in food pens.
- Player characters are ordinary people fighting for their very existence or bent on revenge.
- Humankind fights to rescue those they can, and destroy as many of the zombie abominations as they can.
- Is this the end of the world as we know it? Pick up a copy of **Dead Reign™** and find out.
- Written by Josh Hilden and Joshua Sanford. Additional text, rules and ideas by Kevin Siembieda. Coming this Summer.



S.C.R.E.T. AROUND THE WORLD

Optional Material for Heroes Unlimited™, 2nd Edition

By Glen Evans

The Superbeing Control, Retrieval, and Elimination Team is a non-unified, worldwide task force and intelligence organization dedicated to protecting people and governments from meta-beings and criminal enterprises/organizations that threaten their security and safety. Unlike other international agencies, each S.C.R.E.T. is connected to a particular federal government. The USA agency, for example, is presently tied into the Department of Homeland Security, but prior to the Department's creation, the agency was controlled entirely by the Department of Defense. Most of the technologically advanced countries participate in S.C.R.E.T., however each agency only has jurisdiction in its home country, although joint operations have occurred in the past (particularly among countries who share common borders and/or the same meta-criminal – USA and Canada for example). S.C.R.E.T. activities are usually not covert, but only in the U.S. is the general population aware of the agency's existence; in fact, news reporters and onlookers are usually trailing behind them wherever they go.

Presently, there are only four nations with the most sophisticated, trained, and best funded agencies (size level five), and they include the United States, Canada, Great Britain, and Russia. Germany is slowly rebuilding theirs, which at one time rivaled all others until it suffered terrible losses when two-thirds of the organization broke away to form the terrorist group known as the Brotherhood of Armageddon. (Presently, the German agency exists as a size level three, while the Brotherhood is a size level five.) Four years ago, the U.S. President sent word to all the other directors and military personnel of Canada, Russia, and Great Britain's S.C.R.E.T. to meet and discuss strategy. Out of their talks came the idea that the four nations should either unite their agencies into one giant super agency or they should share in their research and technology to defeat a common foe; meta-terrorists and super villains. An agreement was made to do the latter. Although separate and distinct from each other, each S.C.R.E.T. agency benefitted from a freewheeling policy toward each other, although the financial status of their home country determines what they can afford. It was also agreed that the four would help other nations like Mexico, South Africa, France, Israel, Australia, and China to develop and train their own agencies (they are equal to size level three, but should expand to level four over the next five years).

The top defense contractors for U.S. S.C.R.E.T. (KLS Corporation, Cyberworks Network, SIGHT, Triton Industries, Bio-Spawn, Price Pharmaceuticals, Taylor Oil, and Eagle Knight Se-

curities) are also major players in conception, design, manufacture and integration of new technologies to aid S.C.R.E.T.s around the world. Russia, however, has been far more reluctant to accept aid as they have always prided themselves in using their own research and designs. Unfortunately, due to budget issues, the Russian S.C.R.E.T. is the one hurting the most for newer technology as it works to reestablish itself as a super network.

The four S.C.R.E.T. agencies are finding themselves put to the ultimate test as super being vigilantes and/or criminals operating within their borders are becoming increasingly bolder, greater in number, and their abilities even more difficult to combat. Some believe it's only a matter of time before an agency finds itself under siege by a major super being terrorist network, like the Brotherhood of Armageddon. The U.S. S.C.R.E.T. is still reeling after losing thirty-three agents to the Unnatural Disasters. A defeat of this magnitude would cripple any of the Canadian, British, or Russian agencies (the latter most definitely). However, the super patriots who run and fight for these agencies are not about to surrender or give in to terror. They plan on defending their nation's citizens and its infrastructure to the very end, and will do so by any means necessary.

Canada S.C.R.E.T.

Canada S.C.R.E.T. was the first "official" government agency in the world created to protect its citizens from the increasing number of metas that began appearing in the mid 1960s. Local and federal law enforcement agencies lacked the capabilities to handle metas. The bodies of fallen police officers and SWAT served as grim reminders of the obvious difference between the two. This went on for about five years before a Canadian scientist/tinkerer named Lloyd Bachet became convinced that metabeings in the near future would use their powers to enslave the human race. So on his own he began kidnaping/capturing metas in order to study them and learn how their abilities worked. After several near death experiences, he decided to hire a team of mercenaries (an assemblage of Physical Training, Hardware, and Special Training individuals) to capture/kidnap metas from the United States and Canada. They were brought to his secret compound for study, but unfortunately, some of his mercs refused to give up their criminal past and robbed a local bank. This brought out the Canadian authorities, resulting in a massive firefight. In the end, two-thirds of the mercs were killed and Bachet found himself under arrest.

However, instead of being sent to prison, Canadian authorities whisked Bachet away to a secret meeting with the Prime Minister. Impressed with Bachet's goals and methods, he pardoned the man and provided him federal support to create an agency capable of capturing and neutralizing super powered individuals, yet at the same time, the agency was to remain unknown to the public. Bachet himself coined the agency S.C.R.E.T.

Six months later, the Canadian S.C.R.E.T. demonstrated its effectiveness by capturing the meta-terrorists "the Unchained Canadians" while the President of the U.S. happened to be in Ottawa, Canada to meet with the Prime Minister. The President was impressed by the manner in which they operated, and firmly



believed that if America had such an agency, a tragedy involving a super villain in Atlanta, Georgia would have never occurred. In a short while the U.S. revealed its S.C.R.E.T. agency along with its sister organization, a reconfigured G.I.G.M.A. under a completely new administration. At the time, the major difference between the two countries was that the Canadians kept S.C.R.E.T. top secret while the United States opened theirs to public scrutiny.

Today the Canadian S.C.R.E.T. is responsible for protecting all Canadians from meta-terrorism and threats to Canadian interests around the world. It remains a top secret agency within the Canadian Ministry of Defense and run by Canadian Special Operations Forces Command (CANSOFCOM). However, S.C.R.E.T. is capable of operating as an independent military organization. Whenever meta-criminals and super villains appear in Canada, as far as 99.9% of the Canadian population knows, the Land Force Command (Canadian Army) shows up to deal with them. Officially, S.C.R.E.T. is not a part of the unified armed forces of Canada, however it's still under the indirect control of the Chief of Defense Staff, the military head of the Canadian Forces. The individual who takes an "active" role in running the agency is an "unofficial" Cabinet officer for the Prime Minister known as the Minister of Secret Defense (MSD). This person alone holds *de facto* decision-making power over the deployment and disposition of Canada S.C.R.E.T.

Throughout the 1990s, successive budget cuts forced further reductions in the personnel, number of bases, and fighting abil-

ity of the Canadian Forces. However, this has not effected S.C.R.E.T. at all. In fact, because of the alarming increase of new metabeings as well as several super villains deciding to use the Canadian wilderness as a place to hide, the budget of Canadian S.C.R.E.T. has not been touched. Nonetheless, it's slow in receiving updated technology and modernization. Thankfully, KLS and Cyberworks Network have been patient enough to still provide S.C.R.E.T. military and aerospace technology even though it takes a while for the bills to be paid.

Presently, Canada S.C.R.E.T. operates from three HQs. One is in Comox, British Columbia, which consists of 250 agents. The second, in Elliot Lake, Ontario, was initially established with 125 agents; however, with a recent attack at the Nuclear and Mining Museum by meta-terrorists, it will be outfitted to hold 800 agents. Finally, the original S.C.R.E.T. regiment is located on rue de Bleury in Montreal, Canada, and consists of 550 agents.

Typical Canada S.C.R.E.T. Agent for Heroes Unlimited™ 2nd Edition

Based on the original concept by Kevin Long

Alignment: Any, but often Scrupulous or Aberrant.

Typical Attributes: I.Q. 12, M.E. 17, M.A. 10, P.S. 21, P.P. 18, P.E. 15, P.B. 10, Spd 24. Those agents who are Physical Training will have a P.S. equal to Superhuman or Extraordinary.

Average Age: 23-35

Average Sex: 85% male, 15% female.

Average Height: Male 6 feet, 2 inches (1.88 m), female 5 feet, 9 inches (1.75 inches).

Average Weight: 185-200 lbs (83-90 kg) for male agents and 130-150 lbs (58.5 to 67.5 kg) for female agents.

Average Experience Level: 2D4. Team Leaders must be 5th level or higher.

Military Rank: 1st and 2nd level Private, 3rd level Trained Private, 4th level Corporal, 5th level Master Corporal, 6th and 7th level Warrant Officer, 8th level Master Warrant Officer, 9th level and beyond Chief Warrant Officer. S.C.R.E.T. agents can never be commissioned officers.

Super Power Category: Physical Training (40%), Special Training: Secret Operative (30%), Robot Pilot (20%), and Other (10%). The Canadian S.C.R.E.T. allows super-powered individuals to work alongside normal agents.

Average Hit Points: 30

Average S.D.C.: Varies. Those who are Physical Training will have 70 or 90 S.D.C. (does not include bonuses from skills and other combat bonuses). Secret Operatives have around 60-80 S.D.C. Robot Pilots have around 40-50 S.D.C. Bionics, Super Soldiers, and others have numerous factors that will determine their total S.D.C.

Combat Training: Those with Physical Training will either specialize in Aggressive and Deadly or Defensive and Fast. All others will have Hand to Hand: Martial Arts, Assassin, or Commando.

Typical Number of Attacks per Melee: 5 or 6 (6 or 7 for those at 4th level).

Agent Bonuses: The following are bonuses granted to Canadian S.C.R.E.T. agents regardless of their Super Power Category. +4 to save vs Horror Factor, +3 to perception, +2 to damage, +1 to strike, parry, and dodge. These are in addition to possible bonuses from attributes, skills, power category, or Hand to Hand Combat.

Saving Throw: +1 to psionic attack and insanity.

Special Abilities: Varies with each agent. Those with Physical Training, for example, will rely on their special combat abilities (see *Heroes Unlimited 2nd Edition*, page 189), while others utilize the weapons and equipment available to them.

Education Level and Skills: Military or Military Specialist. Those belonging to the Physical Training or Hardware category must sacrifice one entire Skill Program, however it cannot be the Military Program (basic). Special Training: *Secret Operative* are rolled up accordingly (see HU2, page 216). Robot Pilots are rolled up accordingly (see HU2, page 194).

Appearance: A typical S.C.R.E.T. soldier looks like the average Canadian.

Occupation: A Canadian soldier.

Standard Weapons: Browning-HP 9 mm pistol, C7A1 rifle (a service rifle variation of the M16A2 rifle; sometimes includes the M203 Grenade Launcher), Parker Hale M85 (a .308 sniper rifle, 4D6 damage, Range: 2952 feet/900 m, fires 10 rounds from a detachable magazine), Remington Model 870 shotgun, C9 Machine-gun (a 5.56 x 45 mm NATO light machine-gun), M3 Carl Gustava (84mm recoilless rifle anti-tank weapon, 1D4x100 damage, Blast Radius: 50 feet/15 m, Range: 1476 feet/450 m), and the CN2 Laser Rifle (A Cyberworks Network Laser Rifle, same as Laser Rifle in *Heroes Unlimited G.M.'s Guide*, page 216). Some of the weapons can come with special munitions (A.P., exploding, hollow point, etc.), grenades: two (2) HE, four (4) tear gas/CS, two (2) stun/flash gas; and/or four (4) throwing knives.

Equipment and Armor: All the special equipment mentioned earlier is standard. Every agent carries with him two pair of heavy handcuffs. Generally, all agents wear a hard armor vest (A.R. 12, S.D.C. 120) or Class 4 Armor (full suit; A.R. 17, S.D.C. 280).

Vehicles: See *Villains Unlimited 2nd Edition* (pages 44-45) and those mentioned below. All Robot Pilots are given their own Exoskeleton.

Headquarters: See above.

Canada S.C.R.E.T. Vehicles

The Grizzly Wheeled Armored Personnel Carrier (WAPC)

This armored personnel carrier is a six-wheeled vehicle designed for a crew of three and carries an additional six troops. It's fully amphibious and propelled by two propellers mounted at the rear of the vehicle, behind the third road wheel on each side. The vehicle is easily identified by the pointed front end and distinct gap between the second and third wheel stations. Its

10mm armor is made for maximum protection against shell splinters. These vehicles are powered by a diesel engine and have automatic transmissions. The vehicle mounts a manually traversed Cadillac Gage turret armed with a 12.7mm machine-gun and a 7.62mm machine-gun mounted coaxially. It has entry and exit for the infantry by two doors in the hull rear.

Armor: A.R. 12. Stops pistol, rifle, light machine-gun, and fragments. (Penetration Value 8.)

S.D.C. by Location:

Main Body – 600 S.D.C.

12.7mm turret (1) – 85 S.D.C.

7.62mm machine-gun (1) – 35 S.D.C.

Wheels/Tires – 40 S.D.C. each side

Crew: 3 +6 (Commander, gunner, pilot and +6 agents/specialists).

Length: 18 feet (5.48 m).

Width: 8.25 feet (2.50 m).

Weight: 24,000 lbs (10,800 kg).

Height: 8.8 feet (2.68 m).

Speed: 62 mph (100 km) on roads and 6.2 mph (10 km) in water.

Range: 396 miles (633 km).

Total Vehicle Bonuses: +2 to strike with all weapons in addition to the gunner's skill bonuses.

Typical Armaments:

One 12.7mm Machine-Gun: Damage: 1D4x10, Range 3,000 feet (915 m), Payload: 400 rounds before needing to reload (takes one melee to do so). The weapon carries enough ammo for six reloads.

One 7.62 mm Machine-Gun: Damage: 6D6, Payload: 200 rounds, Range: 3,000 feet (915 m).

Special Equipment:

Surveillance Mount. Numerous pieces of electronic equipment are mounted on a 10 m (32.8 foot) telescoping mast that can peek out from behind a hill or building. It includes radar, video, and infrared night vision surveillance. Range: 2000 feet (610 m) for infrared nightvision. It can be used to provide a targeting sight with the weapons to give an additional +2 bonus to strike (See Total Vehicle Bonuses).

Radio: Range: 300 miles (480 km).

Encrypted Burst Transmitter/Radio Scrambler: Range: 300 miles (480 km).

Radar Targeting Computer: Range: 30 miles (48 km), able to identify 20 targets and simultaneously track 20 targets flying at 600 feet (182 m) or higher.

Radiation Shielding

Pressurized Cabin (Full protection from Nuclear, Biological, & Chemical Warfare.)

The Cyberworks Network Aias

The Aias is an armored land assault vehicle built by Cyberworks Network and is slowly replacing the Grizzly as S.C.R.E.T.'s primary mechanized infantry vehicle. It's very similar to the lightly armored vehicle used by the United States Army named the Stryker. The Aias is an 8x8 wheeled armored

vehicle with a 25mm cannon, and can reach speeds of 75 mph (120 km). Like the Cyberworks Diomedes and Ajax, the Aias is protected by a ceramic/aluminum/titanium composite armor (impervious to magnetism). Its suspension and fire suppression equipment allow it to fire while on the move. The 25mm cannon uses an electric drive system and a laser range finder, which only add to its ability to hit moving targets with deadly accuracy. The vehicle is amphibious, but unlike other AVs is not limited to non-surf bodies (oceans). The Aias is quite capable of driving from Quebec to Nova Scotia. Even the frozen north around the Arctic will not hinder the vehicle. It's built to go wherever Canada S.C.R.E.T. wishes to travel. Cyberworks is already planning on making numerous variants of this vehicle for anti-tank, air defense, command & control, logistics, Mobile Electronic Warfare Support System (MEWSS), and Expeditionary Fire Support System (EFSS) functions. S.C.R.E.T. only has twenty of these vehicles and is awaiting Cyberworks to deliver twenty more during the year, but only when the government pays for the lot.

Armor: A.R. 14. Stops pistol, rifle, heavy machine-gun (20mm) and fragments. The armor can reduce damage from energy attacks, Armor Piercing bullets, explosive rounds, grenades, and light explosives, which inflict half damage when their roll to strike is 15 or higher (Penetration Value 10).

S.D.C. by Location:

Main Body – 660 S.D.C.

Wheels/Tires – 40 S.D.C. each (A.R. 10)

Machine-Gun (2) – 50 S.D.C. each

25mm Turret (1) – 100 S.D.C.

Grenade Salvos (2) – 35 S.D.C. each

Crew: 3 (+6 or 7 troops).

Length: 23 feet (7 m).

Width: 9 feet (2.74 m).

Weight: 29,882 lbs (13,446 kg).

Height: 9.24 feet (2.8 m).

Speed: 75 mph (120 km) on land or 10 mph (16 km) in water.

Range: 510 miles (816 km).

Total Vehicle Bonuses: +4 to strike with all weapons in addition to the gunner's skill bonuses.

Typical Armaments:

M242 Bushmaster 25mm Chain Gun: Damage: 1D6x10, Payload: 210 rounds, Range: 6600 feet (2011 m). Either Armor Piercing (PV 12) or High Explosive (HE/2D4x10) ammunition may be selected with the flick of a switch. The Gunner may select from single or short burst (x3) modes.

7.62mm Machine-Gun Mounted Coaxially to the Main Gun: Damage: 6D6, Payload: 440 rounds, Range: 3,000 feet (915 m), Rate of Fire: Single shot, semi-auto, full.

CN2 Laser Rifle (Pintle-Mounted): Damage: 5D6, Payload: Effectively unlimited, Range: 1800 feet (548.6 m), Rate of Fire: Single shot or semi-auto burst.

8 Smoke Grenades: In each grenade salvo are four smoke grenades. They release a cloud that covers a 20 foot (6 m) radius. The smoke obscures vision in and through the smoke cloud and causes minor difficulty breathing. Infrared optic systems cannot see into or through smoke. Those in the cloud are -5 to

strike, parry, and dodge and -1 on initiative. Attackers firing into/through the cloud are shooting completely wild! Aimed shots or controlled bursts are impossible (the shooter cannot see the target). Range: 300 feet (91 m).

Special Equipment:

Laser Rangefinder: This allows the vehicle to track and determine the distance of a target, even while it's moving. This results in no penalty when firing at a moving target or one at maximum distance.

Thermo-Imager: An optical heat sensor that converts the infrared radiation of warm objects into a visible image. The pilot and gunner can see in total darkness, shadows, and smoke. Range: 1600 feet (488 m).

Superior Suspension: This allows for the gun to fire while the vehicle is moving, and results in no penalty when firing at a moving target.

Superior Engine Coolant Pre-Heater for -104°F (-40 C) cold starts.

Self-Recovery Hydraulic Winch (front-mounted 15,000 lbs/6750 kg dynamic pull).

Armored/Self-Seal/Inflating Tires. These tires have no problem traveling over ice and rough terrain.

Radio: Range: 300 miles (480 km).

Laser Targeting System

Encrypted Burst Transmitter/Radio Scrambler: Range: 300 miles (480 km).

Radar Targeting Computer: Range: 30 miles (48 km), able to identify 20 targets and simultaneously track 20 targets flying at 600 feet (182 m) or higher.

Combat Computer with Heads-Up Display (HUD). +2 to initiative roll.

Underwater Capabilities

Multi-Optics Periscope and HUD

Radiation Shielding

Pressurized Cabin (Full protection from Cold, Nuclear, Biological, & Chemical Warfare).

Life Support Unit

The Cyberworks Network

“Thunderclap 2” Sonic Cannon Tank

Shortly after deployment, U.S. S.C.R.E.T. agents complained the Thunderclap was simply impractical to use in an urban environment. The forty-three ton tank destroyed interstate highways and city streets (especially those with subway or large sewer tunnels beneath them), was unable to cross bridges, and lacked maneuverability. Not to mention the countless times its energy weapons proved unreliable when so many metas were either energy resistant, impervious to energy attacks, could bend light (they lost count of how many agents were killed by reflective fire), or they simply disregarded the “devastating” effects of the sonic cannon and destroyed the tank in less than fifteen seconds. So Cyberworks suggested the Thunderclap be moved to rural areas and be deployed against robot vehicles, exoskeletons, and cyborgs.

Unfortunately, the company still had 120 Thunderclaps in stock, and now no one seemed interested in them, and many of those who did were those the company felt reluctant selling to (namely, rogue nations like Malvador). Finally, Cyberworks engineer Cornelius Davenport decided to ask if the Canada S.C.R.E.T. would be interested in using the tanks at half their original cost. To his amazement, the Canadians agreed, but asked if the tanks could be refitted with even better sound technology. Davenport worked personally on the project and came up with the Thunderclap 2.

These improved Thunderclaps have several additions. First and foremost, an ultra-sophisticated composite armor made of a unique material that absorbs vibratory energy in its vicinity, such as sound waves, within itself. The outside vibratory energy is stored within the bonds between the molecules making up the material. As a result, over time the material becomes increasingly difficult to destroy, yet retains its light weight and resistance to magnetism. By using this material, Cyberworks has devised sonic weaponry uniquely around the Thunderclap.

The tank now features digital fire control systems with laser range finders, fully stabilized main gun, night vision equipment, and thermal imaging. The tank has the ability to engage moving targets while moving over rough terrain. It can drive through water 15 feet (4.5 m) deep using a snorkel or 4 feet (1.2 m) without it and it can climb vertical obstacles 3 feet (1 m) high. With a turbo-charged, super fuel efficiency diesel engine, the tank can reach speeds of 48 mph (77 km).

Presently, Canadian S.C.R.E.T. has ten Thunderclap 2 tanks spread out between the three HQs. As much as they would love to get their hands on more of these bad boys, it won't come about until they can be paid for.

Armor: A.R. 16. Stops pistol, rifle, heavy machine-gun (20 and 30mm) and fragments. The armor is impervious to sound and vibrations, making it and those inside impervious to all types of sound and vibration based attacks. The armor is powerful enough to reduce damage from energy attacks, Armor Piercing bullets, explosive rounds, grenades, and light explosives by half damage when their roll to strike is 17 or higher (Penetration Value 11).

S.D.C. by Location:

- Main Body – 750 S.D.C.
- Sonic Cannon – 120 S.D.C.
- Treads (2) – 120 S.D.C. each
- Sonic Speakers – 40 S.D.C. each

Crew: 4

Length: 25 feet (7.62 m).

Width: 12 feet (3.65 m).

Weight: 28.5 tons (25,650 kg).

Height: 9.9 feet (3 m).

Speed: 48 mph (77 km).

Range: 412 miles (659 km).

Total Vehicle Bonuses: +4 to strike with all weapons in addition to the gunner's skill bonuses.

Typical Armaments:

The Banshee Sonic Cannon Mark 2: Range: 6600 feet (2011 m), Damage: 2D4x10, half of which carries through ar-

mor/vehicle or protective cover, and hits ALL the occupants inside a vehicle's cockpit/pilot's compartment/crew quarters or everyone in a ten foot (3 m) radius. The weapon will also inflict unconsciousness and disorientation unless the victim successfully saves vs non-lethal poison (16) twice (use P.E. attribute bonus only): first to resist disorientation penalties and again to fight off unconsciousness (successful save or rendered unconscious for 2D4 melee rounds). Only those with vehicles or armor with sonic insulation are protected from the splash-over effect. Blast Radius: 10 foot radius (3 m; roughly a 20 foot/6.1 m diameter of effect, double underwater). Penalties from Stun Effect: No initiative, reduce number of attacks by half, -7 to strike, parry, and dodge, and reduce speed and skill proficiency by half for 2D4 melee rounds. Halve penalties on a successful save, Rate of Fire: Twice per minute, Payload: Effectively unlimited.

Sonic Speakers: These speakers can issue forth two types of sonic attacks. **One** is a high-pitched frequency that will hurt, deafen and distract all who encounter it. Victims are -6 on initiative, strike, parry, and dodge, and take 1D6 points of damage per melee round. The only defense is to plug the ears (damage and penalties are reduced by one-half. Range: 180 feet (54.8 m), Area of Effect: 30 foot (9.1 m) radius, with the tank as focal point, Damage: 1D6 per melee round, Payload: Unlimited, Rate of Fire: Once per melee round, but can be maintained for up to one minute. The **second** type of attack is similar to that used by the T20 Disruptor Cannon. Range: 300 feet (91 m), Damage: 1D4 points of damage, plus the victim must make a save vs 16 (non-lethal poison) with a -2 penalty, otherwise the sonic vibrations cause nausea, stomachaches, loose bowels, and vomiting. Reduce Spd by 70% (those who run or engage in combat have a 90% chance of vomiting and/or having diarrhea). Victims are -6 to strike, parry, and dodge, and have no initiative. Victims are -12 to strike, parry, and dodge while throwing up. Use only P.E. attribute bonus when attempting to make a saving throw, Payload: Effectively unlimited, Rate of Fire: Once per melee but can be maintained for two minutes.

Special Equipment:

Electro-Hydraulic Stabilizer System: This allows the sonic cannon to fire while the vehicle is moving. This results in no penalty when firing at a moving target.

Laser Range Finder: This allows the vehicle to track and determine the distance of a target, even while it's moving. This results in no penalty when firing at a moving target or one at maximum distance.

Thermo-Imager: An optical heat sensor that converts the infrared radiation of warm objects into a visible image. The pilot and gunner can see in total darkness, shadows, and smoke. Range 1600 feet (488 m).

Nightvision Camera, a passive night vision optics system that amplifies existing, ambient light to provide a visible picture.

Radio: Range: 300 miles (480 km).

Laser Targeting System

Encrypted Burst Transmitter/Radio Scrambler: Range: 300 miles (480 km).

Radar Targeting Computer: Range: 30 miles (48 km), able to identify 20 targets and simultaneously track 20 targets flying at 600 feet (182 m) or higher.

Combat Computer with Heads-Up Display (HUD). +2 to initiative rolls.

Multi-Optics Periscope and HUD

Radiation Shielding

Underwater Capabilities

Pressurized Cabin (Full protection from Nuclear, Biological, & Chemical Warfare).

Life Support Unit

EX-9A1 Super Exoskeleton

A variant of the EX-9 suit of power armor made by KLS Corporation specifically made for the Canadian S.C.R.E.T. Because they lack air units (lost to budget cuts), S.C.R.E.T. requested power armor capable of making up for it. KLS not only delivered but made USA S.C.R.E.T. agents green with envy. Presently, there are over forty suits available between the three HQs.

Model Type: EX-9A1

Class: Strategic Armor Military Assault Suit.

Crew: One.

Armor: A.R. 14. Special, laser resistant alloy (laser/light attacks inflict half damage).

S.D.C. by Location:

Main Jet Thruster (1, back) – 100

Lower Maneuvering Jets (2, back) – 40 each

Intake Jets (2, top) – 40 each

Wings (2) – 150 each

* Forearm Backup Computer/Communicator – 25

* Head – 100

Main Body – 450

* Destroying the head/helmet of the power armor will eliminate all optics and sensory systems as well as negate *all* power armor combat bonuses. The pilot will have to rely on his own human vision and senses. The head is a relatively small and difficult to hit, especially when the unit is moving. Thus, it can only be hit when a character makes a “Called Shot,” and even then the attacker is -3 to strike. The left, forearm computer/communicator is an even smaller target and is -5 to strike.

Power Supply: Nuclear.

Height & Body Frame: 8 feet (2.4 m) and Reinforced Human Frame.

Width: Wings down 3.5 feet (1.06 m). Wings extended 10 feet (3 m).

Weight: 450 lbs (202.5 kg).

Length: 4 feet, 6 inches (1.4 m).

Speed:

Running: 90 mph (144 km). Fatigue rate is reduce to 20% normal.

Leaping: 20 feet (6 m) up or lengthwise. A jet thruster assisted leap can propel the power armor up to 100 feet (30.5 m) high and 200 feet (61 m) across without actually attaining flight.

Flight: The rocket propulsion systems enable the power armor to hover stationary up to 1000 feet (305 m; 50 feet/15.2 m with no wings) or fly. Maximum flying speed is 150 mph (240 km), but cruising speed is considered 110 mph (176 km). The maximum

recommended flying time is three hours. Afterwards the system starts to overheat, causing the jet thrusters and sensor systems to burn out within 2D6 minutes, requiring replacement of parts to get it to work again.

Underwater Capabilities: 4 mph (6.4 km/3.4 knots) using arms and legs to paddle. 50 mph (80 km/43.5 knots) using its jet thrusters to skim across the surface of the water. 30 mph (48 km/26 knots) using the thrusters underwater. Maximum Ocean Depth: 300 feet (91.44 m).

Internal Weapons: Retractable blade (one arm; 3D6 damage plus P.S. bonus), wrist blaster (other arm; 3D6 damage).

Bonuses: Laser targeting gives the wearer +3 to strike using any single shot/short burst weapon and +2 to strike with long bursts, plus bonuses the pilot has from the W.P. skills.

Attribute Enhancement: Increase P.S. to 30 (Robotic), P.P. to 24, Speed running to 132 (90 mph/144 km).

Sensors: Bio-scan, micro radar, radar detection, and radiation detector.

Optics: Full optical systems, including laser targeting, telescopic, passive nightvision (light amplification), thermo-imaging, infrared, ultraviolet, and polarization.

Audio: Wideband radio and loudspeaker.

Special Equipment:

SIGINT (Signal Intelligence) GEAR: Enables the pilot to receive radio or cell phone frequencies. He or she can monitor specific frequencies, or scan through a range of frequencies for a specific signal. Once the signal has been found, a radio directional finder will attempt to track the signal to its source (88%).

Secure Radio: Encrypted radio transmissions. Must use Radio: Scramblers in order to intercept aircraft’s transmissions, and even then it’s a -25% penalty.

Satcom Radio: Receive and transmit radio broadcasts with any military and/or civilian satellites. **Range:** Worldwide communications.

Missile Warning System and Anti-Missile Chaff: Enough to decoy 4 medium or long-range missiles. The system provides a +5 bonus to initiative whenever any missiles or rockets are propelled at the power armor. Missiles lose any guidance bonus; straight, unmodified dice rolls only.

Radiation Shielding

EX-9B Super Exoskeleton

Yet another variant of the EX-9 suit of power armor. These suits are being field tested and impressing the Canadian brass, especially the Minister of Secret Defense. There are only five suits available and because of their destructive capabilities, their use is limited. However, the Minister is attempting to work out a deal with the KLS Corporation to build a factory in Quebec, Canada and receive a major discount in the purchase of this very effective power armor.

The EX-9B has been outfitted with a Barrett .50-Cal Anti-Materiel Rifle attached to the back and right shoulder on a swivel mount. When not in use, the gun is flipped back and stored in an upward position. When needed for combat, the agent simply reaches back, grasps the handle and pulls forward. Presently, KLS is experimenting with using the M307 Airbursting Weapon, which would provide even greater firepower.

Model Type: EX-9B

Class: Strategic Armor Military Assault Suit.

Crew: One.

Armor: A.R. 14. Special laser-resistant alloy (laser/light attacks inflict half damage).

S.D.C. by Location:

Barrett .50-Cal Anti-Materiel Rifle (1) – 30

* Optional M307 Airbursting Weapon System (1) – 30

* Head – 120

Main Body – 525

* Destroying the head/helmet of the power armor will eliminate all optics and sensory systems as well as negate *all* power armor combat bonuses. The pilot will have to rely on his own human vision and senses. The head is relatively small and difficult to hit, especially when the unit is moving. Thus, it can only be hit when a character makes a “Called Shot,” and even then the attacker is -3 to strike. The left forearm computer/communicator is an even smaller target and -5 to strike.

Power Supply: Nuclear.

Height & Body Frame: 8 feet (2.4 m) and Reinforced Human Frame.

Width: 3.5 feet (1.06 m).

Weight: 670 lbs (301.5 kg).

Length: 4 feet, 6 inches (1.38 m).

Speed:

Running: 90 mph (144 km). Fatigue rate is reduced to 20% normal.

Leaping: 20 feet (6 m) up or lengthwise.

Underwater Capabilities: 4 mph (6.4 km/3.4 knots) using arms and legs to paddle. Maximum Ocean Depth: 300 feet (91.4 m).

Internal Weapons: Retractable blade (one arm; 3D6 damage plus P.S. bonus), wrist blaster (other arm; 3D6 damage).

Bonuses: Laser targeting gives the wearer +3 to strike using any single shot/short burst weapon and +2 to strike with long bursts, plus bonuses the pilot has from the W.P. skills.

Attribute Enhancement: Increase P.S. to 30 (Robotic), P.P. to 24, Speed running to 132 (90 mph/144 km).

Sensors: Bio-scan, micro radar, radar detection, and radiation detector.

Optics: Full optical systems, including laser targeting, telescopic, passive nightvision (light amplification), thermo-imaging, infrared, ultraviolet, and polarization.

Audio: Wideband radio and loudspeaker.

Weapon Systems:

M82A1A .50-cal Anti-Materiel Rifle: Range: 5940 feet (1810 m), Damage: 1D4x10, Feed: 10 round .50 caliber detachable box magazine, Rate of Fire: Semi-Automatic Only. This weapon can be outfitted with Armor Piercing ammo (PV 10) or Saboted Light Armor Penetrator (SLAP) rounds (PV 12; 1D6x10; 4950 foot/1508 m range).

Optional Weapon: M307 Airbursting Weapon System. Range: 6600 feet/2011 m for 25mm rounds and 5900 feet/1798 m for .50-cal., Damage: 25mm Thermobaric round 1D4x10 to a 20-foot (6 m) blast radius or 1D4x10 for the .50 caliber, Feed: 50 round ammo drum for 25mm rounds or 100 round ammo

drum for .50 caliber. It takes four melees to remove and snap on a new drum, and it takes an additional four melees to change from a .50-caliber machine-gun to firing 25mm airburst ammunition by changing four parts, Rate of Fire: Single shot, 3 round semi-automatic, and full.

The 25mm “smart shells” use a computer-controlled fuze in each shell. The operator can select four different firing modes via a selector switch. The four modes include bursting (airburst), “PD” (point detonation, where the round explodes on contact), PDD (point detonation delay, where the round detonates immediately after it has gone through a door, window or thin wall) and “Window,” which is used for firing at enemy troops in a trench, behind a stone wall or inside a room. The round detonates just beyond the aiming point. For buildings, this would be a window or doorframe, cave entrance or the corner of a building (to get enemy troops thought to be around the corner).

Special Equipment:

Laser Range Finder: This allows the operator to track and determine the distance of a target, even while it’s moving. This results in no penalty when firing at a moving target or one at maximum distance.

Computer Targeting System: The power armor’s main weapon can be fired manually or the computer can track and lock onto enemy targets, then fire upon voice command. This works perfectly when in a concealed location. The weapon can also be locked onto the optics of the wearer, effectively “seeing” whatever the wearer sees, or use information based on the micro radar. When using the computer targeting system, the weapon is +4 to strike, but the weapon functions independently of the operator, so he or she cannot include W.P. skill bonuses.

SIGINT (Signals Intelligence) GEAR: Enables the pilot to receive radio or cell phone frequencies. He or she can monitor specific frequencies, or scan though a range of frequencies for a specific signal. Once the signal has been found, a radio directional finder will attempt to track the signal to its source (88%).

Secure Radio: Encrypted radio transmissions. Must use Radio: Scramblers in order to intercept the aircraft’s transmissions, and even then it’s a -25% penalty.

Satcom Radio: Receive and transmit radio broadcasts with any military and/or civilian satellites: Range: Worldwide communications.

Missile Warning System and Anti-Missile Chaff: Enough to decoy 4 medium or long-range missiles. The system provides a +5 bonus to initiative whenever any missiles or rockets are propelled at the power armor. Missiles lose any guidance bonus, straight, unmodified dice rolls only.

Radiation Shielding

The Buteo

This is a KLS version of the CH-149 Cormorant helicopter and is used by Canada S.C.R.E.T. as a troop transporter and escort/gunship aircraft. The pilot wears an integrated helmet display that includes nightvision goggles similar to a Heads-Up Display (HUD) and a Forward-Looking Infrared Output. When used for tactical missions, the Buteo will have a 12.7 mm machine-gun in the nose. The Buteo carries missile launchers on two attachment points that can be extended from the side of the

ship. For electronic support, the Buteo has a missile warning system that automatically triggers countermeasures. The craft also has an automatic flight control system that provides dual-redundant digital control, giving autostabilization and four-axis auto-pilot operation.

Armor: A.R. 14. Stops pistols, rifles, and light machine-guns under .30 caliber (Penetration Value of 7+).

S.D.C. by Location:

Main Body – 500 S.D.C.

Cockpit Windows – 100 S.D.C.

Passenger Windows – 50 S.D.C.

Tail – 200 S.D.C.

Rotor – 120 S.D.C.

Crew: 5 (Aircraft Commander/Pilot, First Officer/Co-Pilot, Flight Engineer, and two Technicians) + 30 seated troops or 45 standing troops in EX-7, EX-9, or EX-9A1 power armor. EX-9B will fit, but only 38 can fit at a single time.

Length: 74 feet (22.55 m).

Empty Weight: 23,150 lbs (10,417 kg).

Max Takeoff weight: 35,406 lbs (15,932 kg) or roughly 17.7 tons.

Height: 21 feet, 10 inches (6.6 m).

Speed: 192 mph (307 km).

Ceiling: 15,000 feet (4572 m).

Range: 949 miles (1518 km).

Total Vehicular Bonuses: +3 to initiative, +4 to strike (Nose Gun Array, doesn't include pilot or gunner's bonuses).

Weapon Systems:

12.7mm Machine-Gun: Each Buteo has the option of having a 12.7 mm machine-gun, mounted on the nose of the craft. The turret can fire in a 180-degree arc in any direction. It fires linkless ammunition. A delinking feeder can be installed to handle standard, linked ammunition. **Range:** 7546 feet (2300 m). **Damage:** 6D6x10, **Rate of Fire:** Long burst only. This weapon's rate of fire is so fast that a long burst only counts as one attack. **Payload:** 1000 rounds. Enough for 4 long bursts. **Note:** Anyone thinking they can carry this weapon around needs to know it weighs 52 lbs (23.4 kg) empty and is nearly 4 feet long (1.2 m).

Other Weapons: The Buteo carries two KS-7 Rocket Launchers (similar to the XM-3) only it's an arrangement of 12 tubes of guided short-range missiles. These missiles can be HE, Frag, AR, Plasma, Tear Gas, Knockout Gas, Smoke, or Fire Retardant. KLS encourage combinations. All missiles are guided (+3 to strike). Can be fired in volleys of 1, 2, 4, 6, or all 12 (total 24).

Special Equipment:

Missile Warning System and Anti-Missile Chaff: Enough to decoy 10 missiles. The system provides a +5 bonus to initiative whenever any missiles or rockets are propelled at the vehicle.

Secure Radio: Encrypted radio transmissions. Must use Radio: Scramblers in order to intercept the aircraft's transmissions, and even then it's a -25% penalty.

Satcom Radio: Receive and transmit radio broadcasts with any military and/or civilian satellites: **Range:** Worldwide communications.

GPS (Global Positioning System): Navigation computer uses the constellations of GPS satellites orbiting the earth. Enables the pilot to locate the plane's position or for that matter, an enemy's position, within one yard/meter. Using this sort of navigation does not require the RB2 to make any sort of Radio Frequency (RF) emissions, which makes it difficult to detect using radio detection gear, radar warning receiver, etc. (92%).

FLIR (Forward Looking InfraRed): An optical heat sensor that converts the infrared radiation of warm objects into a visible image. The pilot can see in total darkness, shadows, and smoke. **Range:** 1600 feet (488 m).

Sound Analysis Computer: Can help the technician listen to, recognize, and analyze sounds picked up with sonar. +15% to Surveillance Systems when using it with sonar.

Laser Targeting System

Maxi-Radar: **Range:** 50 miles (80 km).

Folding Acoustic Sonar: **Range:** 2000 feet (610 m).

Combat Computer with Heads-Up Display (HUD): Confers +2 to dodge.

Multi-Optics and HUD

DHC-5 Buffalo

The de Havilland Canada DHC-5 Buffalo is a short takeoff and landing (STOL) utility and tactical transport, a turboprop version developed from the earlier piston-powered DHC-4 Caribou. The aircraft has extraordinary STOL performance, able to take off in distances much shorter than even light aircraft can manage. There are only five of these aircraft for the Canadian S.C.R.E.T. to use. With the USA S.C.R.E.T. using the Mega Galaxy as its utility and tactical transport, the Canadian S.C.R.E.T. is wondering when they will be able to afford such an aircraft.

Armor: A.R. 11. Stops pistols and rifles (Penetration Value of 6+).

S.D.C.: 950

Crew: 3 (pilot, copilot, crew-chief) + 70 troops. Can only take a max of 30 troops all in EX-7 or EX-9 power armor.

Weight: 25,160 lbs (11,322 kg) empty.

Payload: 18,000 lbs (8100 kg).

Fully Loaded: 49,200 lbs (22,140 kg).

Wingspan: 96 feet (29.26 m).

Length: 79 feet (24.08 m).

Height: 28 feet, 9 inches (8.76 m).

Speed: 290 mph (464 km).

Range: With max payload 690 miles (1104 km), empty 3797 miles (6075 km).

Ceiling: 31,000 feet (9450 m).

Features of Note:

Pressurized Cabin

Polarized, Light Sensitive/Adjusting, Tinted Windshields

Complete Reinforced, Environment Pilot and Crew Compartments

Two Honeybee Drones: Small aerial robots that can be launched one or two at a time. The drones emit the exact radar signature of the C-25 so enemies who launch medium or

long-range missiles at the craft will be unable to distinguish the false radar signal from the real craft. This form of radar deception works to conceal S.C.R.E.T. or any other type of aircraft from the enemy even if they are 144 miles (230 km) away (88%).



United Kingdom S.C.R.E.T.

Second to the United States, the U.K. S.C.R.E.T. is one of the best-trained and funded S.C.R.E.T. agencies in the world. It is also one of the most successful, having on dozens of occasions been called to combat meta-terrorists and super villains not only in the U.K. but throughout Europe, India, Africa, and the South Pacific. With Australia attempting to create its own S.C.R.E.T., the obligation of protecting India and the South Pacific will shift to them, thus allowing the U.K. agency to concentrate its efforts in Europe and Africa.

The U.K. S.C.R.E.T. first saw deployment around the mid 1970s shortly after the U.S. revealed its agency to the world. The Canadian and British Prime Ministers worked together to create the U.K. S.C.R.E.T. With Britain experiencing major economic problems, it became increasingly difficult to fund a

fourth branch of the United Kingdom Special Forces, much less do so without public awareness. Despite this, S.C.R.E.T. found itself in much eager need with meta-terrorism and super villains on the rise, particularly in Ireland and other parts of the Commonwealth of Nations.

After S.C.R.E.T. helped Britain score a major victory against Argentina in the Falkland Islands (1982), the Conservative government and Prime Minister cut government expenditures and found a way to provide S.C.R.E.T. the funds it needed to become a size level four agency. By the time a new Prime Minister took over in the 1990s, S.C.R.E.T. had reached size level five, and rivaled its Canadian creator and benefactor.

The role of U.K. S.C.R.E.T. is to protect British interests at home and abroad, executing the foreign and defense policies of Her Majesty's Government through the exercise of military activities. S.C.R.E.T. is also a key element of the UK contribution to NATO, with a number of assets allocated to NATO tasks at any time.

S.C.R.E.T. is one of the four Special Forces units within the United Kingdom Special Forces group. Although considered a naval Special Forces unit, S.C.R.E.T. is independent of both the Royal Navy and Marines. As a Special Force unit, it conducts operations on land and sea, which can consist of protecting UK and EU fisheries or engaging in counter-meta-terrorism high in the Himalaya Mountains. Like Special Air Service Regiment (SAS), it's a secretive institution that usually attracts a disproportionate amount of media coverage, namely because of its size and worldwide presence.

S.C.R.E.T. is comprised of two battalion-sized units, one regular (the Knight Regiment) and one reserve unit in the Territorial Army (the Blue Commandos). Within the Regiments, there is a number of "Sabre" Squadrons, which do not include support functions (planning and intelligence, operational research, etc.). Each "Sabre" Squadron of the Knight Regiment is divided into four 64-man troops with specialized skills (Air, Water, Civil, and Wilderness Troops), however all personnel are broadly skilled in all four areas after training. The specialized troops provide a focus for particular skill sets and personnel may move between troops over the length of a career. The Blue Commandos do not distinguish agents this way.

Air Troop personnel specialize in airborne combat and insertion using fixed wing and rotary wing aircraft and/or power armor. Boat Troop personnel specialize in waterborne combat and insertion techniques; diving and small boats, and/or power armor. Civil Troop units specialize in land combat in urban environments or functioning as a special operative engaging in espionage, covert reconnaissance, or human intelligence (HUMINT) collection. Wilderness Troop specializes in land combat in rural environments, with a major emphasis in mountain and Arctic Warfare, however they also function as special operatives.

The U.K. S.C.R.E.T. is established under the Royal Prerogative, hence members of the agency (unlike the British Army and Royal Air Force) have never been required to take the oath of allegiance to the British Monarch. Command of the U.K. S.C.R.E.T. is controlled by two individuals: the Commander-in-Chief Fleet (CINCFLEET), who is the admiral responsible for the operation, resourcing and training of the ships, submarines, aircraft, and personnel of the British Royal Navy; and the

Chief Guardian, a member of the Defense Council of the United Kingdom and the Admiralty Board, which handles the administration of the Naval Service of the United Kingdom.

What truly separates the U.K. S.C.R.E.T. from its level 5 counterparts is its base of operations, the HMS Invisible. She is named Invisible for two reasons. One, she is the first of a new generation of aircraft carriers being developed for the United Kingdom's Royal Navy. The vessels were not expected to enter service for another ten years, but Invisible was built without public awareness, and even today fewer than 3,000 people in the entire world know of its existence (and most of them work on the ship). The other reason is that she is the world's first submersible aircraft carrier. She uses the most advanced, state of the art technology of Heroes Unlimited Earth. She can function as a combat submarine, a super aircraft carrier, an amphibious assault transporter, or as a spy ship. Today HMS Invisible remains the U.K.'s best kept secret, but it's only a matter of time before her existence becomes general knowledge, and when it does, she will be the envy of the world.

Typical U.K. S.C.R.E.T. Agent for Heroes Unlimited™ 2nd Edition

Partly based on the original concept by Kevin Long

Alignment: Any, but often Scrupulous or Unprincipled.

Typical Attributes: I.Q. 13, M.E. 12, M.A. 13, P.S. 22, P.P. 18, P.E. 18, P.B. 12, Spd 25.

Average Age: 23-35

Average Sex: 70% male, 30% female.

Average Height: Male 6 feet (1.83 m), Female 5 feet, 8 inches (1.73 inches).

Average Weight: 180-200 lbs (81-90 kg) for male agents and 130-150 lbs (58.5 to 67.5 kg) for female agents.

Average Experience Level: 1D4+2

Military Rank: 1st and 2nd level Marine, 3rd level Lance Corporal, 4th level Corporal, 5th level Sergeant, 6th and 7th level Color Sergeant, 8th level Warrant Officer Class 2, 9th level and beyond Warrant Officer Class 1. S.C.R.E.T. agents can never be commissioned officers.

Super Power Category: Special Training: Secret Operative (45%), Robot Pilot (30%), Super Sleuth (15%), and other (10%). The U.K. S.C.R.E.T. does not allow super-powered individuals to work alongside normal agents.

Average Hit Points: 28

Average S.D.C.: Secret Operatives have around 60-80 S.D.C. Robot Pilots and Super Sleuths have around 40-50 S.D.C. Bionic, Super Soldiers, and others have numerous factors that will determine their total S.D.C.

Combat Training: Hand to Hand: Martial Arts, Assassin, or Commando.

Typical Number of Attacks per Melee: 5 or 6 (6 or 7 for those 4th level).

Agent Bonuses: The following are bonuses granted to S.C.R.E.T. agents regardless of their Super Power Category. +2 to initiative, +1 to strike, parry, and dodge, +2 to damage, +1 to roll with punch/fall/impact, +4 to pull punch, +3 to per-

ception, and +4 to save vs Horror Factor. These are in addition to possible bonuses from attributes, skills, power category, or Hand to Hand Combat.

Saving Throw: +1 to psionic attack and insanity, +2 to save vs magic and poison, and +6% to save vs coma/death.

Special Abilities: Varies with each agent.

Education Level and Skills: Special Training: *Secret Operative* are rolled up accordingly (see HU2, page 216). Robot Pilots are rolled up accordingly (see HU2, page 194). Super Sleuths are rolled up accordingly (see HU2, page 221, however they must either take the Basic Military Program or Option #2).

Appearance: U.K. S.C.R.E.T. agents typically look like average everyday people.

Occupation: U.K. Marines.

Standard Weapons: The Browning L9A1 (being phased out), the Sig P229 (can be chambered in 9 mm, .40 S&W or .357 SIG. Changing between .40 S&W and .357 SIG is as simple as switching out the barrel. The magazine can accommodate ammunition of either caliber. The 9 mm model cannot be converted to another caliber), SA80A2 (fires a 5.56 x 45 mm NATO cartridge from a 30-round detachable box magazine, and can mount a 4x optical sight with a tritium-powered glowing pointer for limited night sighting, can be fitted with an under-barrel 40mm grenade launcher), Arctic Warfare (AW) Bolt-Action Rifle (chambered for 7.62 mm NATO rounds, but can also be fitted for 5.56 mm rounds, 10 round detachable box magazine, it is mounted with a standard scope and a muzzle brake to cut down on recoil. Its maximum effective range with a 6 x 42 scope is around 2640 feet/804 m), M2 .50 Browning Machine-Gun, M82 Barrett Rifle, FN Minimi (a 5.56 x 45 mm NATO light machine-gun with 100 or 200 round reusable soft packs, effective range 3300 feet/1005 m), Law Rocket, MILAN (a wire guided anti-tank missile which is in the process of being replaced by the American Javelin, 1D6x100 damage with a 70 foot/21 m blast radius, 85-6562 feet/25-2000 m, comes fitted with thermal-imaging system, +3 to strike), FIM-92 Stinger (a passive surface-to-air missile, shoulder-fired by a single operator, although officially it requires two. It can attack aircraft at a range of up to 15,700 feet/4785 m and at altitudes between 600 feet/181 m and 12,500 feet/ 3810 m, 1D6x100 damage, has a dual-detector seeker: IR and UV/+3 to strike, Speed: Mach 2.2), and the CN2 Laser Rifle (A Cyberworks Network Laser Rifle/same as Laser Rifle in *Heroes Unlimited™ G.M.'s Guide*, page 216). Some of the weapons can come with special munitions (A.P., exploding, Hollow Point, etc.), grenades: four (4) HE, four (4) tear gas/CS, two (2) stun/flash; and/or four (4) throwing knives.

Equipment and Armor: All the special equipment mentioned earlier is standard. Every agent carries with him two pair of Heavy Handcuffs. Generally, all agents wear a hard armor vest (A.R. 12, S.D.C. 120) or Class 4 Armor (full suit; A.R. 17, S.D.C. 280).

Vehicles: See *Villains Unlimited™, 2nd Edition*, pages 44-45, and those mentioned below. All Robot Pilots are given their own Exoskeleton.

Headquarters: See above.

U.K. S.C.R.E.T. Vehicles

The RB2 Harrier (Robot Harrier)

The RB2 Harrier built by KLS Corporation is the latest generation vertical takeoff, hover, and landing (VTOHL) jet aircraft used by U.K. S.C.R.E.T. While the rest of the Royal Military awaits the latest Joint Strike Fighter, U.K. S.C.R.E.T. has been using this multi-role aircraft that can perform close air support, tactical bombing, and air-to-air combat for nearly a year. These single seat aircraft, like the HMS Invisible, are not what they appear to be. Upon close inspection, the aircraft look quite similar to a Harrier II, but these planes are actually Type One Robot Vehicles. This gives them numerous advantages over conventional aircraft, namely the ability to respond like an exoskeleton, rather than a large vehicle. Like a master puppeteer, the RB2 responds to the pilot's thoughts thanks to a telemental helmet. With its ability to perform multiple tasks, such as aerial combat the equivalent of an attack helicopter, the RB2 has installed fear in the hearts of meta-terrorists and super villains, the likes so far unattainable by the U.S. S.C.R.E.T. As a result, the RB2 has become U.K. S.C.R.E.T.'s cornerstone and main offensive weapon in the fight to protect British lives all over the world. Presently the U.K. has 28 of these craft on the HMS Invisible. Six more are with the Blue Commandos.

Model Type: Series Two

Class: Robot Multi-Functional Jet Aircraft.

Crew: One (Pilot).

Armor: A.R. 13 (16 for the Reinforced Pilot's Compartment).

S.D.C. by Location:

Forward Mounted Guns (2; nose) – 40 each

Wing Mounted Missiles (8) – 60 each

Wing Mounted Mini-Missile Launcher – 60

Weapon Hardpoints (2) – 30 each

*** Wings (2) – 120 each

** Tail – 100

* Main Body – 210

Reinforced Pilot's Compartment – 200

Pilot's Seat – 20

* Destroying the main body knocks the aircraft out of the sky and sends its flaming remains to the ground below.

** Destroying the tail reduces Spd and the pilot skill by -50%.

*** Destroying one of the wings (and one of the VTOL engines) will send the aircraft into a spin and crashing to the earth. VTOL is impossible. The RB2 will crash and the pilot will be killed unless he or she ejects. The crash causes 2D4x100 S.D.C. to a 300 foot (91 m) radius. Nothing is salvageable.

Speed:

Driving on the Ground: Only possible for conventional takeoff and landing, as well as parking/storage; 10 mph (16 km).

Flying: 662 mph (1,059 km) and climb to an altitude of 51,000 feet (15,544 m). The jet has a minimum glide speed of 45 mph (72 km); if it goes any slower, it may stall and crash, unless en-

gaging in VTOL. The craft can hover stationary almost like a helicopter and turn 360 degrees.

Range: Fusion powered, giving it continual power for an estimated 6 years, but the jet engines begin to overheat after 9 hours of continual use. Occasional rest stops every 3-6 hours, and allowing the engines an hour or two to cool down, will allow the aircraft to travel indefinitely.

Power System: Fusion.

Length: 46 feet, 6 inches (14.2 m).

Wingspan: 30 feet, 4 inches (9.2 m).

Empty Weight: 12,500 lb (5,625 kg).

Max Takeoff Weight: 18,950 lb VTOL, 31,000 lb STOL (8,527 kg VTOL, 13,950 kg STOL).

Height: 11 ft, 9 inches (3.5 m).

Total Vehicle Bonuses: +7 to initiative, +6 to strike with all weapon systems and/or missiles, +6 to dodge, and +10% on piloting skill for aerial maneuvers and acrobatics.

Weapon Systems:

Two 30mm ADEN Cannons, Damage: 6D6x10, Rate of Fire: Short burst only, Payload: 800 rounds, enough for 6 short bursts, Range: 8000 feet (2438 m).

Three Short-Range HE (light) Air-to-Air Missiles (AAM), Damage: 2D4x10, Blast Radius: 10 feet (3 m), Speed: Mach 2.5 (1650 mph 2640 km), Range: 11.3 miles (18 km).

* **Two Short-Range HE (medium) Air-to-Ground Missiles (AGM),** Damage: 2D6x10, Blast Radius: 15 feet (4.6 m), Speed: 670 mph (1072 km), Range: 7.2 miles (11.5 km).

* **Two Short-Range Plasma AGM.** Damage: 2D6x10, Blast Radius: 15 feet (4.6 m), Speed: 620 mph (992 km), Range: 17 miles (27.2 km).

* **One Short-Range Armor Piercing/Plasma Bomb.** Bunker buster, penetrates 40 feet (12.1 m) of dirt and 6 feet (1.8 m) of reinforced concrete before detonation. Damage: 3D6x10, Blast Radius: 15 feet (4.6 m), Speed: 620 mph (992 km), Range: 21 miles (33.6 km).

One HE Mini-Missile Cluster (12 tubes), Damage: 5D6, Blast Radius: 5 feet (1.5 m), Speed: 500 mph (800 km), Range: 1 mile (1.6 km). They are all unguided and can be fired in volleys of 1,2,3,6, or 12.

* The laser rangefinder and laser designator combination make these missiles +5 to strike and -3 to dodge. When not using the laser designator, these missiles must rely on radar and/or high-resolution camera images from the aircraft's cameras (+3 to strike). The other missiles are regular guided missiles (+3 to strike).

Optional: The Harrier can sometimes be equipped with an Advanced Short-Range Air-to-Air Missile (ASRAAM), Damage: 2D4x10, Blast Radius: 10 feet (3 m), Speed: Mach 3.5 (2310 mph/3696 km), Range: 11 miles (17.6 km). These infrared homing (heat seeking) missiles are specifically used to lock onto flying enemy targets and destroy them (+3 to strike), and because of their speed, flying targets are -6 to dodge them.

Note: The missile combination can be changed depending upon the mission. For example, a battle that will engage primarily air-to-air combatants will call for more AAM and little or no AGM.

Special Equipment:

Video Camera with Telescopic Lens: Range: 20,000 feet (6096 km).

Still Camera with Telescopic Lens: Range: 20,000 feet (6096 km).

Real-Time Sensor Link

Motion Detector and Warning System: Range: 60 feet (18.3 m).

Maxi-Radar: An ultra-sophisticated radar unit capable of ground and air surveillance with an image intensification system. It can identify 72 targets and simultaneously track 48. While flying at a high altitude, it can pick out surface targets from a distance of 50 miles (80 km). Its air-to-ground weapon delivery and high-resolution mapping modes can be used to track and attack moving targets that are too difficult to use the laser designator.

Laser Rangefinder: This allows the aircraft to track and determine the distance of a target, even while it's moving. This results in no penalty when firing at a moving target or one at maximum distance.

Laser Designator: (same as Laser Targeting) Range: 5 miles (8 km).

ECM (Electronic Countermeasures): Powerful enough to distort the echo delivered to enemy radar, or fill the enemy's radar screen with imaginary targets. In game terms, provides a -35% to vehicles, robots, and humans using radar to detect the Harrier's signature.

SIGINT (Signals Intelligence) GEAR: Enables the pilot to receive radio or cell phone frequencies. It can monitor specific frequencies, or scan through a range of frequencies for a specific signal. Once the signal has been found, a radio directional finder will attempt to track the signal to its source (88%).

GPS (Global Positioning System): Navigation computer uses the constellations of GPS satellites orbiting the earth. Enables the pilot to locate the plane's position or for that matter, an enemy's position, within one yard/meter. Using this sort of navigation does not require the RB2 to make any sort of radio frequency (RF) emissions, which makes it difficult to detect using radio detection gear, radar warning receiver, etc. (92%).

Secure Radio: Encrypted radio transmissions. Must use Radio Scramblers in order to intercept the aircraft's transmissions, and even then it's a -25% penalty.

Satcom Radio: Receive and transmit radio broadcasts with any military and/or civilian satellites: Range: Worldwide communications.

IRCM (Infrared Countermeasures): Lasers are used to decoy heat-seeking missiles. They follow the nearest portion of the beam and explode there. The system provides a +5 bonus to initiative whenever any missiles or rockets are propelled at the vehicle. Missiles lose any guidance bonus, straight, unmodified dice rolls only. A volley of four missiles can be affected at one time.

Missile Warning System and Anti-Missile Chaff: Enough to decoy 10 missiles. The system provides a +5 bonus to initiative whenever any missiles or rockets are propelled at the vehicle. Missiles lose any guidance bonus, straight, unmodified dice rolls only.

Combat/Targeting Computer

Radar Detector: 90% accuracy. Range: 7 miles (11.2 km).

Radiation Detector: Range: 60 feet (18.3 m).

Telemental Helmet

Radiation Shielding

Pressurized Cabin

Polarized, Light Sensitive/Adjusting, Tinted Windshields

Complete Reinforced, Environmental Pilot Compartment

The Manannan

This is the U.K. version of the Canadian Buteo. This helicopter's primary role is for air warfare, tracking and surveillance, amphibious operations, and search & rescue missions. It is essentially the same vehicle as the Buteo except the Manannan is armed with two KS-7 Rocket Launchers and four torpedoes. The HMS Invisible holds 12 of these helicopters while the Blue Commandos have four.

Torpedoes: Damage: 2D4x10, Blast Radius: 10 feet (3 m), Speed: 52 mph (83 km), Maximum Depth: 3 miles (4.8 km), and Range: 5 miles (8 km).

The Seahawk

This is the U.K. version of the Goshawk currently used by the U.S. S.C.R.E.T. Having witnessed what these impressive ships can do for the U.S., the U.K. has ordered 8 of these impressive multi-use aircraft to replace its 8 Westland WS-61 Sea King helicopters to transport troops.

EX-7, EX-9, and EX-9A1 Super Exoskeleton

Essentially the same as the U.S. & Canadian versions, except the U.K. EX-9A1 version has been modified for improved underwater capabilities. The U.K. presently has 72 EX-7, 32 EX-9, and a 16 EX-9A1 on board the HMS Invisible. The Blue Commandoes have another ten of each type.

EX-9A1 Underwater Capabilities: 10 mph (16 km/8.6 knots) using arms and legs to paddle. 50 mph (80 km/43.5 knots) using its jet thrusters to skim across the surface of the water. 30 mph (48 km/26 knots) using the thrusters underwater. Maximum Ocean Depth: 300 feet (91.4 m).

Thunderclap and Thunderclap 2

The Blue Commandoes have a dozen Thunderclaps in their possession; however, they are eager to get their hands on eight Thunderclap 2s, which are expected to arrive within three months.

The HMS Invisible

Model Type: CVF-1

Class: Submersible Carrier.

Crew: 600 total (however there are accommodations for 1400).

Armor: A.R. 17. Stops pistol, rifle, heavy machine-gun (20 and 30mm) and fragments. The armor can reduce damage from energy attacks, Armor Piercing bullets, explosive rounds, gre-

nades, and light explosives by half damage when the roll to strike is 18 or higher (Penetration Value 13). Nothing short of medium or long-range missiles/bombs or a massive explosion is going to damage this ship.

S.D.C. by Location:

Goalkeeper CIWS (4) – 150 each

Laser Cannons (2) – 150 each

Mk 41 VLS system (2) – 100 each

Torpedo Tubes (4; 2 in front, 2 in back) – 800 each

Hull per 40 foot (12.2 m) area – 100

Flight Deck – 8000

* Bridge – 2800

** Main Sensor and Communication Tower – 960

*** Secondary Sensors/Comm Arrays (3) – 420 each

**** Main Body – 20,000

* If the bridge is destroyed, the ship can be operated from the Main Sensor and Communications Tower without penalty, or from the engine room at -20% to piloting rolls and with all weapon systems disabled until a technician can jury-rig a set of controls (takes 1D6 hours; half that time if a successful Mechanical Engineer skill roll is made at -20%).

** Destroying the Main Sensors and Communications Tower: see #7 for complete details.

*** Destroying the Secondary Comm Arrays: see the description under #7, below.

**** Destroying the S.D.C. of the main body destroys the ship's structural integrity, causing it to sink beneath the waves. If the vessel sinks below 3000 feet (914 m), the pressure will crush it, killing everyone inside – no survivors!

Speed:

Water Surface: 44 mph (70 km or 38.23 knots).

Underwater: 32 mph (51 km/27.8 knots), 23 mph (37 km or 19.9 knots) "silent."

Power System: Nuclear; expected energy life 12 years.

Length: 928 feet (282 m).

Beam (width at its widest point): 128 feet (39 m) at waterline, 231 feet (70.4 m) overall.

Displacement: 71,650 tons.

Height: 98 feet (29.8 m).

Range: Effectively unlimited.

Cargo: In addition to the Knight Battalion, it holds their weapons, ammo, equipment, 48 aircraft (28 RB2, 12 Manannan, and 8 Westland WS-61 Sea Kings (to be replaced by 8 Seahawks), and 120 suits of power armor.

Weapon Systems:

1. Goalkeeper CIWS (4): A 180 degree, 30mm auto-cannon, which defends the ships against incoming missiles and ballistic shells. The system consists of a 30mm auto cannon and advanced dual radar which tracks incoming fire, determines its trajectory, then aims the gun and fires in a matter of seconds. The system is fully automatic, needing no human input once activated. The system first acquires a target using one radar, which can track up to 18 targets at once, then a second radar is vectored to the heading indicated by the first. The

system's reaction time to a Mach 2 missile from automatic detection to kill is 5.5 seconds, with the engagement starting at a range of 5000 feet (1524 m) and ending with a kill at 990 feet (301 m). The dual radar is also backed up by an optical system. This prevents the system from shooting at birds all day.

Primary Purpose: Anti-Missile.

Secondary Purpose: Anti-Aircraft.

Damage: 4D6x10 (These are short bursts of 70 rounds).

Rate of Fire: Each cannon has 6 attacks per melee round.

Payload: 4200 rounds (60 short bursts).

Maximum Effective Range: 5000 feet (1524 m).

Bonus: The system provides a +5 bonus to initiative whenever any missiles, aircraft, or flying object larger than four feet (1.2 m) comes within 300 feet (91.4 m) of the ship at speeds up to Mach 3. The guns are +5 to strike and suffer no movement or speed penalties.

Note: An automated reloading system cuts down the regular 9 minute reloading time to 3 minutes.

2. Cyberworks High Speed Laser Cannon (2): A free-swinging single-barreled cannon on a fixed pedestal mounting. A system similar to the Goalkeeper is used.

Primary Purpose: Anti-aircraft.

Secondary Purpose: Anti-missile.

Damage: 2D4x10 (These are short bursts of 5-10 blasts).

Rate of Fire: Each cannon has 6 attacks per melee round.

Payload: 1000 shots per hour (then the weapon needs to cool down, otherwise unlimited).

Maximum Effective Range: 6000 feet (1829 m).

Bonus: The system provides a +5 bonus to initiative whenever any aircraft, subsonic missiles, or flying object larger than four feet (1.2 m) comes within 300 feet (91.4 m) of the ship at speeds up to Mach 1. The guns are +5 to strike and suffer no movement or speed penalties.

3. Torpedo Tubes (4): These tubes can fire a variety of torpedoes, from heavy ship-killers (inflicting 2D4x100 S.D.C. with a 50 foot/15.2 m blast radius) to light torpedoes (2D4x10 S.D.C. with a 10 foot/3 m blast radius).

Primary Purpose: Anti-Ship.

Secondary Purpose: Defense.

Rate of Fire: Up to 6 torpedoes can be fired a melee.

Speed: 52 mph (83 km) for light torpedoes, 92 mph (147 km) for heavy.

Payload: 25 of each type.

Maximum Effective Range: 1 to 20 miles (1.6 to 32 km).

4. Mk 41 VLS system: VLS (Vertical Launching System) is a type of missile-firing system using RIM-162 Evolved Sea Sparrow Missiles (ESSM) to counter supersonic maneuvering anti-ship missiles. These missiles can also protect the ship from attacking aircraft, flying metas, and ground and surface targets. The ESSM, unlike other anti-missiles, is larger and has a more powerful rocket motor for increased range and agility, as well as upgraded aerodynamics using strakes and skid-to-turn.

Primary Purpose: Anti-Missile.

Secondary Purpose: Anti-Aircraft.

Damage: 2D6x10 S.D.C. with a 40 foot (12.2 m) blast radius.

Speed: Mach 4.

Rate of Fire: Volley of 1, 2, 3 or 4 from a launcher. Multiples can be fired from different launchers.

Payload: Four in each of the six launchers (24 missiles total).

Maximum Effective Range: 40 miles (64 km).

Bonus: The system provides a +5 bonus to initiative whenever any missiles, aircraft, or flying object larger than four feet (1.2 m) comes within one mile (1.6 km) of the ship at speed up to Mach 4. Each missile is +5 to strike; has 2 attacks per melee round and can pursue a designated target for 8 melee rounds (two minutes) before running out of fuel.

5. Vehicles: In addition to the various aircraft and power armor mentioned above, the HMS has 24 small boats and two small detachable submarines.

6. Stealth System: The man behind the creation of HMS Invisible (Linton Wash, an 11th level Hardware: Mechanical Genius) built the stealth system that makes the ship nearly impossible to detect. How it works remains a mystery to everyone, except for five individuals (including Wash), and only one of them is on board at any given time. Essentially, while traveling above or below water, the HMS Invisible possesses the super ability Cloaking (see *Heroes Unlimited™ 2nd Edition*, page 256), making it, the crew, and all of its cargo/vehicles completely invisible to all forms of technology. No form of mechanical detection, sonar, radar, photographic devices, cameras, etc. can detect or see this ship. Even the pilots flying aircraft off the flight deck are incapable of detecting the carrier. This is why robotic jet craft are used to give the pilots an advantage in landing on an “invisible” ship. Radio signals from the ship can be received and transmitted, as can all forms of technology used on the ship. Only detection and scanning devices are useless against it. Destroying a particular one of the Secondary Sensors/Comm Arrays will disable the Cloaking effect, however no one but the 5 know which of the three. Without the stealth system, the ship can be detected by any mechanical device normally.

7. Sensor System Notes:

Air Search Long-Range Radar: A superior radar system, capable of tremendous air surveillance. The radar is capable of tracking 600 targets. Targets can be distinguished as friend or foe. They can be as small as standard size humans or mini-missiles. Radar can determine rate of travel, direction, and exact location, even identify them by radar signature. The radar can simultaneously track and identify all incoming targets in its range. Range: 345 miles (552 km).

Air Search Short-Range Radar: An ultra-sophisticated radar system, capable of air surveillance with an image intensification system. It can identify 50 targets and simultaneously track 24. It can pick out surface targets from a distance of 120 miles (192 km).

Target Acquisition Radar: Advanced radar that tracks incoming fire or objects heading toward the ship. The ship's targeting computers receive this data, determine the object's trajectory in a matter of milliseconds, aim the ship's guns or missiles, and tell them to fire, all before the object has a chance

to come within 300 feet (91.4 m) of the ship. It has a range of 6000 feet (1828 m).

Air Traffic Control Radars: Enables the HMS Invisible to keep track all of its aircraft as well as perform Advanced IFF (Identification Friend or Foe). This enables it to read the IFF of enemy aircraft and block them. Able to read and detect all signals in range of radar (88%). Range: 75 miles (120 km).

Landing Aid Radars: This signal is sent to all aircraft attempting to land on the carrier. Without this signal, pilots would have to land on the craft using visual references only (-30% on control rolls, and impossible to do at night, -90%). Range: 5 miles (8 km).

Long-Range Sonar: A superior sonar system. The sonar is capable of tracking 60 targets and identifying over 1000 different underwater objects from their signature. The sonar also functions as a form of motion detection. Range: 92 miles (147.2 km).

Short-Range Sonar: An ultra-sophisticated sonar system, capable of tracking 200 specific targets and identifying 7000 underwater objects. Range: 10 miles (16 km).

Echolocation Sound System: A narrow scanning field about 100 feet (30 m) in radius used to aid in navigation, accurately gauge depth, and locate and identify underwater terrain and formations, underwater vessels, wreckage, structures, and sea animals.

Secure Radio: Encrypted radio transmissions. Must use Radio: Scramblers in order to intercept the vessel's transmissions, and even then it's a -25% penalty.

GPS (Global Positioning System): Navigation using the constellations of GPS satellites orbiting the earth. Enables the navigator to locate the ship, any U.K., naval, or aircraft's position or for that matter, an enemy's position, within one yard/meter (92%).

Satcom Radio: Receive and transmit radio broadcasts with any military and/or civilian satellites. Range: Worldwide communications.

Deception Jamming: A form of ECM that blanks out the real position of friendly aircraft on enemy radar, and replaces it with a false radar return. This form of radar deception works to conceal S.C.R.E.T. or any other type of U.K. aircraft from the enemy even if they are 144 miles (230 km) away (88%).

Communications and Sensor Tower: If the main communications and sensor tower is destroyed all operations are less effective, delays and errors will more likely occur, and some long-range systems may be lost. There is also a 01-50% chance that there will be 1D4 melee rounds when all but internal communications systems are down and the secondary tower takes over.

If the secondary tower is destroyed, ALL long-range systems, target acquisition radar, and additional radars are lost. Only short-range systems are working. Aircraft and ships more than 50 miles (80 km) away will lose communications with the carrier. Sound quality of communications may be poor and fade in and out, and errors are likely even for those within a 50 mile (80 km) radius.

Final Note: Once again, the HMS Invisible functions as the U.K. S.C.R.E.T. base and home of the Knight Battalion. It provides all the accommodations for those who live and operate from this craft. You name it, it's probably on board. There are

plenty of life rafts for everyone. There is a sick/bay hospital with an advanced medical facility, quarantine area, recreation and VR areas, a brig, complete environmental systems, emergency power and life support, emergency lighting, external spotlights/searchlights scattered around the entire ship, sections with water and airtight sealable compartments, and various areas to repair weapons, armor, and vehicles.

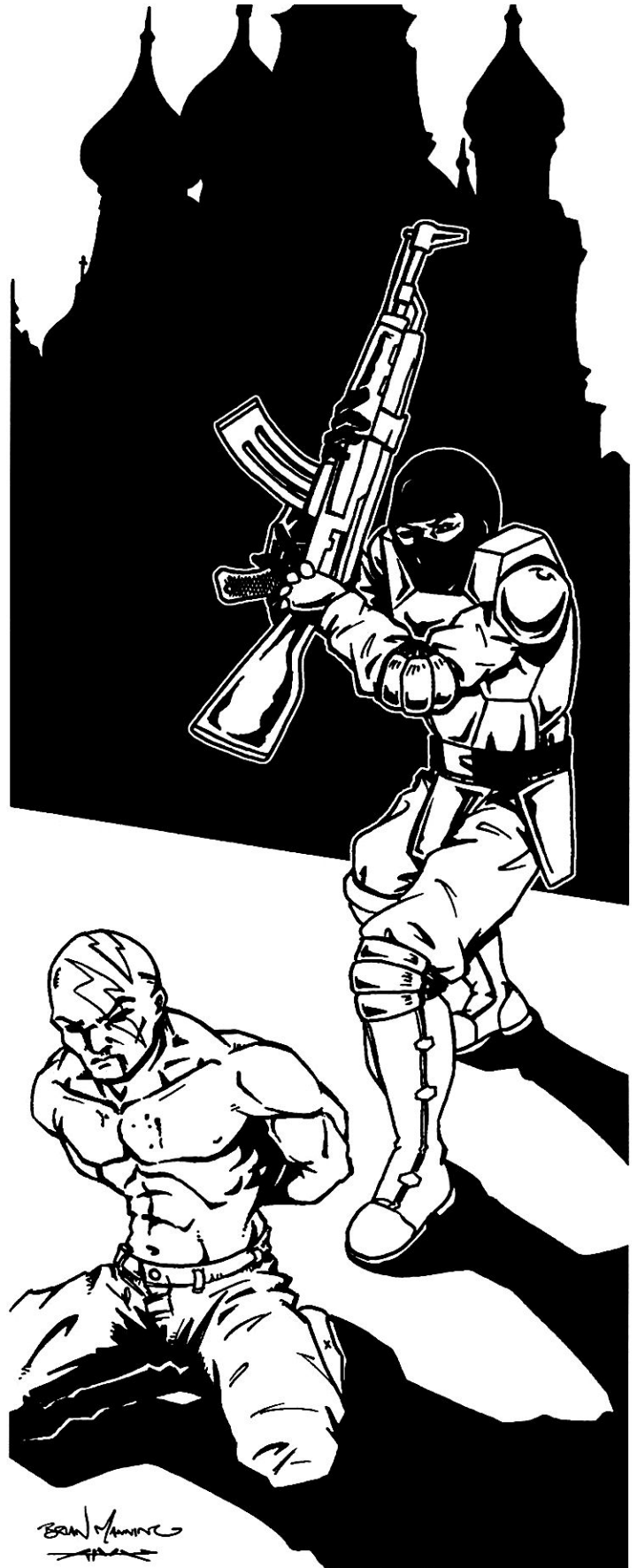
Russian S.C.R.E.T.

During the late 1970s and mid 1980s, the Soviet Union S.C.R.E.T. was one of the most successful government projects in the world. From the time the agency was first created to crush an anti-Soviet revolt in Czechoslovakia in 1968 to its dismantling in August 1991, less than twenty S.C.R.E.T. operatives lost their lives, while 1800 metabeings were arrested or executed. Two-thirds of these metas lived in the Warsaw Pact satellite states (Poland, Romania, Yugoslavia, etc.).

The origins of the Soviet Union S.C.R.E.T. actually take place far earlier than its inception in 1968. Shortly after the end of WW II, a squad from the Russian Army captured Johann Funck, the assistant to Professor Der Klug, a Nazi scientist who conducted experiments in shifting the molecules and atoms of a living creature in order to change its appearance. His goal was to find a way to make Nazi spies assume the appearance of important individuals within the military and governing body of the Allied nations to eventually usurp control. Instead, this became a covert plan used by a Russian espionage agency in 1947. Codenamed "Project Chameleon," the plan called for fifty augmented beings to be created by Johann Funck and Professor Meinhard Syvan, or as he liked to be called, *Nachttoter* (Night Killer). Between the two of them they managed for the first time to create metahumans with duplicated abilities in a consistent manner. These "metamorphs" received special training by the espionage agency and were sent off to various parts of Europe and the United States to subvert the government and/or military in a timely fashion. Fortunately, an agent for the Central Intelligence Group (forerunner of the CIA) learned of the operation and informed the U.S. Department of Defense. This eventually led to the creation of G.I.G.M.A. In the end, a G.I.G.M.A. covert operation convinced the Soviet General Secretary that the agency in charge of the metamorphs was attempting to use them to replace him and several key members of the Communist Party. This brought a swift end to the agency and the total annihilation of every metamorph, however the science and technology involved in their creation was not lost. In time it found its way into the hands of a super-secret government project in league with Soviet Army Intelligence. The men in charge of the project were growing ever fearful of *Euroforce*, a former Allied super-group turned combatant against covert communist expansion. Despite their best efforts, communist meta-agents such as *Mother Russia*, *Redstar*, *the Partisan*, and *Proletariat* continued to be defeated by them. So the idea came to create obedient high-tech soldiers more than capable of defeating any meta-being they encountered, thus was born the Soviet Super Soldier program called the Red Iron Guard (RIG).

The first generation of RIGs first saw combat in 1968 when the Soviet Union sent thousands of Ground Forces and Fifty

RIGs to crush an anti-Soviet revolt in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic (ĚSSR). The event, known as *Prague Spring* by Western Media, became a major turning point in meta-science,



as the Soviets were the first nation in the world to demonstrate a bonafide successful Super Soldier program. By 1978, the next generation of Red Iron Guard appeared, only this time they were not only super strong, agile, and intelligent, but aged at a fraction of the normal rate compared to most normal humans. This meant the RIG would be around for a long time. Within a few months, the 1st and 2nd generation of RIGs traveled throughout the Soviet Union and satellite states tracking, locating, and arresting/eliminating metabeings. The RIG did not venture into East Germany, which was in the process of creating its own S.C.R.E.T.

Between 1979-1989, it is believed the Soviet S.C.R.E.T. captured dozens of metas and took them to Holding Facilities similar to those within the U.S., only these prisoners ended up as test subjects for further experiments in super-eugenics, as the scientists sought new ways of creating new versions of Super Soldiers. However, these experiments proved to be complete and embarrassing failures. Not only did they remove a significant percentage of meta-beings from the population of Russia and the Eastern Block (70-80%), they cost the Russian Government hundreds of thousands of rubles with nothing to show for it.

From around 1987 to 1991, the new leader of the Soviet Union attempted to reduce the strain the Soviet S.C.R.E.T. placed on economic demands. His government slowly reduced the size of S.C.R.E.T. and removed most of the RIG influence from the Communist Party. Members of the first and second generation RIG were outraged, for they expected the government to begin a third generation and possibly appoint some of their leaders to positions of power. Among their leaders, Ivan Kosloff, known among the RIG as Major Red, led a coup d'état against the government along with a group calling itself the State Emergency Committee in August of 1991. The Russian SFSR President vigorously denounced the coup and led a resistance from the White House, Russia's parliament building. A planned assault on the parliament building by RIG was attempted, however two-thirds of the Soviet S.C.R.E.T. (nearly everyone not a RIG) aborted when the troops unanimously refused the order. Along with the Russian Army, Soviet S.C.R.E.T. defected to the government's side and surrounded parliament, guns pointing outward. The coup's failure brought a series of collapses of all-union institutions, and eventually, the Soviet Union itself.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Soviet Army dissolved and the USSR's successor states divided its assets among themselves, including the Soviet S.C.R.E.T. Without the governing body or the S.C.R.E.T. technicians to explain the usage of most of the ultra-secret technology, the successor states decided to sell the meta-science and advanced technology to the highest bidder. A great deal of this technology ended up in the possession of rogue nations and/or in the hands of rebel armies bent on overthrowing their country. Before long, the U.S. and U.K. S.C.R.E.T. were deployed overseas to hunt down or help train other nations who were affected by those possessing Soviet S.C.R.E.T. technology.

Eventually, a new Russian S.C.R.E.T. was formed in July 1992, and thankfully, no form of meta-terrorism or any major super villains appeared prior to its creation. On the other hand, the Soviet S.C.R.E.T. had done such an effective job of wiping out metabeings, there were none to cause any significant crimes. Despite the problems with the Russian military throughout the

1990s, the Russian S.C.R.E.T. did not have such occurrences, namely because its operatives were motivated by a deep love of their native country and a desire to see it protected from ill harm, both foreign and domestic. Today the Russian S.C.R.E.T. continues this tradition, moving away from serving the policies of the state, which was to capture/kill without moral compunction. If anything, the Russian S.C.R.E.T. is more organized, efficient, and responsive to the needs of the Russian people than at any time in its history.

As for the RIG, less than half of them remain, and those who do are brooding and bitter with the state of affairs of the Russian government. They long for the Soviet days when they were looked upon and revered (actually feared is a better word). In this age of democracy and open government, the RIG is referred to as dinosaurs, incapable of letting go of the old ways. They're not interested in moving toward the future. This may be because the RIGs might be under the "mental conditioning" that Sector covert agents undergo. The process should not be compared to mind control, but rather a way of directing a person's behavior to conform to a particular type of social values and norms. RIG members readily accept being loyal, obedient, respectful, and devoted not just because they know they must, but because their behavior is internalized and becomes a part of the person's emotional life and thought processes. Subjects experience intense guilt if they *successfully* violate Soviet procedures or values. They begin to pass judgment on their own actions, and without being told to by anyone, the subject confesses or turns himself in, or in extremely rare cases, takes his own life. In the case of most RIGs during the coup, they wanted to preserve the communist way of life, but they were unable to rise up against the average Russian citizen, who by decree, they're not supposed to be fighting. The RIG's goals are to capture or eliminate metas, not normal people.

Those RIGs who are not with S.C.R.E.T. are imprisoned or left Russia to serve other nations or follow leaders who they believe adhere to the Soviet ideals. Furthermore, a country like the U.S. is still considered an enemy to those ideals. Some of the RIGs are drawing upon the old Stalin ideals and notions. So far, no RIG has become an international terrorist or attempted to usurp control of a nation, however the Sector believes Major Red has been given political sanctuary by Emperor Danilek, the ruler of Malavador, and might be aiding him with his invasion plan of the small Central American country of Spaniguala. If Major Red has decided to throw his support to Emperor Danilek then there is a strong possibility other RIGs or fragments of the former Soviet S.C.R.E.T. will follow, which could only spell further trouble for the U.S. as the country of Malavador becomes an ever-growing threat.

In an attempt to bolster their ranks since the loss of most of the RIGs, Russian S.C.R.E.T. has decided to turn to the science of cybernetics and bionics rather than explore further into the expensive development of super-eugenics. Bionics provides the advantage of re-enlisting injured soldiers or police officers, as well as recruiting the physically impaired to serve their country. The Russian military has even decided to allow any nineteen year old male the option to volunteer for bionic reconstruction or conversion as a way to not only serve the country but to help pay for the welfare of his family. As a result, several hundred men have sacrificed their humanity in order to provide their

families a better life. This broad move has received some harsh criticism by those in the United States and other NATO allies as they fear one day, the Russians will come to rely on cyborgs as their mainline troops, which could, in the future, make the Russian military once again the most feared army on the planet.

Although S.C.R.E.T. operates in every major city in Russia with a population over one hundred thousand (and along its borders with China and in bases throughout Siberia), its central command is based in Moscow and controlled by a governing council who serve under the Russian President. The number of individuals who run this council is top secret, and only the President and a select number within the agency know the exact count as well as their names, rank, and functions. Although S.C.R.E.T. remains closely attached to the Army, it functions as an independent agency assigned to civil defense and law enforcement. S.C.R.E.T.'s primary responsibility is the protection of the nation's borders, the security of occupied territories, and the arrest/eradication of all non-government sanctioned meta-beings. S.C.R.E.T. must be able to achieve these goals without the use of weapons of mass destruction. Furthermore, they must be capable of protecting the national interests within the framework of its international obligations as well as holding onto the alliance maintained with the S.C.R.E.T. agencies of the United States, the U.K. and Canada. Among the four, no other agency benefits more from the freewheeling policies than the Russians. In fact, the Cyberworks Network, the KLS Corporation, and Triton Industries all look forward to starting up business ventures with them and giving their S.C.R.E.T. a massive overall. More importantly, Price Pharmaceutical and Bio-Spawn are drooling over the opportunity to learn even a fraction of the science involved in the creation of the RIG, but most agree the Russians are not about to share *anything* in that regard. Unless a major deal can be struck for an exchange in technology (which Lester Van Horn, the CEO and owner of SIGHT is willing to do), the Russians plan on keeping all information of the history and creation of a Super Soldier army to themselves. However, there is a great deal of knowledge known to Major Red and he is more than willing to share this information with Emperor Danilek or perhaps with Rex Taylor (President of Taylor Oil), for the right price.

Typical Russian S.C.R.E.T. Agent for Heroes Unlimited™ 2nd Edition

Based on the original concept by Kevin Long

Alignment: Any, but often Scrupulous or Aberrant.

Typical Attributes: I.Q. 14, M.E. 17, M.A. 12, P.S. 21, P.P. 18, P.E. 18, P.B. 10, Spd 24. Those agents who are Physical Training will have P.S. equal to Extraordinary or Superhuman.

Average Age: 23-35

Average Sex: 85% male, 15% female.

Average Height: Male 6 feet, 3 inches (1.9 m), female 5 feet, 10 inches (1.74 inches).

Average Weight: 185-200 lbs (83-90 kg) for male agents and 130-150 lbs (58.5 to 67.5 kg) for female agents.

Average Experience Level: 1D6. Team Leaders must be 5th level or higher.

Military Rank: 1st level Private, 2nd level Gefreiter, 3rd level Corporal, 4th level Junior Sergeant, 5th level Sergeant, 6th level Senior Sergeant, 7th level Starshina/Sergeant-Major, 8th level Warrant Officer, 9th level and beyond Senior Warrant Officer. S.C.R.E.T. agents can never be commissioned officers.

Super Power Category: Physical Training (40%), Special Training: Secret Operative (25%), Bionics (20%), Experiment/Super Soldier (10%), and other (5%). The Russian S.C.R.E.T. does allow super powered individuals to work alongside normal agents.

Average Hit Points: 30

Average S.D.C.: Varies. Those who are Physical Training will have 70 or 90 S.D.C. (does not include bonuses from skills and other combat bonuses). Secret Operatives have around 60-80 S.D.C. Bionics and Experiments have numerous factors that will determine their total S.D.C.

Combat Training: Those with Physical Training will either specialize in Aggressive and Deadly or Defensive and Fast. All others will have Hand to Hand: Martial Arts, Assassin, or Commando.

Typical Number of Attacks per Melee: 5 or 6 (6 or 7 for those 4th level).

Agent Bonuses: The following are bonuses granted to S.C.R.E.T. agents regardless of their Super Power Category. +2 on initiative, +1 to pull punch, +1 to roll with punch/fall/impact, +3 to save vs Horror Factor (+1 at levels 3, 6, 9, and 12), +1 to strike, parry, and dodge, and +3D6 to S.D.C. These are in addition to possible bonuses from attributes, skills, power category, or Hand to Hand Combat.

Saving Throw: +1 to psionic attack and insanity.

Special Abilities: Varies with each agent. Those with Physical Training, for example, will rely on their special combat abilities (see HU2, page 189) while others utilize the weapons and equipment available to them.

Education Level and Skills: Military or Military Specialist. Those belonging to the Physical Training or Hardware category must sacrifice one entire Skill Program, however it cannot be the Military Program (basic). Special Training: *Secret Operative* are rolled up accordingly (see HU2, page 216).

Appearance: Russian S.C.R.E.T. typically look like average everyday people.

Occupation: Russian soldier.

Standard Weapons: OTS-33 Pernach (9mm machine-pistol, 20-round detachable box magazine, 660 foot/201 m range), AK-74M (5.45 Assault Rifle, 5D6 damage, 30 round detachable box magazine, 2904 foot/885.1 m range, comes standard with a 40-mm under-barrel grenade launcher and a passive image intensifier night sight), RPK-74 (5.45 Light Machine-gun, 6D6 damage, 40 round detachable box magazine, 3630 foot/1106 m range, comes standard with AP rounds and night sights), 7.62mm Dragunov Sniper SVD (comes standard with AP rounds), 12.7mm Heavy Machine-Gun (1D6x10 damage; PV 11), fire metal link belt from 50 round boxes, 6600 foot/2011 m range, comes standard with Armor Piercing/Incendiary Rounds), AGS-17 (30mm Automatic Grenade Launcher, 1D6x10 damage with a 10 foot (3 m)

blast radius, single shot, semi-auto, or full, drum magazine containing 29 round belt, 3960 foot/1207 m range, can also fire smoke, CS and illuminations grenades), RPG-7V (Anti-tank grenade launcher, 1D4x100 damage from HEAT or 3D6x10 Fragment Round with a 50 foot/15 m blast radius, single shot, 984 foot/300 m range against moving targets, 3018 feet/919 m against stationary), RPG-22 (72-mm Disposable Antitank Grenade Launcher, 1D6x100 damage with 50 foot/15 m blast radius, single shot/discard, 825 foot/251 m range), RPO-A (Infantry Rocket Flame Weapon, fires a Thermobaric mini-missile 1D6x10+20 to a 165 foot/50 m blast radius, 1980 foot/603 m range), 9K38 Iгла (man-portable infrared homing surface-to-air missile (SAM), 1D6x100 damage, blast radius 100 feet/30 m, IFF system to prevent firing on friendly aircraft/metas, infrared targeting (+3 to strike), improved resistance to infrared countermeasures (78%), average speed 1350 mph/2160 km, 17,000 foot/5181 m range), and the Kutuzov Laser Rifle (a dual-barrel laser rifle, 5D6 for a single blast or 1D6x10 for a dual, simultaneous blast, 20 shot E-Clip, 1800 foot/548 m range), and grenades: six (6) HE, four (4) tear gas/CS, two (2) stun/flash; and/or four (4) throwing knives.

Equipment and Armor: All the special equipment mentioned earlier is standard. Every agent carries with him two pair of Heavy Handcuffs. The Soviet/Russian military tradition has never placed much importance on the survivability of individual soldiers, and thus personal protection equipment is a rarity, though promises to improve the situation have been made. Some modernization has taken place with the adoption of Kevlar and ballistic helmets. Only 35% of all S.C.R.E.T. agents wear hard armor vests (A.R. 12, S.D.C. 120) and less than 12% wear Class 4 Armor (full suit; A.R. 17, S.D.C. 280).

Vehicles: See below.

Headquarters: See above.

The Red Iron Guard (RIG)

Alignment: Any, but often Principled or Aberrant.

Typical Attributes: I.Q. 20, M.E. 15, M.A. 10, P.S. 22, P.P. 22, P.E. 22, P.B. 20, Spd 30.

Age: 47-57. New generations will be between the ages of 18-32.

Average Sex: 95% male, 5% female.

Average Height: Male 6 feet, 3 inches (1.9 m), Female 5 feet, 10 inches (1.74 inches).

Average Weight: 185-200 lbs (83-90 kg) for male agents and 130-150 lbs (58.5 to 67.5 kg) for female agents.

Experience Level: 2D4+2 (6th level is the average).

Military Rank: 1st and 2nd level Junior Lieutenant, 3rd level Lieutenant, 4th level Senior Lieutenant, 5th and 6th level Captain, 7th and 8th level Major, 9th level and beyond Podpolkovnik/Lieutenant Colonel. No RIG can hope to aspire beyond a Lieutenant Colonel.

Super Power Category: Super Soldier (the 1st and 2nd generation possess stats from *Heroes Unlimited™ 2nd Edition*, pages 118-119). If the Russians decide to make a 3rd generation RIG, they will possess Super Soldier stats from *Powers Unlimited™ 2*, pages 76-86).

Average Hit Points: 60

Average S.D.C.: 116

Super Soldier Abilities: Increased Physical Agility & Dexterity, Brain Boost, and Physical Transformation. All RIGs possess Extraordinary P.S.

Minor Super Abilities: Longevity.

Combat Training: Hand to Hand: Commando.

Typical Number of Attacks per Melee: 7 (2 initial, +3 from Hand to Hand, +1 from Boxing, +1 from Increased Agility).

Combat Bonuses: +8 to initiative, +7 to strike, +10 to parry, +10 to dodge, +6 to auto-dodge, +7 to damage, +6 to roll with punch/fall, +1 to pull punch, and +1 to disarm.

The following bonuses have been included above and elsewhere, and are bonuses granted to all Russian S.C.R.E.T. agents regardless of their Super Power Category: +2 on initiative, +1 to pull punch, +1 to roll with punch/fall/impact, +3 to save vs Horror Factor (+1 at levels 3, 6, 9, and 12), +1 to strike, parry, and dodge, and +3D6 to S.D.C.

Combat Skills: Karate Punch 2D4, Karate Kick 2D6, all foot strikes, Tripping Leg Hook and Backward Sweep Kick (can only be dodged, otherwise knockdown), +1 Body Flip/Throw 1D6 (lose initiative and 1 attack/action), Tackle 1D4 (parry or dodge to avoid knockdown), Pin 18-20, Crush 1D4, Knockout on an unmodified roll of 20 for 1D6 melee rounds, and Paired Weapons.

Saving Throw: +19% to save vs coma/death, +1 to save vs illusions, +9 to save vs Horror Factor, +2 to save vs possession, +7 to save vs disease, and +4 to save vs magic and poison.

Other Bonuses: +6% to all skills and 50% to Charm/Impress.

Education Level and Skills: Military Specialist: Basic Military Program (includes Forced March), 2nd Military Program (NBC Warfare, Demolitions, Find Contraband & Illegal Weapons, and one Military Pilot [APC and Tank, Combat Helicopter, or Aircraft: Jet Fighter], Espionage Program (Hand to Hand: Commando instead of Hand to Hand: Martial Arts), one W.P. Modern Skill Program (W.P. Rifle, W.P. Heavy Military Weapons, and one of choice), and Physical Program (Boxing, Wrestling, Swimming, and SCUBA). Secondary Skills are left up to the individual.

Appearance: The RIGs are the epitome of Russian Olympic athletes.

Occupation: A Russian soldier.

Standard Weapons: Any of the Standard Weapons used by S.C.R.E.T. as well as two Special Weapons found in the Super Soldier Section found in *Powers Unlimited 2* (typically they use Mini-Guns and Mini-Missile Launchers).

Standard Equipment: Suit, long coat, scarf, gloves, boots, uniform, utility belt, binoculars, combat bush knife, handheld communicator, and other standard military gear.

Armor: All Red Iron Guard wear the infamous red Jazeraint Armor, a full environmental body armor. It is very similar to the FA-70 Standard Ultra-Lite Flexi-Steel Body Armor created by Fabricators Inc. A.R. 15, 180 S.D.C.

Vehicles: One Combat Car (See Prototype Vehicle, *Powers Unlimited 2*, page 85) as well as any vehicle available to Russian S.C.R.E.T.

Headquarters: See above.

Russian S.C.R.E.T. Vehicles

T-90 Main Battle Tank

The T-90 is the newest main battle tank (MBT) in service with the Russian army, a further development of the T-72. S.C.R.E.T. has been given over thirty of these tanks. Unlike the issues faced by the U.S. S.C.R.E.T., nearly all the major cities in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc are capable of supporting these tanks. In fact, these tanks are purposely designed to go anywhere in the Russian countryside. During the days of the Soviet Army, the RIG took great pride in their T-72, and upon seeing the T-90, those RIGs who remain with the Russian S.C.R.E.T. foresee that same pride again.

The T-90's main armament is the 2A46M 125 mm smooth-bore gun. It can be replaced without dismantling the inner turret and is capable of firing a variety of shells or an anti-tank missile, which S.C.R.E.T. has no qualms about using on a metahuman. The tank is fitted with conventional armor plating and nuclear, biological and chemical (NBC) protection equipment. The upper front hull armor of the tank is covered by explosive reactive armor (ERA). The T-90 is also equipped with special countermeasures, such as infrared jammer, laser warning system with four laser warning receivers, grenade discharging system which produces an aerosol screen and a computerized control system. The laser warning system warns the tank's crew when the tank has been "touched" by a weapon-guidance laser. The T-90's electro-optical jammer interferes with the enemy's semi-automatic command to line of sight (SACLOS) antitank guided missiles, laser rangefinders, and target designators.

However, the T-90 does have one weak point, which so far, remains unknown to everyone but the S.C.R.E.T. leaders. Its spare ammunition is stored in the main compartment, rather than separate compartments with blow-out panels. As a result, if the tank is hit in the right spot at the right angle and the charge is strong enough to penetrate the armor, the ammunition may cook off, causing shrapnel and debris to fly everywhere inside the tank, injuring or killing the crew members.

Nevertheless, the T-90 is already doing its job, putting the fear of the Russian S.C.R.E.T. in the hearts of any meta who unfortunately encounters one. So far, over twenty-two have met their end from its deadly armaments, and if the RIGs have anything to say about it, plenty more will follow.

Armor: A.R. 16. Stops pistol, rifle, heavy machine-gun (20 and 30mm) and fragments. When the dice rolls a 17 or higher or any form of explosives are used against these tanks, its reactive armor reacts in some way to the impact of a weapon to reduce the damage by 70%. The reactive armor can be defeated with multiple hits in the same place, as by tandem-charge weapons, which fire two or more shaped charges in rapid succession (the second or excessive charge does full damage). Lacking these weapons, emulating this effect is difficult as it requires a Called Shot (-3 to strike), precision artillery, or close-quarters use of either shoulder-launched anti-tank weapons or adhesive explosives such as satchel charges. **Note:** Anything that penetrates the tank completely (Natural 20 dice roll or PV of 12 or higher) has a

17% chance of cooking off the ammo, causing 1D4x10 points of damage to everyone inside the tank.

S.D.C. by Location:

Main Body – 1100 S.D.C.

Turrets – 300 S.D.C.

Treads – 220 S.D.C. each side

12.7 mm Machine-Gun – 75 S.D.C.

7.62 mm coaxial Machine-Gun – 50 S.D.C.

Crew: 3

Length: 31.44 feet (9.58 m).

Width: 12 feet, 4 inches (3.8 m).

Weight: 51.25 tons.

Height: 7 feet, 3 inches (2.2 m).

Speed: 40.3 mph (64.5 km).

Range: 300 miles (480 km).

Total Vehicle Bonuses: +2 to strike with the main gun, in addition to the gunner's skill bonus, but this bonus will be lost when the tank is traveling more than 30 mph (48 m).

Weapon Systems:

125mm Smoothbore Gun, Damage: 3D4x100 each. Ammo: 24 rounds. Blast Radius: 20 feet (6 m). Range: 9,240 feet (2,816 m). **Note:** Auto loader allows the gun to fire three times in a single melee.

The T-90 typically fires HEAT rounds but it can also fire the following:

Fragmentation. Needle-like flechettes that can pierce 50-100mm of reinforced steel plate. Damage: 1D4x100. Blast Radius: 70 feet (21 m).

Armor Piercing Fin-Stabilized Discarding Sabot (APFSDS). These tungsten rounds have a Penetration Value of 14! These rounds can penetrate tank armor with ease. Damage: 3D6x10. Blast Radius: 5 feet (1.5 m).

Antitank Guided Missile. Damage: 1D6x100, Blast Radius: 20 feet (6 m), Range: 330 feet (100 m) to 16,500 feet (5,029 m), Bonus: +3 to strike (laser-guided), **Note:** The missile can also engage low-flying air targets such as helicopters and flying metas.

CS. An extremely powerful version of tear gas. The gas will instantly affect all individuals without a protective mask or environmental body armor. The eyes burn, sting, and water profusely, causing great discomfort, and seeing is nearly impossible. It also causes major irritation in the nose, mouth, and throat, making breathing difficult. Victims become heavily nauseated and the skin becomes irritated. The effects last for 3D4 minutes. The 30 foot (9 m) cloud dissipates in about 5 minutes unless blown away by the wind (dissipating quickly in 2D4 melees). The victims of CS are -10 to strike, parry, dodge, -3 on initiative, and lose one melee action/attack for the next 1D6+1 melee rounds. There is no saving throw.

Stun/Flash. These types of rounds are used to confuse and disorient, especially when in a confined location. Each shell makes a loud exploding boom and releases a bright flash of light (and some smoke to startle and blind any onlookers within 200 feet (61 m). The flash is so overwhelming that even targets not facing the blast may be affected by light reflecting off walls and other large surfaces (01-33%). There is a blast radius of 3 feet

(0.9 m) around the impact that does 1D6 points of damage. Flare compensation devices will reduce penalties by half. Closing one's eyes does nothing to protect them from the flash, nor does putting up the hands in front of the face. Those observing the flash are -10 to strike, parry and dodge for 2D6 minutes with no initiative and a number of attacks cut in half.

Smoke. These rounds release a cloud that covers a 20 foot (6 m) radius. The smoke obscures vision in and through the cloud and causes minor difficulty breathing. Infrared optic systems cannot see into or through smoke. Those in the cloud are -5 to strike, parry, and dodge and -1 on initiative. Attackers firing into/through the cloud are shooting completely wild! Aimed shots or controlled bursts are impossible (the shooters cannot see the target).

Illuminating. These are powerful flares that illuminate a 300 foot (91.4 m) area for 2D4 melees.

7.62mm PKT Machine-Gun: Damage: 5D6, Payload: 250 round ammo box, Range: 3000 feet (914 m).

12.7mm NSV Heavy Machine-Gun (anti-aircraft): Damage: 1D4x10, Payload: 50 round belt, Range: 4921 feet (1500 m) vs air units, 1.24 miles (1.98 km) vs ground units.

Note: Both machine-guns use the standard combat rules for machine-guns found in HU2, page 76.

Special Equipment:

Laser Rangefinder: This allows the vehicle to track and determine the distance of a target, even while it's moving. This results in no penalty when firing at a moving target or one at maximum distance.

Thermo-Imager: An optical heat sensor that converts the infrared radiation of warm objects into a visible image. The pilot and gunner can see in total darkness, shadows, and smoke. Range: 1600 feet (488 m).

Countermeasures: These special countermeasures neutralize all bonuses from laser, infrared, and target designators. These bonuses are the only ones neutralized. The infrared jammer, however, makes the tank invisible to infrared detection by missiles and anti-tank systems (82%).

Radio: Range: 300 miles (480 km).

Encrypted Burst Transmitter/Radio Scrambler: Range: 300 miles (480 km).

Radiation Shielding

Pressurized Cabin (Full protection from Nuclear, Biological, & Chemical Warfare).

Life Support Unit

BMP-3

Since 1990, the BMP-3 (*Boyevaya Mashina Pekhoty*; Combat Vehicle of Infantry) has become a favorite of the Russian Army. These vehicles can safely carry soldiers into battle and provide fire support to neutralize enemy targets. It is armed with a 100mm main gun, a 30mm auto-cannon, and a 7.62mm machine-gun, all mounted coaxially in the turret. There are also two 7.62mm bow machine-guns. The BMP-3 is capable of engaging targets out to 2.5 miles (4 km) with an ATGM (anti-tank guided missile) system. However, the missile based system has a significant minimum range, within which only the machine-gun can engage targets, and the flight time for maximum range

is about twelve seconds (one melee). If the ATGM system is destroyed, the missile guidance ceases and the missile may well miss its target. All of the vehicle's weapons can be fired while on the move with the same effectiveness.

Armor: A.R. 15. Stops pistol, rifle, heavy machine-gun (50 caliber) and fragments (Penetration Value 9).

S.D.C. by Location:

Main Body – 800 S.D.C.

Turret – 200 S.D.C. (Destroying the turret destroys the 30mm auto-cannon and one 7.62mm machine-gun.

Treads – 180 each

7.62mm Machine-Guns (2; sides) – 50 S.D.C. each

Crew: 3 +7 passengers.

Length: 23.56 feet (7.18 m).

Width: 10.56 feet (3.22 m).

Weight: 20.6 tons.

Height: 5 feet, 6 inches (1.68 m).

Speed: 43.4 mph (69 km) on roads, 27.9 mph (45 km) off road, 6 mph (9.6 km) through 3 feet of water.

Range: 360 miles (576 km).

Total Vehicle Bonuses: +3 to strike with ATGM and +1 to strike with all other weapons on the turret in addition to the gunner's skill bonuses, but all bonuses are lost when the vehicle is traveling more than 30 mph (48 m).

Weapon Systems:

100mm Main Gun: Damage: 6D6x10. Blast Radius: 40 feet (12.2 m), Payload: 18 shells, Range: 6600 feet (2012 m). **Note:** Auto loader allows the gun to fire twice in a single melee.

The BMP-3 typically fires HE-Frag (High Explosive Fragmentation) shells from its 100mm gun, but it can also fire the following:

ATGM (Anti-Tank Guided Missile). Damage: 1D6x100, Blast Radius: 15 feet (4.6 m), Range: 13,200 feet (4023 m), and Speed: Mach 1.7. **Note:** The laser can strike any target up to the system's range. Once marked, the missile will follow the path (+3 to strike) to the target. If the laser ceases, not only does the missile lose the +3 bonus, it takes a -3 penalty.

30mm APDS (Armor Piercing Discarding Sabot) Rounds. These rounds have tiny explosive charges in them that propel them at higher speeds shortly after they're fired from a weapon, which dramatically increases their range and damage. 2D6x10 damage per round (PV 14), or +4 to strike, or lower a target's A.R. by 4, Range: 10,000 feet (3048 m).

30mm Auto-Cannon: Damage: 2D4x10, Ammo: 400 rounds. Range: 5000 feet (1524 m).

3x 7.62mm PKT Machine-Guns: One on the turret, two on the sides of the tank: Damage: 5D6, Payload: 250 round ammo box, Range: 3000 feet (915 m). **Note:** The 30mm and machine-guns use the standard combat rules found in HU2, page 76.

Special Equipment:

Laser Rangefinder: This allows the vehicle to track and determine the distance of a target, even while it's moving. This results in no penalty when firing at a moving target or one at maximum distance.

Infrared Laser Targeting System: +3 to strike using the 100mm gun, +1 to strike with burst fire for the 30mm auto-cannon and 7.62mm machine-gun on the turret.

Thermo-Imager: An optical heat sensor that converts the infrared radiation of warm objects into a visible image. The pilot and gunner can see in total darkness, shadows, and smoke. Range: 1600 feet (488 m).

Radio: Range: 300 miles (480 km).

Encrypted Burst Transmitter/Radio Scrambler: Range: 300 miles (480 km).

Combat Computer with Heads-Up Display (HUD). +2 to initiative rolls.

Multi-Optics Periscope and HUD

Radiation Shielding

Pressurized Cabin (Full protection from Nuclear, Biological, & Chemical Warfare).

Life Support Unit

Ka-50 Attack Helicopter

“The Black Shark”

Ka-50 (Black Shark) is a single-seat attack helicopter, designed as a gunship. The Russian S.C.R.E.T. has chosen it over the army’s Mi-28 because it’s small, fast, agile, and lethal. Since it has so much well-designed support automation, a single pilot can carry out an entire mission alone. It features include contra-rotating coaxial rotor system, which removes the need for the entire tail-rotor assembly and improves the aircraft’s aerobatic qualities – it can perform loops, rolls, and “the funnel” where the aircraft maintains a line-of-sight with the target while flying circles of varying altitude, elevation, and airspeed around it. Because it has no tail rotor, the Ka-50 does not need to worry about the vulnerable boom and rear gearbox which are common causes for helicopter losses in combat. Its entire transmission presents a comparatively small target to ground fire. The coaxial drive assembly is built to survive hits from 23mm ammunition like the other vital parts of the helicopter. The zero native torque also allows the aircraft to be fairly immune to wind strength and direction, and to have an unsurpassed turn rate in all travel speed envelopes.

Besides its main gun, the Ka-50 carries a substantial load of weapons in four external hardpoints under the stub wings plus two on the wingtips. The main armament are twelve laser-guided anti-tank missiles. The laser guidance is reported to be virtually jam-proof and the system features automatic guidance to target, enabling evasive movement immediately after missile launch. The fire control system automatically shares all target information among other Ka-50s in real time, allowing one helicopter to engage a target spotted by another, and the system also can input target information from ground-based forward scouts with man-portable target designation gear. The integrated 30mm cannon is semi-rigidly fixed on the helicopter’s side, movable only slightly in elevation and azimuth. The aircraft’s agility allows the weapon control system to turn the entire helicopter and the cannon at the target acquired in the pilot’s helmet sight. The semi-rigid mounting improves the cannon’s accuracy, giving the 30mm a longer practical range and better hit ratio at medium ranges than with a free-turning turret mount.

However, the one thing that sets this helicopter above the rest is it’s fitted with an ejector seat, which the Russians see as a psychological factor enhancing the pilot’s combat courage. Before the rocket in the ejection seat kicks in, rotor blades are blown away by explosive charges in the rotor disc and the canopy is similarly jettisoned.

Russian S.C.R.E.T. presently has sixteen Ka-50s in its service, and already they’ve proven their lethality by annihilating an eight man meta-terrorist team in Chechnya. Its ominous presence has already convinced many meta-terrorists and super villains to stand clear of S.C.R.E.T. and to avoid direct confrontation at all costs.

Armor: A.R. 13. Stops pistols, rifles, and light machine-guns under .50 caliber.

S.D.C. by Location:

Main Body – 450 S.D.C.

Cockpit Windows – 85 S.D.C.

Tail – 180 S.D.C.

Rotors (2) – 150 S.D.C. each

Crew: 1

Length: 44 feet, 3 inches (13.5 m).

Weight: 17,200 lbs (7,740 kg) empty and 21,600 lbs (9,720 kg) during missions.

Height: 17 feet, 9 inches (5.4 m).

Max Takeoff Weight: 22,930 lbs (10,319 kg).

Speed: 217 mph (347 km).

Ceiling: 18,000 feet (5,486 m).

Range: 720 miles (1152 km).

Total Vehicular Bonuses: Pilot +7 to dodge, +4 to initiative, +5 to strike (Main Gun; doesn’t include bonuses from the pilot).

Weapon Systems:

30mm Cannon: Each Ka-50 has one 30mm Shipunov 2A42 cannon. It has a linear linkless feed system. The bullets themselves are APDS Projectiles (Penetration Value 14). Range: 8250 feet (2514 m) against ground targets, 9900 feet (3017 m) against air targets. Damage: 6D6x10 for a short burst and 1D10x100 for long. Rate of Fire: Short or long burst only. This weapon’s rate of fire is so fast that a long burst only counts as one attack. Payload: 1800 rounds. Enough for 4 long bursts or 8 short bursts. **Note:** Anyone thinking they can carry this weapon around needs to know it weights 253 lbs (113.85 kg) empty and is 10 feet long (3 m).

12 ATGM: These are air-to-ground (AGM), short-range, HE medium missiles. Damage: 2D6x10, Blast Radius: 15 feet (4.6 m), Speed: Mach 1.8, Range: 6 miles (9.6 km). All the missiles are laser-guided (+3 to strike) and can be launched in volleys of 1, 2, 3, 6, or 12.

Note: The Ka-50 has the option of being outfitted with other types of weapons besides its main gun, which include the following:

Two 23mm Gun Pods, Range: 4600 feet (1402 m), Damage: 1D6x10 per round, both guns not only fire simultaneously at the same target, but they’re fire-linked, so they do a nasty 4D6x10! Rate of Fire: Fully Automatic (see machine-gun combat rules). Payload: 250 rounds per weapon.

Four Armor Piercing, Short-Range Air-to-Air Missiles (AAM), Damage: 2D6x10, Blast Radius: 5 feet (1.5 m), Speed: Mach 2.5, Range: 18.75 miles (30 km). The missiles are infrared homing (+3 to strike) and can be launched in a volley of 1,2,3, or 4.

S-8 Rocket Pads, Damage: Varies, Speed: Varies, Range: Varies, Payload: Seven or Twenty Rockets each (7, 20, 14 or 40 total). Any variety of mini-missiles can be used. They are all unguided and can be fired in volleys of 1-5.

B-13L Launcher with 5 Tandem (Armor Piercing/High Explosive M) Short-Range AGM. Damage: These missiles can penetrate 20 feet (6m) of earth or 3.3 feet (1 m) of concrete before exploding 3D6x10, Blast Radius: 20 feet (6 m), Speed: 600 mph (960 km), Range: 10 miles (16 km). The missiles are laser-guided (+3 to strike) and can be fired in volleys of 1-5.

Four Plasma Bombs, Damage: 4D6x10, Blast Radius: 40 feet (12.2 m), Speed: Mach 2.1, Range: 40 miles (64 km). All of these bombs are laser-guided (+3 to strike) and can be fired in a volley of 1 to 4.

Special Note: Here is an example of an “Eradication” Armament: 30mm Cannon, two 23mm gun pods, one S-8 Rocket Pad, and the option of four AAM, one B-13L, or four Plasma Bombs.

Special Equipment:

Laser Targeting System with Automatic Guidance: This not only gives all laser-guided missiles fired from the craft a +3 bonus to strike, but last second course correction, meaning the target has to make TWO dodge rolls in order to avoid being struck by the missiles.

Fire Control System: Information of a target’s distance, speed, direction, and exact location can be shared with other Ka-50s. This enables one craft to make one initiative and strike roll for up to 3 other Ka-50s OR all four can make initiative and strike rolls, and the best can be selected and shared for the rest of the melee. All four helicopters have the same initiative and rolls to strike with only the bonuses from the *initial* helicopter for all of their attacks for the entire melee. Should the initial helicopter be destroyed, the other helicopters lose initiative until the next melee round, however they can use their own targeting systems/radar, thus giving them their own bonuses to strike, but once again, one helicopter can choose to share the data with the others. Range: 7 miles (11 km).

Contra-Rotating Coaxial Rotor System: The sophistication of the dual rotors allows it to have superior acrobatics capabilities and maneuverability. This grants the pilot a +6 to dodge (includes HUD).

Rigid Main Gun: This improves the main gun’s ability to fire simultaneously while moving and engaging moving targets. This results in no penalty when firing at a moving target nor is there a distance penalty until nearly beyond the weapon’s effective range. The main gun is +5 to strike.

Secure Radio: Encrypted radio transmissions with other Ka-50s. Must use Radio: Scramblers in order to intercept the aircraft’s transmissions, and even then it’s a -25% penalty.

Radio: Range: 300 miles (480 km).

Maxi-Radar: Range: 50 miles (80 km).

Combat Computer with Heads-Up Display (HUD): Confers +3 to dodge.

Multi-Optics Periscope and HUD

Pressurized Cabin

Ejector Seat: Pilot has a +5 to initiative/dodge in order to eject before crash or destruction of the craft.

Sukhoi Su-24M2

The Sukhoi Su-24 was the Soviet Union’s most advanced all-weather interdiction and attack aircraft in the 1970s and 1980s. The two-seat, twin-engine aircraft remains in service with the Russian Air Force and eight have been given over to the Russian S.C.R.E.T. They have proved invaluable when air support is needed or for rapid deployment and engagement, not to mention flying metas are sitting ducks.

The Su-24 has a shoulder-mounted variable geometry wing outboard of a relatively small fixed wing glove, swept at 69°. The variable geometry wing provides excellent STOL (Short Take Off and Landing) performance, allowing a landing speed of 143 mph (228 km). Its high wing loading provides a stable low-level ride and minimal gust response, but reportedly makes the aircraft somewhat difficult to fly (-10% to control rolls). It has two afterburning turbojet engines that give it an excellent performance, but they have inherently higher fuel consumption than a turbofan and are expensive to maintain.

The Su-24 has side-mounted intakes which allow for a maximum speed of Mach 2.18, at an altitude ceiling of some 57,400 feet (17,495 m). However, because the Su-24 is used almost exclusively for low-level missions, the actuators for the variable intakes were deleted to reduce weight and maintenance. Fortunately, this has no effect on its low-level performance, but its absolute maximum speed and altitude are cut to a modest Mach 1.35 and 36,100 feet (11,003 m).

The Su-24’s fixed armament is a single fast-firing GSh-6-23 cannon with 500 rounds of ammunition, mounted in the fuselage underside. When not in use, an eyelid shutter covers the gun. There are eight external hardpoints (two under the inner wing glove, two swiveling pylons under the outer wing, and four on the fuselage) for a maximum payload of 17,600 lb (7920 kg).

The Su-24s have comprehensive radar warning, missile launch warning, and active ECM equipment, with triangular antennas on the sides of the intakes and the tip of the vertical fin. They also have large wing fence/pylons on the wing glove portion with integral chaff/flare dispensers. Because S.C.R.E.T. wants to keep these planes around for as long as they can. It’s not likely they’re going to be receiving any new ones for a while; they requested the Su-24 be updated with the latest in GPS, a cockpit with multi-function displays (MFDs), HUD, digital moving-map generator, helmet-mounted sights, and provision for the latest guided weapons and air-to-air missiles (AAM).

Russian S.C.R.E.T. uses these planes whenever lethal force is required. They will send them out to hunt down and kill any unauthorized meta who even thinks of flying in restricted airspace or in commercial traffic zones. As far as the Russians are concerned, the skies belong only to humans in aircraft.

Armor: A.R. 11. Stops pistols and rifles (Penetration Value of 6+).

Crew: 2 (pilot and weapon system operator).

Weight: 49,165 lbs (22,124 kg) empty.

Loaded Weight: 83,865 lbs (37,739 kg).

Max Takeoff Weight: 96,505 lbs (43,427 kg).

Wingspan: 57 feet, 10 inches (17.63 m) extended, 34 feet, 10 inches (10.6 m) maximum sweep.

Length: 73 feet, 11 inches (22.53 m).

Height: 20 feet, 4 inches (6.2 m).

Speed: Mach 1.35. However, it likes to run at Mach 1 at sea level.

Range: 369 miles (590 km) in an attack mission with ordnance and external fuel.

Ferry Range: 1665 miles (2664 km).

Ceiling: 36,100 feet (11,003 m).

Total Vehicle Bonuses: Pilot +3 to dodge, +3 on initiative, +3 to strike (Main Gun; doesn't include bonuses from the pilot or weapon systems officer).

Weapons:

GSh-6-23 Gatling Gun: Each Su-24 has a GSh-6-23 cannon, which is a powerful, fast-firing, six-barreled Gatling gun. Unlike American type weapons, this one is gas-operated, electrically fired. It has a linear linkless feed system. Range: 3000 feet (914.4 m), Damage: 4D6x10. Rate of Fire: Long burst only. This weapon's rate of fire is so fast that a long burst only counts as one attack. Payload: 500 rounds. Enough for 2 long bursts. **Note:** Anyone thinking they can carry this weapon around needs to know it weights 165 lbs (74.25 kg) empty and is 4 feet, 7 inches long (1.4 m).

Air-to-Air Missiles (AAM), Short-Range Armor Piercing (2), Damage: 2D6x10, Blast Radius: 5 feet (1.5 m), Speed: Mach 2.5, Range: 18.75 miles (30 km). The missiles are infrared homing (+3 to strike). One or two missiles can be fired.

Additional Armaments: There are 8 hardpoints. They can hold individual missiles, rocket launchers, or external gun pods. The configuration varies by mission. Individual rockets (1 per hardpoint) are limited because of weight and balance that can be allowed on each wing.

Air-to-Ground Missiles (AGM):

Short-Range HE Light (4), Damage: 2D4x10, Blast Radius: 10 feet (3.0 m), Speed: Mach 2.72, Range: 6 miles (9.6 km). All the missiles are guided (+3 to strike) and can be launched in volleys of 1-4.

Short-Range HE Medium (4), Damage: 2D6x10, Blast Radius: 15 feet (4.6 m), Speed: Mach 2.26, Range: 6 miles (9.6 km). All missiles are laser-guided (+3 to strike) and can be launched in volleys of 1-4.

Medium-Range Plasma Anti-Radiation Missiles (ARM) (2): Damage: 4D6x10, Blast Radius: 40 feet (12.1 m), Speed: Mach 3.4, Range: 42 miles (67.2 km), Bonuses: +6 to strike when homing in on enemy radar emissions (smart missiles). When not homing in on radar they are +3 guided missiles. One or two missiles can be fired.

Short-Range Fragmentation (3), Damage: 2D4x10, Blast Radius: 20 feet (6 m), Speed: 450 mph (720 km), Range: 3 miles (4.8 km). All missiles are laser-guided (+3 to strike) and can be launched in volleys of 1-3.

Medium-Range Armor Piercing (2), Damage: 3D6x10, Blast Radius: 20 feet (6.0 m), Speed: 626 mph (1001 km), Range: 69 miles (110.4 km). All missiles are dual-guided (inertial guidance & television system/+4 to strike). One or two missiles can be fired.

Rocket Launchers:

UB-32 Launcher: Damage: Varies, Speed: Varies, Range: Varies, Payload: 32 of any variety of mini-missiles can be used. They are all unguided and can be fired in volleys of 1, 2, 4, 8 or 16.

S-8 Rocket Pads, Damage: Varies, Speed: Varies, Range: Varies, Payload: Seven or Twenty Rockets each (7, 20, 14 or 40 total). Any variety of mini-missiles can be used. They are all unguided and can be fired in volleys of 1-5.

B-13L Launcher with 5 Tandem (Armor Piercing/High Explosive M) Short-Range AGM, Damage: These rockets can penetrate 20 feet (6 m) of earth or 3.3 feet (1 m) of concrete before exploding for 3D6x10, Blast Radius: 20 feet (6 m), Speed: 600 mph (960 km), Range: 10 miles (16 km). The missiles are laser-guided (+3 to strike) and can be fired in volleys of 1-5.

Bombs:

Plasma Bombs (4): Damage: 4D6x10, Blast Radius: 40 feet (12.2 m), Speed: Mach 2.1 (2251 km), Range: 40 miles (64 km). All of these bombs are laser-guided (+3 to strike) and can be fired in a volley of 1-4.

Gun Pod:

23mm, Range: 4600 feet (1402 m), Damage: 1D6x10 per round, both guns not only fire simultaneously at the same target, but they're fire-linked, so they do a nasty 4D6x10! Rate of Fire: Fully Automatic (see machine-gun combat rules). Payload: 250 rounds per weapon.

Special Equipment:

Enhanced Radar: Can identify and simultaneously track up to 42 different targets in the air or on the ground. Range: 250 miles (400 km).

RWR (Radar Warning Receiver): Can track the source of lock-ons by enemy aircraft and missile launchers by enemy aircraft or SAMs with 90% accuracy. Prevents surprise attacks by missiles. Range: 30 miles (48 km).

H.U.D. Helmet: Significantly improves the reaction time of the pilot for firing weapons. It gives a bonus of +2 on initiative unless the pilot is surprised.

Target ID: By coupling the radar, FLIR (Forward-Looking Infrared Radar), and/or VAS (Visual Analysis System, the computer reads the shape, engine heat, radio signature, heat signature of the surface of the target, etc. to determine for the operator what kind of target he is facing. The Target ID is optimized for enemy aircraft, missiles, and flying humanoids, but with its look-down radar, it can also identify ground targets. The reading is generally an approximate (80%).

ECM (Electronic Countermeasures): Powerful enough to distort the radar echo delivered to enemy radar, or fill the enemy's radar screen with imaginary targets. In game terms, provides a -35% to vehicles, robots, and human operators using radar to make the aircraft's radar signature undetectable.

Secure Radio: Encrypted radio transmissions. Must use Radio: Scramblers in order to intercept the aircraft's transmissions, and even then it's a -25% penalty.

GPS (Global Positioning System): Navigation using the constellations of GPS satellites orbiting the earth. Enables the pilot and weapon system operator to locate the plane's position or for that matter, an enemy's position, within one yard/meter. Using this sort of navigation does not require the craft to make any sort of radio frequency (RF) emissions, which makes it difficult to detect using radio detection gear, radar warning receiver, etc. (92%).

Missile Warning System and Anti-Missile Chaff: Enough to decoy 8 missiles. The system provides a +5 bonus to initiative whenever any missiles or rockets are propelled at the vehicle. Missiles lose any guidance bonus, straight, unmodified dice rolls only.

Radio: Receive and transmit radio broadcasts with any military and/or civilian satellites: Range: Europe, Central and Western Asia.

Pressurized Cabin

Polarized, Light Sensitive/Adjusting, Tinted Windshields

The Black Steel Guard

A few weeks before the events of August 1991, the agency responsible for the creation of the RIG announced plans for the creation of robotic exoskeletons/power armors similar to those worn by U.S. and Canadian S.C.R.E.T. Rumor had it that some Russian scientist got a hold of an Ex-7 Equalizer, and through reverse engineering, managed to learn how it worked. A number of prototypes were built and the RIG pilots selected to utilize them were to be referred to as the Black Steel Guard. However, the failed coup ended any notion that the Russian military would possess their own brand of power armor. However, it is believed one prototype survived, but its location is unknown. Some speculate Major Red might know the truth, and he is not about to tell anyone, except perhaps Emperor Danilek.

After things settled and the new Russian government and military took shape, the plans for robotic exoskeletons were shelved for a later date. Decades later, there are still no plans for incorporating any sort of *expensive* power armor into the Russian military, much less purchasing any for S.C.R.E.T. With the new free-wheeling policy between the four class 5 agencies, the Russian S.C.R.E.T. is hoping for an opportunity to get access to any hand-me-downs from the other three nations. Presently the prices the KLS Corporation and Cyberworks Network are asking simply cannot be met. SIGHT, however, is another story. According to a U.S. intelligence report, Lester Van Horn (President and owner of SIGHT) is willing to make a deal in exchange for the land to build a new SIGHT weapons development plant. If the deal goes through, it is believed SIGHT will sell Russia a variant of the KLS EX-7. The major difference between the two is the SIGHT variants lack the laser resistant coating and they stand 10 feet (3 m) tall and weigh 700 lbs (315 kg). A.R. 15 with a Main Body of 500 S.D.C. The speed is reduced to 30

mph (48 km), however, the P.S. is increased to 36 (Robotic). The weapons consist of wrist blasters (4D6 damage each), a miniature Gatling-style gun (1D4x10 with machine-gun rules) with 1000 round ammo drum, and a small missile launcher pod (8 mini-missiles or 2 short-range missiles).

Ilyushin Il-76MD

The Ilyushin is a 4-engine strategic airlifter used by Russian S.C.R.E.T. as its main transporter. It's able to operate from short and unprepared airstrips, and capable of coping with the worst weather conditions likely to be experienced in Siberia and the Soviet Union's Arctic regions. In order to provide better protection for these craft (two in the last three years have been destroyed by flying metas), all Ilyushin are now armed with a gun turret in the tail for defense purposes. The Russian S.C.R.E.T. has four of these planes.

Armor: A.R. 11. Stops pistols and rifles (Penetration Value of 6+).

S.D.C.: 950

Crew: 7 (Two pilots, flight engineer, navigator, tail gunner, and two loadmasters) +200 passengers.

Weight: 202,400 lbs (91,080 kg) empty.

Max Takeoff Weight: 418,000 lbs (188,100 kg).

Wingspan: 165 feet, 8 inches (50.5 m).

Length: 152 feet, 10 inches (46.58 m).

Height: 48 feet, 5 inches (14.76 m).

Speed: 560 mph (896 km).

Range: With max payload 2,640 miles (4,224 km), otherwise 5,520 miles (8,832 km).

Ceiling: 42,700 feet (13,015 m).

Weapons and Systems of Note:

Two 23mm GSh-6-231 Cannons: Two 23mm cannons in a radar-directed, manned turret at the base of the tail (+3 to strike). Range: 3000 feet (914 m), Damage: 4D6x10. Rate of Fire: Long burst only. This weapon's rate of fire is so fast that a long burst only counts as one attack. Payload: 2000 rounds. Enough for 6 long bursts. **Note:** Anyone thinking they can carry this weapon around needs to know it weighs 165 lbs (74.25 kg) empty and is 4 feet, 7 inches long (1.4 m).

Two Honeybee Drones: Small aerial robots that can be launched one or two at a time. The drones emit the exact radar signature of the 76MD so enemies who launch medium or long-range missiles at the craft will be unable to distinguish the false radar signal from the real craft. This form of radar deception works to conceal S.C.R.E.T. or any other type of NATO aircraft from the enemy even if they are 144 miles (230 km) away (88%).

Pressurized Cabin

Polarized, Light Sensitive/Adjusting, Tinted Windshields

Complete Reinforced, Environmental Pilot and Crew Compartments

The Others

The other S.C.R.E.T. agencies found in Germany, Mexico, South Africa, France, Israel, Australia, and China, etc. are far from the capabilities of the U.S., Canada, Russia, or the U.K. These S.C.R.E.T. agencies (level three) operate from a single central office/base, with soldiers/agents scattered throughout the region. They operate secretly without public awareness or support. Fortunately, for the last four years they've been receiving some support from their larger brethren. However, if any major meta-terrorists or super villains (the Masters of Speed or Unnatural Disasters, for example) attack these agencies, they can do very little to defend themselves.

The Other S.C.R.E.T. Agencies Around the World

Level 3 Agency. 145 + 30 Points from the major S.C.R.E.T.

- A. Outfits:** Specialty Clothing (0 Points).
 - B. Equipment:** Electronic Supplies (10 Points).
 - C. Weapons:** Armed Agents (5 Points).
 - D. Bionics & Robotics:** Basic Systems (10 Points).
 - E. Vehicles:** Fleet Vehicles (10 Points).
 - F. Communications:** Satellite Network (30 Points).
 - G. Offices:** Urban (5 Points).
 - H. Military Power:** Militia (15 Points).
 - I. Super Power Operatives:** Freelance (10 Points).
 - J. Sponsorship:** Government (10 Points) + Private U.S. Industry Support (7 Points).
 - K. Special Budget:** Large Loans (15 Points).
 - L. Administrative Control:** Free Hand (15 Points).
 - M. Internal Security:** Internal Security (0 Points).
 - N. External Infiltration:** General Infiltration (0 Points).
 - O. Research:** Good Connections (10 Points).
 - P. Agency Credentials:** Unknown (3 Points).
 - Q. Agency Salary:** Good (20 Points).
- Total Agency Points:** 175 Points.

Typical Other S.C.R.E.T. Agent for Heroes Unlimited™, 2nd Edition

Based on the original concept by Kevin Long

Alignment: Any, but often Unprincipled or Aberrant.

Typical Attributes: I.Q. 10, M.E. 10, M.A. 9, P.S. 12, P.P. 9, P.E. 11, P.B. 9, Spd 11.

Average Age: 23-35

Average Sex: 80% male, 20% female.

Average Height: Male 6 feet (1.83 m), female 5 feet, 8 inches (1.73 inches).

Average Weight: 185-200 lbs (83-90 kg) for male agents and 130-150 lbs (58.5 to 67.5 kg) for female agents.

Average Experience Level: 1D6. Team Leaders must be 5th level or higher.

Super Power Category: Ordinary People (Sometimes will have superbeing operatives/mercenaries).

Average Hit Points: 25-35 (3D6 + P.E. attribute).

Average S.D.C.: 3D6+12

Combat Training: Hand to Hand: Martial Arts, Assassin, or Commando.

Typical Number of Attacks per Melee: 5 or 6 (6 or 7 for those 4th level).

Agent Bonuses: The following are bonuses granted to S.C.R.E.T. agents regardless of their Super Power Category: +1 on initiative, +1 to pull punch, +1 to roll with punch/fall/impact, +2 to save vs Horror Factor. These are in addition to possible bonuses from attributes, skills, power category, or Hand to Hand Combat.

Special Abilities: None, unless a super being.

Education Level and Skills: Military or Military Specialist. Those belonging to the Physical Training or Hardware category must sacrifice one entire Skill Program, however it cannot be the Military Program (basic). Special Training: *Secret Operative*, are rolled up accordingly (see HU2, page 216).

Appearance: Individual will look like the typical person from his or her country.

Occupation: A soldier/government agent.

Standard Weapons: Standard for each country.

Equipment and Armor: Standard for each country. Only 35% of all S.C.R.E.T. agents wear hard armor vests (A.R. 12, S.D.C. 120) and less than 15% wear Class 4 Armor (full suit; A.R. 17, S.D.C. 280).

Vehicles: Standard for the country.

Headquarters: One central location found in each country.





The Wormwood Addenda

Optional Material for Rifts® Wormwood

By Braden Campbell

Author's Introduction

When Erin Tarn arrived on Wormwood, she became the first Earthly visitor in nearly three thousand years. However, she was only privy to a relatively small area of this unique world. Being one half the size of Earth, Wormwood has a diameter of 3,986 miles (and the maps of the world as found on pages 39 and 155 of *Rifts® Wormwood™* represent about one-quarter of the planet). Her travels took her from a starting point near Battle Star, to the city of Cathedral Stronghold (where she seems to have spent less than a day), then north once more to the Free City of Worldgate. All in all, she spent six months on the Living Planet and traveled through only one kingdom.

Readers of her book, "*Wormwood, a Distant World*," may then be inclined to think that the conflict on the Living Planet is straightforward and two-sided; the Cathedral versus the Unholy and his evil minions. Had Ms. Tarn elected to stay longer on Wormwood, she would have found that there are, in fact, many more facets to the war, and its complications run very deep. There are many divisions on Wormwood that stem from differing religious, philosophical, and moral interpretations. And the Cathedral, while mighty, is but one kingdom amongst several.

North of Battle Star are the **Dark Domains**. But these were not always blighted lands. A thousand years ago, they were the heart of the great Unified Realm, and the city of Charun was a glorious place of enlightenment.

Between the warring Cathedral and the lands of the Unholy, is the ravaged **Reorith Province**. Erin Tarn was lucky to not have wandered into these lands, for they are a battlefield the likes of which has rarely been seen. For a millennium, Mankind and demon have clashed here. Wormwood is scarred and toxic from the fighting, and the soldiers of the Light have lost all hope.

To the northeast, across the Demon Mountains, lies **Ezud, the Eastern Domain**. A kingdom of religious puritans, they would prefer to ignore the problem of the Unholy, and not take an active hand in reclaiming the Living Planet. But their time of isolation is at an end. Some of the Cathedral High Priests seek to subtly control Ezud, and this land must now change its pacifistic ways, or be lost forever.

Far out beyond the Forest of Pillars there are only the **Grand Barrens**; a near-limitless, flat expanse of Wormwood, untamed

and unsettled. The Barrens are an ocean without water. It is desolate and foreboding. Yet, there are adventurers, both the brave and the insane, who wander its length and breadth, hoping to find new symbiotes, unknown crystals and stones, long-lost Battle Saints, or even Wormwood's mythical control center, the Plexus.

There is also the **Forrest of Skelosia**, on the plateau west of Kriktonspire. Here it is rumored that the last of the ancient royal family hid themselves when the Unholy first appeared. If there are any living heirs who could collect the Three Symbols of Office and re-unite the Realm, they will be found here. But Lord Krikton has also heard of the legends, and is even now making plans to destroy the forest and all that is hidden in it.

Finally, west of the Resin Mountains are a collection of dirty, renegade dukedoms collectively called the **Far Sovereignties**. It was Vidicus the Wanderer who first settled these towns, in the aftermath of his failed Crusade. Was he a true prophet of the Light, as he himself claimed, or just a delusional madman?

Wormwood is far more complex than Erin Tarn's readers could possibly know. It is a place of open warfare, and dark, backdoor maneuverings. Here then is the first part in a continuing series that will take a closer look at the people and places beyond the Cathedral.

A History of The Great Tribulation

*"...Then leaf subsides to leaf,
So Eden sank to grief,
So dawn goes down today,
Nothing gold can stay."*

— Robert Frost

Part One: The Sundering of the Realm

There are many books, scriptures, and scrolls that claim to tell the true history of Wormwood and the dawning of the Great Tribulation. They differ wildly in their accounts. However, there is one text that is considered to have a greater credibility than many others: *The Lamentations of Etsocalt*.

"Lamentations," as it is more commonly called, chronicles the onset of the Great Tribulation, and was most likely penned about 950 years ago. As a guide to understanding the religious and political divisions on Wormwood it is essential. Over its length, it tells of how the world was divided up, how the once universal Church of Inner Light became split, and how the Unholy arose from Wormwood's most noble house to bring an Age of darkness and strife.

So it came to pass in those times that Khaimeron, the Great Emperor of the Unified Realm, called before him all his Royal Court. And he lay before him a large tapestry, upon which was

drawn a map of the Realm. And he said to all of those assembled, "Let it be known that on this day, I shall divide my Empire into three equal parts. And unto each of my children will I bequeath a Dominion. For I no longer wish to rule over the peoples of Wormwood, but choose rather to pass that task unto my progeny. For they are young and strong, and the Light burns bright in them. Therefore shall I give up the throne, and reside in Magorz the rest of my days."

Then called he before him Emeron, his first-born. And laying his hand upon him said, "Emeron, thou art my first born, flesh of my flesh. In you do I most see the passion to rule over men. Henceforth shall you be known as the Western King, and Charun shall be your Dominion; from Lalibela in the north, to the walls of the Free City, west from Skelosia to the mountains in the east." And he did give him then the Kidoc, the Scepter of Wormwood, first of the Three Symbols of Office.

To his second son, Avylos, he gave Mayvoc, which is also called the Orb of Wormwood. And handing it to him, thus did Khaimeron say: "To my second son, the first of my twins, do I say that truly you are of two minds; for you were born unto me being both first and second. In you do I find most a man who has achieved balance, and mastery over affairs of the Spirit. Go ye now unto the Far East, into the Domain of Ezud, and dwell ye there in the great city Cenyaw, whose shining spires shall sustain you and your subjects in the paths of the Light. Build ye mighty walls and battlements, and ensure above all else, that the Light presides over your people."

So Avylos took the Orb of Wormwood, and prepared to go into the east, which is called Ezud.

Then finally did the Emperor turn unto his only daughter, Dasellis, second of his twins, but foremost in his heart. And he did give unto her Abendzul, the Crown of Wormwood, saying "Lastly do I bestow upon my only daughter a mighty crown, and title to all the lands of the South. For she is like a maiden of the elder times, strong and noble, and wise beyond her years. May she live long and happy days in Stronghold, and may her children and subjects know naught but peace until the end of days."

And when he had spoken all this, and announced his sequestration, did he present to the court the new rulers of Wormwood: Emeron, Avylos, and Dasellis. And a great cheer went up from the assembled hall.

The problems began over 1000 years ago. In that long-past and distant time, there was only one kingdom on Wormwood; a vast and powerful empire commonly called the Unified Realm. Its domain stretched over a full third of the planet, and included the lands now claimed by the Cathedral. The capital of the Unified Realm was Charun, and the Emperor ruled from beneath the unsurpassed glory of the domed palace. The Realm was at peace, and the people knew nothing of hunger or hardship.

Then, quite suddenly, the last of the Great Emperors, Khaimeron I, decided to turn control of the land over to his three children. The Realm was divided into three Dominions, and each child received one of them. His eldest son became King of the West; a territory that encompasses what is now the Dark Domain (see *Rifts® Wormwood*, page 155). His second son became ruler over Ezud, a vast flat land to the east. And the final territory, which today is called the Kingdom of Light, was handed

over to the Emperor's only daughter, Dasellis. Furthermore, Khaimeron took the three symbols of the Realm (the Crown, the Orb, and the Scepter), and again, gave one to each child.

At first, no one saw anything wrong with Khaimeron's decision to retire early, unprecedented as it was. The royal court applauded the action, and everyone cheered that this would mark the beginning of an even greater age. Everyone, that is, save one man; Lord Hurcae Reorith.

Yet there was one among them who was sorely displeased. For he alone in all that throng could see the inherent carelessness of Khaimeron's plan.

And Lord Reorith did stand forth, and called the crowd into silence saying, "Be my manners undone when the Emperor is unreasonable! O, be silent and hear me, for I must speak. Long have I served you, Khaimeron, my sovereign lord, and long have I trusted in you. But in this measure I see naught but folly."

And Emeron moved to silence Lord Reorith, and thought to strike him with the Scepter. But he would not be quieted, and he threw the Western King to the floor, crying out "I will not observe this man as my ruler whilst the Emperor still lives. For only by thy father's death art thou entitled to what he hath so recklessly given!"

Then did Khaimeron say unto Lord Reorith, "Am I not the ruler of all the Living Planet? Am I not descended from a line of Kings? I say that I am. Then should my word be law, and my wishes carried out, and all the men of Wormwood rejoice, for the Emperor hath decreed."

But Lord Reorith said unto him, "It is not within the Emperor to decide when his tenure shall be finished. You hold an office until Death come claim you, and not before. This course you set upon, to give your children their inheritance whilst ye still draw breath, is in defiance of all the Natural Order. No good can come from such an upset, and truly do I beg the Emperor to reconsider."

Then Emeron stood again before Lord Reorith, and all the court was silent. And Emeron said unto him, "It has been decreed, and thus it is so: I am now your King, and you now serve my court, not that of my father. I say that I would have your allegiance, and the allegiance of all your Knightly Order. Swear your fealty to me here and now, and all these trespasses shall be forgiven."

And Lord Reorith looked to Avylos for aid, and Avylos looked away. Then did he look to fair Dasellis, and Dasellis also turned away and began to weep.

Then, seeing that he was alone, Lord Reorith said, "When the Emperor is dead, and you have taken your rightful place as a ruler of men, then all my allegiance shall be yours."

So Khaimeron, in a sudden fit of rage, did revoke Lord Reorith's writ of nobility. And Reorith turned to Dasellis, and whispered, "I did love you," and walked out of the Domed Palace. And he went and dwelt in the land east of the Free City, and all his Knightly Order did follow him, yea every one of them. And they founded there a mighty Watchtower, and dwelt there for thirty years, waiting for their time of homecoming.

Emperor Khaimeron then dropped out of all sight. It matters little what actually happened to him following the Sundering, for he had already played out his part in this long tale. His chil-

dren began ruling their respective Dominions, and very quickly the once homogeneous culture of the Unified Realm began to change into three distinct civilizations. And it seemed, over time, that Lord Reorith might have been right after all.

Part Two: The Faith is Divided

Prior to the Sundering of the Realm, the primary religion on Wormwood was *Vram Yufovya*. Roughly translated as "Inner Light," the basic tenet was that there exist in the Universe two opposing forces: Light and Dark, creation and destruction. Mankind, in his heart, is Dark. Without the saving grace of the Light, he will degenerate into baseless violence and barbarity. Thus, every man, woman, and child, must devote the greater part of their lives towards diminishing the Dark within them.

This can be accomplished in several ways. Daily prayer and meditation, loving one's friends and family, and respecting those in positions of authority are some. As well, since life itself is seen as stemming from the creative Light, rather than the destructive Dark, it is the duty of all men to pursue life to its full-

est potential. "For he who sits and does nothing," wrote a great prophet once, "diminishes himself slowly. That is not the manner of the Light. That is the way of the Dark, of the form destroyers."

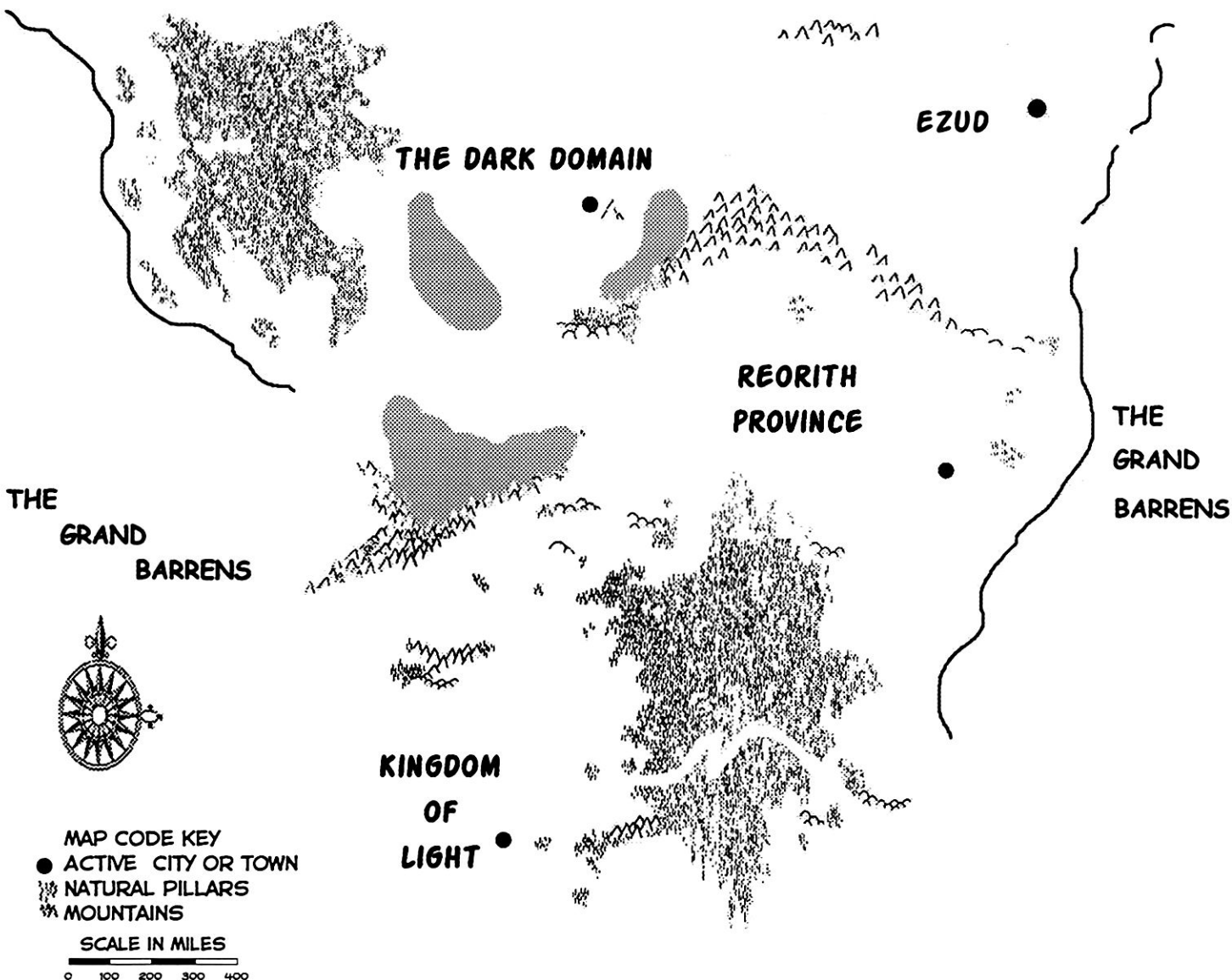
The development of magical powers was also seen as a way to grow more in the Light. Those with the ability to say Prayers of Communion could speak to Wormwood, and create things out of nothingness. So a great many went into the priesthood, and served the Light both by developing their P.P.E., and by then using their priestly powers to help and care for others.

In short, the goal of Vram Yufovya is to create a utopia; a world where there is no want and no suffering.

However, once the Realm had been divided up, and there existed three power bases where before there had only been one authority, problems arose. Each of the Dominions began to interpret for themselves the best ways to grow in the Light. Over the next thirty years, the one true faith branched off into three denominations.

Terradominance

Literally meaning "world ruling," the Terradominance movement developed in Charun under the rule of King Emeron. It



was based heavily on Vram Yufovya, but interpreted several things differently. Foremost was the idea that Mankind, while Dark by nature, is still closer to the Light than all other races. Therefore, it is Mankind's duty to bring Light and civilization to those that have none.

While in practice this might sound well and good, like sending missionaries into the world to perform charitable acts, to the Terradominants it simply meant that Man was a superior life form and must rule over all other races. Otherworldly beings, such as Entities, demons, and mortals not originally from Wormwood, are all naturally subservient. They are meant to be slaves. Which is a good thing; not only do they learn how to act more human (bringing them closer to the Light), but also humans, now freed from manual labor, can lead a life of leisure. Such a life also complemented the tenets of Vram Yufovya, for Terradominants were truly "living life to its fullest."

The Vram Yufovya practiced in the East was seen as rigid and totalitarian. They prayed too much, and fasted too often. It was seen as a religion of self-denial, and was therefore evil. A life cloistered away in constant prayer and meditation was a life wasted.

Eastern Vram Yufovya

Still practiced today, this denomination remained closest to the original, but developed more of a hard line. Eastern Yufovya carries a high emphasis on purging one's inner darkness. It is a religion of self-purification and regimented prayer. Three times daily (morning, noon, and night), Eastern Yufovyaists must sit in prayer, with each session lasting thirty minutes. There are also six different times of the year when one must undergo a weeklong fast in order to purify the body. All throughout the year, one must exercise regularly to keep the body in top form, and avoid damaging vices such as alcohol and drugs.

The development of magical powers is also highly regarded. This may explain why Ezud, the cradle of Eastern Yufovya, has more Alchemists per capita than anywhere else on Wormwood.

Eastern Yufovyaists feel that only Kings and appointed rulers of the land have the right to bear arms, raise armies, or make war. Commoners should not feel the need to arm themselves, for their protection is placed solely in the hands of the nobles. Even so, in Eastern Yufovya one goes to war only for defensive purposes, or when offered no other solution. Warmongering spreads nothing but hate and destruction, and therefore leads one into Darkness.

The summoning of otherworldly beings must only be done by members of the Alchemy Guild, and then followed up by a weeklong regimen of prayer and fasting in order to cleanse the soul.

Orthodox Cathedralism

Founded by Lady Dasellis as a direct response to Terradominance, Cathedralism's main ideology is that it doesn't have a division between "church" and "state." When faced with the growing hedonism of Charun, Lady Dasellis came to the decision that it could not be allowed to happen in her Dominion. Every noble who commanded a city, as well as all of the Grand Knights for both orders, were made indoctrinated Priests of

Light. By this reasoning, the actions of the Army were directed by the Church, and not by the whim of a local Duke or Lord.

The Cathedralists were also the first to field "Freelancers"; a peasant army raised up to bolster the numbers of the Knightly Orders. Ezud looked on this act as akin to heresy. It couldn't envision a general populace with enough arms to overthrow the nobility, should it so choose.

Cathedralists believe that Mankind is meant to rule over other races, but must do so judiciously. Other races may indeed be brought into the Light, but will always be second-class citizens.

Part Three: The Golden Age Ends

For uncounted millennia, Charun and its environs had been a beautiful city and a testament to the Light. But now a darkness was subtly creeping in. Like all true evil, it was not overt at first, and it blanketed itself in good intentions. The faith of Emeron's kingdom grew more and more towards the Terradominant line of thinking. Supernatural beings from twisted, otherworldly realms became more and more commonplace. They were slaves, servants, pets and playthings. The Alchemists of Charun designed ever more elaborate methods of summoning these beings into servitude. And all the while, the faithful assumed that they were doing right.

The nights were filled with revels; at first in salutation to the new King, then to welcome his first-born son, Prince Khairon. Of course the royal birthdays had to be celebrated as well, and the King had seven children. Then there were holidays, and festivals. Thirty-three years after the Sundering, fully half the Charun calendar was comprised of holidays. But the people of that Dominion believed they were actually improving their lives, for truly, they were living them to the utmost as their religion commanded.

Towards the east, in Ezud, Avylos took a wife and had four children. Avylos' father had commanded him to build walls and battlements, and that is exactly what he did. Great cities arose from out of the surface of Wormwood. Giant monuments and works of art adorned the many churches and palaces. His Dominion was prosperous, and safe, but became overtly introspective. The people of Ezud began to worship the Light in a manner very different from those in Charun.

Again, the practitioners of Eastern Yufovya saw their behavior as a natural and proper progression of worship. The fact that their lives had become spartan and fundamental only made sense when compared to the blatant excesses of the West. They were right; everyone else was wrong. And yet, the people of Ezud were content to live their lives in relative seclusion, and for a long time, did not try to interfere with the conduct of the other Dominions.

In the Southlands, the Emperor's only daughter had taken a husband. At the age of twenty-five, Dasellis married the brash Lord Davin Ordek. Ordek was a Grand Knight; the leader of the Order of the Templars. Their union helped pave the way for the Kingdom of Light to move towards a denomination that was to be radically different from the other two: Cathedralism.

Then the people of Charun fell into depravity and arrogance, yet so slowly did it happen that they could see it not.

And Emeron knew his wife, and she bore him a son, and called him Khairon, in honour of the departed Emperor. And Khairon was most beloved of his father, King Emeron, such that every wish the boy had was granted.

And King Emeron had yet six more children, three sons and three daughters. And these were the names of his sons: Shaelon, Deylos, and Merron. And these were the names of his daughters: Sayella, Rhysain, and Maillen. But most beloved of the King was Khairon.

And young Khairon did take after his father's every measure, and did partake in the summoning of evil beings for his delight, and their torment.

So the wickedness of Charun and of King Emeron grew with each year, and creatures of Darkness became ever more commonplace there. But still the people believed themselves to be in the Light.

Until, in the thirty-third year of his reign, was the Beast brought onto the firmament of Wormwood. And the Beast had no name, so terrible in evil was it. But all who saw it recoiled at it, and called it the Unholy, which was all that it was, and nothing more.

From the safety of the southern city of Stronghold, Lady Dasellis became increasingly worried. The Worldgate Traders, who so often brought goods to the city, now also brought strange tales as well. Something was going horribly wrong in the Western Dominion. Monsters were now common pets, summoners ran rampant with their magics. Even Wormwood itself seemed to want to isolate the growing evil in the Kingdom, for the Traders claimed that a new chain of mountains was rising up north of their city. A portent such as that could no longer be denied, and Dasellis sent a company of Templars to investigate.

The leader of that company was Sir Taye de'Vaffe, who had been a squire to her husband. He spent two years in Charun. When he returned to Stronghold he was a haunted man. Where once his face had been bright and youthful, he now looked gray and sullen.

de'Vaffe reported to the court all that he had seen. It was true, he said, that a new mountain chain had risen up north of Worldgate, the largest anyone had ever seen. Demons and monsters were everywhere, and the people of the Dominion were completely corrupted. Their demonic slaves were close to open revolt, and soon the land would no longer belong to Man.

Some in the court called for all the knights of the Cathedral to march on Charun, but Lady Dasellis was slow to action. She simply could not believe that once great city had fallen so far, nor that her brother had let it. She instead decreed that a Congregation be called of all the other leaders of Wormwood; a meeting to confirm de'Vaffe's report, and plan a next move.

It did not take long for the Queen to discover that her brother Avylos' agents had come to the same findings. The Dominion of Charun would soon be overrun with demons, and its people past saving.

Far and wide went the word for the leaders to assemble, but in doing so, Dasellis and Avylos saw how different each other's Kingdoms had become. Each thought the other to be on a path

similar to Charun. The Cathedral saw in Ezud a land of dangerous extremists who refused to face up to facts, and Ezud saw in the Cathedral a kingdom run not by the Queen, but by overzealous generals, itching for an excuse to make war on anyone. The end result was that no one could decide on a place to hold the meeting.

Then, without warning, a message arrived in both Stronghold and Cenyaw from the exiled Lord Reorith. In it, he offered his personal citadel, the Watchtower, as a place of neutral ground where a Congregation could take place. So, under the gray skies of Watchtower, they assembled.

From Ezud came Prince Chaulron and Prince Khadis, sons of King Avylos, the King being too sick and timid to leave the walls of Cenyaw.

From the Free City of Worldgate came the nine Lords of the Exchequer, robed and masked so that none could look upon them. From Hammer and Chisel, from Izrui and Alhir came representatives for the Resiners, the Guild of the miners and weaponsmiths.

From the Stronghold of the Cathedral came Lady Dasellis and her husband, Lord Ordek, and Adaboam and Tephen, the Alchemists. And Grand Master Caben of the Hospitaliers was among them also.

And over them all presided Lord Reorith, the Exile. And he welcomed them to his home and said unto them: "Long hath it been these thirty years that my Order hath dwelt in exile. For I alone spoke my heart, and when looked I to you for aid, you turned away and did nothing. Come you all now here in your hour of need. And shall I be as equal cruel, and turn you away?"

And Lady Dasellis replied, "You said on that day that you did love me. Be it so that your affection has cooled in this tower, or do you profess to love me still?" And Lord Reorith looked at her, and did not answer, and they all knew that he did indeed still love her.

Tephen the Alchemist did then say, "We are gathered here in Congregation, and now must we decide what is to be done in the Dominion of the West. For many are the evil portents that wax there. That land shall be lost to the Darkness, lest we act soon."

Then in suddenness did Shaelon, the second son of King Emeron, burst into their midst. And when he entered their place of meeting, they did all gasp for fear. For Shaelon was as a refugee, his cloak in tatters and his feet bare.

And Lord Reorith said unto them, "Behold, Shaelon, the son of Emeron, here as an expatriate in my home. Why lookest thou in such disrepair?"

"I come for I have heard that a mighty Congregation is assembled," said Shaelon. "And seeing it is so, I must relate news unto you of terrible import. My father, King Emeron, is dead."

And the assembled broke into arguing, until Lady Dasellis quieted them. "If my brother be dead, then tell us by what means," said she.

It was an unexpected shock for the Congregation to learn that King Emeron was dead. It was made even worse to hear the way in which he had died.

King Emeron's son, Khairon, had apparently been possessed by an otherworldly life form of great power. Prince Shaelon did

not know the being's name, calling it only "the Unholy." It was both name and descriptor; for Shaelon went on to tell the Congregation that the Unholy had utterly transformed his brother, leaving only an abomination behind. The Unholy had turned on King Emeron, and ripped him limb from limb, reveling in the blood and gore. Then the beast had taken the *Kidoc*, the Scepter of Wormwood, and used it to kill many of the palace guard.



In short, Shaelon told them that their worst fears had already come to pass. The demonic playthings of Charun were in open revolt, enslaving their enslavers. Worse yet, more of the Unholy's kindred had been brought to Wormwood, using human beings as Hosts. Shaelon and his two brothers had managed to escape the palace, after sending Emeron's three daughters into hiding. Now he pleaded for aid.

It did not take long for the Congregation to decide a course of action. The Kingdom of Light allied itself to Ezud, and asked Lord Reorith to join them in a battle to reclaim the lost Dominion. Reorith agreed, but only after Prince Shaelon (who was now King of Charun for all intents and purposes) publicly apologized to Lord Reorith on behalf of his deceased father. Furthermore, he promised to restore Reorith's writ of nobility when Charun was once again free.

The stage was set for total war. The largest military force that Wormwood had ever seen assembled turned itself towards Charun. The Golden Age of peace was over.

Part Four: The Tribulation Begins

Never before, in all the long pre-history of Wormwood, had there been a battle such as the one that took place on the Plains of Khulam, in the shadow of Mount Skael. The actual number of combatants is a matter of conjecture, but most historians put the allied forces of the Congregation at nearly 80,000. Their opposition, however, outnumbered them tenfold.

The Forces of Darkness were composed mainly of demonic beings such as Beast Guards, Br'talb Hound Riders, Skr'lyr Sky Riders, Rathos Rumlbers, and human Priests of Darkness. The Congregation, while far fewer in number, was vastly superior in both equipment and training. Forty thousand knights from Ezud and the Cathedral moved on Charun, backed up by Longbowmen and siege weapons. Lord Reorith's Sentinel Knights were, without argument, equal to three or four regular fighting men apiece. No fewer than eight Battle Saints and 20 Battle Saint Orbs were involved.

The Battle of Khulam Plains also included the first use of massive numbers of "Freelancers." Beforehand, warfare was the work of the nobility, who preferred to have their loyal subjects largely unarmed. In order to counter the sheer volume of the enemy's ranks, however, fighting men and women were conscripted from the lower levels of society. A large number of mercenaries joined the fighting too, whether for ideological reasons, or in the hopes of profiting from the sacking of Charun.

Many wondered if the Congregation's effort might not be doomed from the first. There was the very serious question of who was going to command such an incredible force. In the end though, there was only one logical choice: Lord Reorith. He was, after all, the man who had brought the Congregation together, and while the various factions did not entirely trust one another, they each trusted the exiled Grand Master.

Three spearheads collided on the Plains. From the northwest, out of Charun and Atala, came the followers of the Unholy. From the east came the soldiers of Ezud. The Cathedral forces

and the Sentinel Knights came up from the south through the Demon Mountains, taking the pass below Sky Cape.

The battle was, without hyperbole, a blood bath. Accounts of it are many and varied, but every one describes heaps of bodies and rivers of gore. So many were killed on either side during the first hours of fighting, that the obstacle of corpses hampered effective counterattacks. Eventually, things degenerated from a unified assault into deadly fighting amongst scattered groups. The sun set on a charnel house. Swarms of flies cast a dark halo over bodies piled like cordwood. The cries of the wounded and dying filled the air. Still, it seemed that the demonic troops were giving ground. Lord Reorith rallied the survivors for a final push toward the gates of Charun. *Mayvoc*, the Orb of Wormwood, brought to the fight by Prince Chaulron, shone like the sun itself. For the briefest of moments, the free men of Wormwood had victory within their sight.

But it was not to be.

Then did the Unholy, sworn enemy of all the human race, take to the field. And the leaders of the Congregation looked upon the face of it, and knew true fear. Yea, even Lord Reorith did give pause. And the Plains of Khulam grew silent and still, and even the screams of the dying were muted, such was the dreadful awe of those who looked upon that most evil of beings.

Then with terrible swiftness, the Unholy raised its hand, and in it could they see the Kidoc, Scepter of Wormwood, now as twisted as its wielder. And with it did the Unholy strike Shaelon, son of Emeron. And Shaelon flew apart as if made of water.

Then Deylos and Merron, last of the sons of Emeron, regained themselves, and covered in the blood of their brother, leapt into battle. And the Unholy did kill them in an instant. And thus the sons of Emeron were no more.

*And Prince Chaulron, overcome by terror, gave into weakness, and fled. And he took with him the *Mayvoc*, and the Light departed the leaders of the Congregation.*

*Then said Lord Reorith, "Again I stand alone." And the Unholy struck at him. But Lord Reorith wielded no ordinary sword, and carried no ordinary shield. For they were the *Stuff of Souls*, the only alloy in all the Living Planet. And with his shield he did parry the blow, and with his sword he cut into the Unholy's flesh.*

The beast staggered, and looked at him with confusion. And Lord Reorith smiled. Then the Unholy said unto him, "Pride sullies the noblest character." And Lord Reorith saw that he had sinned, and his countenance fell.

The Unholy, seeing the Grand Master pause, fell upon him, and tore him limb from limb. And thus, in a whirlwind of death and regret, fell Lord Reorith.

Defeat had been snatched from the jaws of victory. With the death of the one man who could have led them, the remaining Congregation army fell into exhaustion and disarray. Prince Chaulron ordered the men of Ezud to retreat back towards the East, and one entire flank of the attack fell away. Without their support, the Cathedral forces suffered incredible losses, for they now bore the full brunt of the demon onslaught.

Finally, after what seemed an eternity, the remaining Sentinel Knights ordered a retreat. The Unholy's own numbers had been dealt a severe blow, and it could not press the advantage. It was

forced to let its enemies pull back from the Plains of Khulam. The bones of the fallen were heaped around the base of Mount Skael, which was then appropriately renamed "the Mountain of Skulls" by its new lord and master.

The final numbers of dead and lost were never recorded. Certainly the Congregation had lost at least one-third of its number – some 27,000 men and women. In the aftermath of the fight, hope seemed to fade out of the world. All the heroes were dead; Lord Reorith, Prince Shaelon, Lord Ordek, Sir Ruslathon, Lady Katalus Blademaster, Prince Khadis, Grand Master Caben of the Hospitaliers, the list went on and on. The greatest generation of its time had been all but wiped out, and those who survived hid away in their castles and found other ways to destroy themselves.

Yet it was not over. All this was merely the prelude of an even greater battle, one that would last for the next thousand years.



THE COALITION EDGE

Optional Source Material for Rifts®

By Matt Olfsen

December 24, 109 P.A.

Quinn could taste the bittersweet flavor of retribution in the sweat on his upper lip. Reaping his revenge on the Coalition for what they did to his family in Tolkeen... it was something he dreamt of for so many nights now, the mage had honestly lost count. All he knew was that by next week the farmlands of Missouri would be a raging inferno, and then he and his partners could move up north to wreak havoc in the countryside of Chi-Town. Just a week longer stomping their way through the back woods under the cover of night, and the sheep of the CS would at last begin to know just what it's like to feel terror from a monster in their midst.

Suddenly, Quinn's point man stopped short and raised a warning hand. The wrathful mage came to a halt and strained his senses to figure out what it might be. His eyes scanned the black, star-filled sky and his ears strained to hear over the beating of his own heart... Nothing... Nothing save the sound of a distant jet leagues and leagues away, and soon after, not even



that. Ever cautious, Quinn and his retribution cell stayed still and silent long enough to be sure all was still safe before moving on. They may have been thirty strong, every one of them a force to be reckoned with, but being so close to the belly of the beast, none of them wanted to take any chances.

As the sun's early light filtered through the trees, Quinn and his small army made camp near a fast running creek. Before going to sleep for the day they wanted to get a bite to eat, and the fish in the creek would make a good meal. As he sat to scale a trout someone caught for him, again the sound of distant jets could be heard over the noise of the water. Patrols are getting tighter, Quinn thought to himself as he casually went about his business. Like before, the distant rumble began to fade as it echoed through the woods... but then a beeping noise caught his attention. It was one of the cyborgs that came with him from Tolkeen, and the mechanical man's radar detector was going off! The jets' roar became increasingly louder and he knew this time the patrol had found him. Shooting up to his feet, fish and knife still in hand, a pair of Coalition Windjammers came into view. Flying just inches over the treetops, the tall foliage helped muffle the noise of their jets.

On their first pass, the flying scouts let loose with a hail of rail gun fire, instantly killing two of the insurrectionists. As others tried to ramble off incantations trying to destroy the retreating threat in the sky, Quinn made use of the talisman around his neck to summon up his Armor of Ithan. But then, instead of turning for another strafing run the two Windjammers continued on

their way heading due east on full burn, disappearing behind the cover of treetops as rapidly as they first appeared.

It made no sense. Quinn cocked his head in slight confusion. Surely they could have killed more of his compatriots with another pass, showering the camp with missiles. And then a thought occurred to him followed by wide-eyed panic. "RUN!" The word had barely left his mouth when a salvo of dozens of artillery shells saturated the campsite. The plasma explosions vaporized half the Tolkeen vets, and shattered the bones of those who were made of sturdier stuff. In an instant, the area was transformed from a serene creek to a lake of fire populated by the dead, the dying, and charred remains. As he laid there, bleeding, broken, and on death's door, all Quinn could wonder was how they did that. To do what they did, the shells had to be in the air before the scouts even made their first pass. But how was that even possible? How did they even know where to aim? How did they coordinate all that so fast? How indeed.

To many, the Coalition is little more than a giant gang of bandits that fight to defend their turf, lay claim to new territory, and kill those that are different from themselves. The only thing that seems to make them different from common thugs to those they harass and slaughter is their vast numbers. But the CS is more than just an overgrown gang. They aren't a band of mercenaries, but compare a CS battalion or company with the likes of Larsen's Brigade and Robot Control and the similarities are hard to ignore. Like any capable merc troupe, each of the Coalition's battalions has soldiers in body armor, energy weapons, rail

guns, robots, suits of power armor, and explosives out the wazu. So why can't even the bigger bands of mercenary forces go toe to toe with the CS even when all else appears to be equal on the surface? Beyond really big transports, what does the CS have that makes them the supreme power of the North American continent? Numbers aren't enough... not in the face of magic and supernatural beasts from beyond. Their weapons aren't necessarily the best. Their banking institution certainly helps, but that can eventually be replaced in time. And though they can make Dog Boys and Skelebots by the thousands, their enemies can make automatons, summon spirits & Elementals, and raise the dead twice as fast. Even their die-hard fanaticism alone isn't enough to make them the most powerful nation in the Western Hemisphere (barring Atlantis, of course). So this begs the question, just what is it that makes them so dangerous and nigh unstoppable? The answer can be summed up in one word: *information*.

When considering of the source of Coalition power, many think of their fortress cities. Though these keep them safe and provide places from which they can organize, these fixed population centers of technological wonder are defensive at best. Fortress cities do not project power beyond a certain point. And the CS can ill afford to let the enemy come to them, so they must face their foes away from the comforts of home and the influence of their mountains of steel. But to attack an adversary on his own land is a dangerous proposition. To do that you need overwhelming numbers (which they have), solid logistics (to be covered later), and not only knowledge of the lay of the land but also the ability to know what the enemy is doing the instant it happens. Though the many CS intelligence agencies do their job superbly well, their respective agents can't help the CS Army in the thick of battle. Intelligence can aid in making the right plans, movements and preparations, but when seconds count and lasers light up the sky, it takes more than just that. At that point it takes up-to-the-second information about every knowable detail of the battlefield. And the faster one knows these pieces of information, the faster they can be put to use.

That is the true power behind the juggernaut that is the Coalition States military. Having strength of numbers, places to coordinate their actions from, and powerful weapons systems is instrumental too, but without the ability to direct and orchestrate all those resources like a clockwork siege engine, all their efforts can quickly go to waste. It is their ability to move where they need to go using the most direct path possible, attack those that can do them the most harm at the most critical of times, and freely and clearly communicate even in the thickest fogs of war. This is what gives them their edge. Using accurate and timely information, backed by decisive and overwhelming force, the CS can cut at the heart of the terrors that plague their land and dream of their destruction.

This is the core of the Coalition's might, and they call it the Digital Battlefield. It is the culmination of decades of research, setbacks, and technological innovations. Some were aware of bits and pieces of this new technology scattered throughout the CS... some not. Regardless of what was known, no one part of its overall tapestry is all that new, but when all the pieces could finally be brought together in the final months of the Tolkeen War, a technological terror was born that immediately began to skyrocket the body-count wherever it went online. To the Coali-

tion's R&D scientists, every aspect of the Digital Battlefield was like a piece of a colossal jigsaw puzzle that they had been slowly piecing together for as long as they can remember. Each element was a piece that had to be made unto itself, and then later modified to fit with the next, and the one before that, and so on. This was no easy task to begin with, but in the modern age of Rifts its completion was nothing shy of a miracle.

Navigation and the Terra Nav-9 System

In a world without satellites in space and the ease of navigating they provide, getting from one place to another can be quite difficult. Many have relearned the old ways before such technological wonders made travel so easy, such as using the position of the sun and constellations, using a map and compass to triangulate one's own position, and other age-old techniques. Roads and pathways were established to further simplify things, as were road signs to point the way. However, roads and paths were few and far between and sometimes overgrown with foliage, not to mention the fact that they became choice locales for bandits and monsters to strike. Many disliked using established trails for many reasons, including these, and many of those who chose to make their own paths were either lost, never to be heard from again, or so turned around it took them months, sometimes years, to find their way home or to any civilization whatsoever.

After the introduction of the Nav-Com 1 navigation system in 43 P.A., courtesy of the people of Northern Gun, everything changed. The Ishpheming-made device cross-referenced a vehicle's speed against its compass heading to determine where a person was on a digital topographical map. With the navigation computer one would have a close approximation of their proximity to certain key cities and landmarks. And with only a 100 yard/meter margin of error for every 10,000 miles of travel (typically re-calibrated every 5,000 miles so it doesn't get too bad), the system was a success. This laid the groundwork for the more accurate and sophisticated systems to come from NG as well as others like Triax and the CS in the years to follow.

The latest and greatest of the navigation systems to date is the Coalition's Terra Nav-9. The Terra Nav-9 is accurate within a 2 yard/meter margin of error for every 10,000 miles of travel and has an internal digital map that can cover a 1,000 x 1,000 mile (1,600 x 1,600 km) area. Some vehicles, such as Death's Head Transports and Shrike jet fighters, have room for additional computers that have enough space for detailed maps of the globe, but most vehicles are programmed for their expected geographic theater of operations and not much more. The Coalition Expeditionary Force and their ultra-modern survey equipment have made the hyper-accurate topographical maps in use today, a product of over a decade's worth of work from the air. To date, the CEF has mapped much of the North American continent, with the most accurate maps being in the continental dividing strip known as the "Domain of Man." The CEF survey has thus far covered the land from the furthest, most eastern fringes of the Magic Zone (as far as but not including Dinosaur Swamp and much of its surrounding area), as far north as the

Hudson Bay in Canada (including the whole of Free Quebec and the St. Lawrence Seaway), over to the west as far as North Dakota and New Mexico (covering most of the New West), and as far south as six hundred miles (960 km) past the Rio Grande. The surveying of the land was so extensive that not a single village, creek, or bump in the ground was overlooked. And needless to say, every single town, city, and trading post has its exact coordinates denoted with stunning and frightening accuracy. **Top Secret Note:** Using stealthy, hypersonic, unmanned probes, the CS has gathered intelligence and, more importantly, hyper-accurate maps of the entire continent of Atlantis and its cities! These maps will be very useful should the CS ever have to go to defend themselves against Atlantian aggression, or worse, be forced to use their super-nuke armed Tomahawk missiles against them.

The Terra Nav-9 system functions on several principles that work in conjunction with each other and independent of one another at the same time. The main five systems are as follows.

Polar EM Intensity Detector: The closer one gets to the equator the weaker the pull of the Earth's magnetic pole gets. By measuring the strength of this pull, the north or south position of latitude (north and south only) from either pole can be determined, even at the equator.

CT/Astronomical System: All CS navigation systems have an internal chronometer and calendar that are set to "Chi-Town Time." This clock is never adjusted for other time zones. Optical sensors that are gyroscopically stabilized monitor the sky above and keep track of the positions of the sun and stars. The system then compares what's above to their corresponding digitized astronomical files. The distance that the sun or stars are out of alignment is compared against their usual positions as they would appear over the sky of the fortress city of Chi-Town. This system is more accurate at determining one's east/west longitude than it is at determining latitude. Its IR and UV optics can see through all but the thickest cloud cover.

Omni-Motion Topographical Tracker: This system, based off the original Nav-Com 1, monitors the vehicle's heading via gyroscopic compass, angle of ascent or descent via altimeter, and rate of speed via speedometer. This information is transposed onto and cross-referenced with the information on a different system, the digital mapping system. The result shows where they should be according to their movements in the known area. Tracking by this system alone is 99.9999763879% accurate, losing 38 yards/meters every 10,000 miles (16,000 km) of travel. Because most missiles don't travel anywhere near this far, it is common for this to be their sole means of navigation for beyond-line-of-sight target acquisition.

Radio Beacons: Every city and town of the Coalition States has a navigation beacon at its hub that transmits that place's exact location on the map. Regardless of the size or significance of the town, the radio beacons always use the same amount of power for the radio signal. There are also several sub-orbital satellite drones in the air over various strategic locations that also transmit their locations. This enables the navigation system to not only detect the exact direction it's coming from, but also analyze the signal's strength and determine exactly how far away its source is and thus telling the crew of the vehicle where they are. But should all else fail, one can just use the beacon to go to a particular city or town, assuming they're in radio range of a

town or city and not just a sub-orbital satellite drone. In the event an attack is detected, these systems can project a false beacon signal up to 100 miles (160 km) away so the signal can not be used against the CS, its people, or resources.

Digital Map Files: As described above, this is a computerized, three-dimensional map of the land. Each map in the system of a vehicle contains the surveys of 1,000,000 square miles/2,560,000 square km (1,000 x 1,000 miles; 1,600 x 1,600 km) worth of work by the CEF. All vehicular units have navigation computers with sufficient memory space to contain a completely accurate topographical map of the entire globe... that is, if and when such a map is made and becomes available. Smaller, handheld units also have vast memory space, but are limited by their map disks. Each one-inch disk only has enough room in its data files for a 10,000 square mile/25,600 square km (100x100 miles; 160x160 km) 3D map in 4 inch (10 cm) resolution. New and additional maps can be entered into the systems by simply loading in an appropriate one-inch data disk. Given this limitation, soldiers have taken up the practice of collecting, trading, and copying disks of various maps. Also, vehicles can use their radar to scan the area around them and make their own temporary maps of their surroundings, even if these makeshift maps are less accurate, have a lower 1 yard/meter resolution, and are from a single perspective.

Sub-Orbital Satellite Drones

Because even the most powerful of radio transmitters rely on line-of-sight to the receivers (minor obstacles like some trees and buildings notwithstanding), though they may have an optimum range of 500 miles (800 km), most of the time the reality is significantly less impressive. More often than not, conventional communications are limited to about thirty to forty miles (48-64 km) due to the interference of hills, mountains, and the natural curvature of the Earth standing in the radio waves' way. And if that weren't bad enough, the Rifts that crisscross the land add a degree of static interference that worsens with every line the radio waves cross. People tried to overcome this by making repeater stations high on the hilltops as had been done in the days before the Rifts, but the evil and monsters that stalk the land always destroy them in a matter of weeks. But in the year 81 P.A., Coalition technology reached the point of where they could finally do something about overcoming these limitations and problems.

Throughout the Eighties the CS deployed a network of high-altitude radio repeaters that allowed the broadcasters to take advantage of their full reach. This drastically increased the communications range to ten times the norm for the common soldier in the field and opened the doors to a new realm of possibilities. Communication from one end of the CS to the other was made possible as more and more sub-orbital satellite drones (SSDs) were sent up into the air and powerful and more diverse systems increased their overall usefulness. Systems like sensors to aid in weather forecasting, long-range radar, and others to aid in various scientific observations.

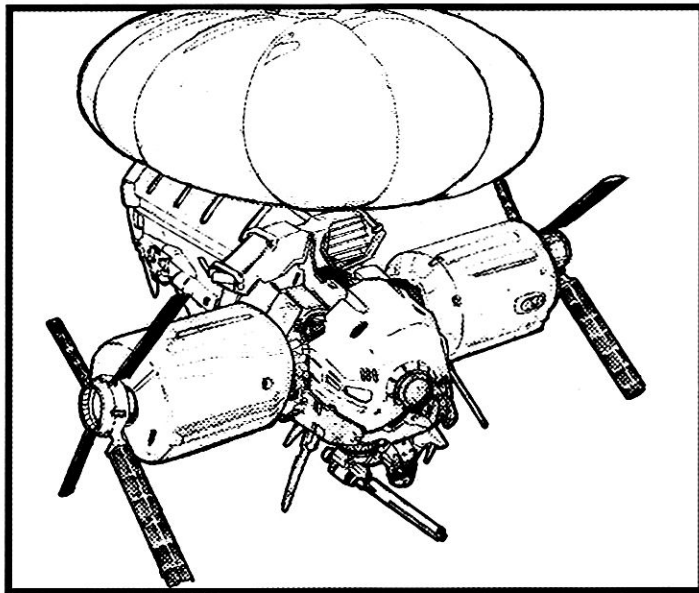
In the next decade, the hovering drones were replaced with more sophisticated ones that could handle an ever-increasing amount of communications traffic, but also aided with navigation. In addition, the latest models were upgraded with ground penetrating radar and IR optical sensors so they could be used to assist Coalition air and ground units with target acquisition, mapping uncharted terrain, and general telemetry. Unhindered by obstacles and most threats, their downward looking optical sensors see all, their ground penetrating radar arrays can target and identify things as deep as 35 feet (10.6 m) under the surface of the earth, all while performing their regular duties as well. But it should be noted that only 20% of the SSDs serve as navigational beacons at any one time, even though they are all capable of doing so. The reason behind this is the radio beacons can be used against the drones, acting as a bull's-eye for anti-radiation missiles. But then again, SSDs are not defenseless and have a chance of countering such attacks.

In the past the sub-orbital satellite drones stayed aloft using banks of hover jets that kept them in their geosynchronous sub-orbital altitudes, typically between 110,000 and 120,000 feet (33.5 to 36.6 km) above sea level. Though it worked well, not only did the drones need to come down on a monthly basis for servicing and maintenance, but the hot jets made them easy targets for heat seeking missiles and the like. As a result, the CS had to find a better way of keeping the SSDs aloft. After much debate and trial and error, one of their think-tanks came up with the idea of making them into small airships. That way they could stay up for years at a time, but also be repositioned under their own power quickly, efficiently, and stealthily.

One of the defining characteristics of "airships" of the past was what held them aloft. Gigantic zeppelins like the Hindenberg achieved their lighter-than-air lift by having their bodies filled with hydrogen. Later, this was replaced with helium due to safety concerns, even though hydrogen provided better lift. The Coalition's approach to this is a radical departure from the tried and true tactics of the past. Instead of using a lighter-than-air gas like hydrogen to get them up into the sky, these miniature airships use *nothing*. The SSDs' bladders are not made to contain gasses, but to keep them out while maintaining their robust spherical form. Inside of an SSD's eight bladders is a hard vacuum of nothingness. Why? Because what is lighter than "nothing"? Nothing! These lightweight vacuum containers displace the drones' mass and allow them to go skyward up to a maximum altitude of 120,000 feet (36.6 km) in their standard configuration. And when it comes time to land, valves allow atmosphere to enter the containers, allowing for a steady, controlled decent (another major improvement over the airships of the 20th century), while pumps can reestablish their vacuums to take off again. Each container and the SSD's outer hull is protected by multiple layers of self-sealing, M.D.C., plasticized fabric, making the overall mini-airship very hard to take down. And should something put a hole in one of the bladders that's too big to self-seal (like from powerful explosives), the other vacuum-bladders can compensate and help keep the ship aloft at a lower altitude (losing 15,000 feet/4.6 km off the maximum altitude per bladder). When needed elsewhere, the SSDs can move into different positions at the rate of 80 mph (128 km) and be anywhere in the CS in a day.

Their high altitudes keep them safe from most attacks and out of normal view, but due to previous generations of the drones being shot down as (rightfully) suspected spy satellites, the current generation of sub-orbital satellite drones have several stealth features to keep them safe. Due to radar absorbent materials, an electronic masking envelope, and thermal masking techniques, they are undetectable from ground based sensors, and impose a -85% to the Sensory Equipment/Radar and Sonar Operation skills within two miles (3.2 km) of the drone. So though the large spheres are detectable, they can be detected by radar *only if* the detecting sensor system gets inside of this range. Beyond it, the drones are effectively invisible to all radio, thermal, and electronic detection systems. And *still* this is not enough to keep them safe.

From their very inception, the biggest threat to the high-altitude satellites has always been long-range missiles and air launched medium-range missiles. Some have taken advantage of the drones' navigational radio beacons to shoot them with anti-radiation missiles, made to seek out the consistent and constant radio emissions like the ones used by a navigation beacon. In response to this, the current model of satellites were made to be able to project a false radio source up to 100 miles (160 km) away to redirect such attacks. In addition to that, to combat missiles that seek out a preprogrammed image or outline with optical sensors, the drones were given an "Electro-Luminescent Skin." This allows the SSD to change colors from a bright sky blue down to a pitch black in gradual increments, so it will always match the sky above. This visual stealth system also illuminates the skin to match the light being emitted from the sky, eliminating any telltale shadows and outlines and making it impossible to spot from the ground. And if all else fails, the SSD's automated defenses can shoot down incoming missiles or high-altitude aircraft with its 2D4x10 M.D. high intensity laser turret. The overall net effect of their sum total of defensive measures and countermeasures makes the Coalition's fleet of sub-orbital satellite drones incredibly hard to find and virtually impossible to shoot down in their current configuration. In short, through trial and error, over the years the CS has learned how to protect these valuable assets extremely well and has not lost a single



one due to hostile enemy activities in years. In fact, most people the land over still don't know the things exist, even when they're right over their heads!

Rumor has it that the CS has used these high-flying airship drones for other purposes. Some say insidious purposes. The latest word from the rumor-mill at Old Bones is that as many as a dozen SSDs are actually secret weapons platforms for super particle beam weapons, massive rail gun cannons, and city-buster nukes! And though this *might* be possible, there isn't the slightest shred of corroborating evidence to support this. There might be something to it on a small few experimental models, but the truth of the matter is that the CS has no intention of truly weaponizing the drones beyond practical purposes for defensive purposes. However, some are looking into the prospect of using the drones' vacuum bladder technology to make a new breed of heavy-lifter transports and colossal airships to serve as stealthy aircraft carriers for their budding air force.

The average life span of an SSD is twenty years. Thereafter, their nuclear power plants will run out of fuel after decades of continuous use. Despite this, no drone has been fielded for even half that long. Because of the rapid rate of technological advancement and growth in this field, most drones are replaced with new and more state-of-the-art SSDs after just five to seven years.

Communications

In the Ley Line ravaged world of Rifts Earth, communicating with others at any great distances is quite a challenge. In the days preceding the Great Cataclysm and dark ages to follow, all one had to do was pick up a phone or zap an e-mail to contact someone. Long-range communications was an easy and everyday part of life. Then came the Ley Lines and everything changed. The satellites in orbit were no longer accessible to bounce signals off of. Phone lines were severed above and below the ground. Even radio waves were limited due to the distorting effects of the Ley Lines that now crisscrossed the land. The age of instant communications across vast distances was over, but not forever.

In the early years of the Dark Age, people tried to make things like the way they had been. They erected networks of phone lines, raised high altitude balloons as substitute satellites, and established courier routes for express mail. But none of these attempts lasted more than a year before being destroyed by the forces that were invading the world. The phone lines were ripped apart by Ley Line storms and creatures of all descriptions. The balloon-lofted satellites were popped by curious and mischievous beasts of flight, following their tether lines up and sending them crashing down to the landscape. And many of the couriers met fates unknown, never to be seen again. For more than 250 years, every attempt to reestablish the links of communications to the world, neighboring kingdoms or even adjacent communities had been squashed. This has been a problem to everyone from the smallest of villages to even the mighty Coalition States.

After nearly three centuries of having to tolerate this debilitating problem it was the CS that finally overcame it in the year of 81 P.A. Deploying a network of ultra-high altitude, sub-or-

bital satellites, suspended in the air and kept in place by powerful jets, the Coalition made a radio relay network that was virtually immune to the pitfalls of previous attempts. The hovering radio repeaters loiter in the sky on the edge of the space between 110,000 and 120,000 feet (33.5-36.6 km) above sea level, about as high as one can go without being shot down by the Hunter-Killer satellites in orbit. From there they can transmit and relay civilian and military radio communications well above the obstructing geographic features of the land and added interference from the rivers of magic energy.

Today, the Coalition's network of SSDs is extensive, efficient, and quite an achievement. A typical sub-orbital satellite drone can send and receive radio transmissions up to 500 miles (800 km) and can handle 100,000 individual connections at once. Should one be overworked and pushed beyond capacity, additional SSDs can be retasked and repositioned to the area, or new ones can be made and put in where they're most needed so they can share the workload.

Though it could be done, the comm system was not made so a person in Lone Star could have a friendly chat with his mom in Iron Heart. Communications of a personal sort are sent in packages called "Vid Mails" which are recorded video or audio messages made with any typical computer available on the open market. The Vid Mail is then (or later) uploaded by radio to the local SSD above and the communications drone relays it in burst transmissions to the next drone and so on until the message is delivered to the intended receiving party's computer (must be connected to the local communications network somehow). The drones look for a coded address that is part of every transmission which tells them where to send the Vid Mail. Consequently, every receiving computer is coded for a certain area. If it is removed from that area the computer can not receive any transmissions, but the SSD tasked to the new area can still receive any uploads for outgoing Vid Mails.

Data Compilation and Display Stations have other uses as well. Using a verbal interface, people can have news programs, movies and episodes of their favorite shows, and video games (sorry, no multi-player online games) sent to them in seconds to be downloaded and watched when they like, as many times as they like. However, like all things that come free, there is a price. First, all of the Coalition's entertainment industry is under the scrutinizing eye of the CS Propaganda Division. In addition to the entertainment value and the ability to keep in touch with friends and loved ones, the communications systems can also be used for commerce. Any time the system displays an advertisement, the computer adds the product and radio address of the producer to its records. Should a person want to order something, all they have to do is tell their computer to place an order in whatever quantities desired and then push the action button to commit to the purchase. The order also includes the purchaser's account number that the receiving company can use to draw funds from the Coalition States Continental Bank.

Personal and entertainment based burst transmissions have a minimal security coding in them since they are less sensitive. Burst transmissions of a military or banking nature are another matter altogether. Because people can die or be financially ruined due to someone intercepting delicate information, all such data sent out through the air is quadruple encoded using a cipher

that is beyond 100% unbreakable! Those that do manage to intercept an errant transmission have absolutely no chance of deciphering it or making it even the slightest bit intelligible. These precautions have prevented even a single (known) successful bank robbery or breach of security in military communiqués in over 20 years. Though that doesn't mean people don't try.

Since entertainment transmissions are much less encrypted to cut down on the SSDs' workload, the last fifteen years has seen the rise of a few Black Market entertainment distributors. These illegal transmitters offer the kind of shows the Coalition does not like its people to see. But given the sheer volume of radio traffic on their multipurpose communications system, sorting out which signals are of the legal variety and which ones aren't is all but an impossible task. Sometimes the pirate programming replaces a show's advertisements, other times it replaces a show in its entirety, making it seem to be just another retransmission of a legal program. Such programming can be anti-CS propaganda and news reports from "political terrorists." Other programs, particularly the ones that only replace a commercial or two, are ads for Black Market programming that people can order through their systems for a reasonable charge of 10 to 10,000 credits, depending on circumstances such as demand, production costs, and subversion/perversion level. In addition to that, people can also purchase products like drugs, weapons, non-CS approved videodisks, and services.

As much as the CS hates it, their own communications network has become a successful tool for the illegal underworld. The Coalition started combating this with package inspections at the depots with drug and weapon sniffing Dog Boys and T-ray machines. In turn, the Black Market began to make and use their own depots and delivery routes for the more overtly illegal items. One-inch disks that contain illegal movies, illegal games (mostly anti-CS stuff), digital books or whatever, are sent right through the normal CS routes, depots and delivery services. To determine what's on them, the authorities would have to put every disk in a player, which would take forever considering how common the medium is, not to mention people have complained en masse the last time they tried that.

Though illegal activity may be prevalent and pervasive across the less secure commercial and civilian bands and channels, this is *not* so in the bandwidths used for the CS Army and Coalition Central Banking Institution (usually just called the CBI). This is because these more information-sensitive institutions not only use multiple layers of amazingly complex encryption, but they also use vast expanses of the available bandwidth of radio waves. Every byte (a packet containing eight binary digits of ones and zeroes) of their digital transmissions over the long-range radio systems is sent out over one of a hundred thousand different, narrow frequencies seemingly in random order (random both in terms of the frequency used and order of the bytes sent), and never in the same order twice. Each byte is tagged as part of the system's encryption protocols, which is key for the receiving end's ability to put them back together again in the right order, properly decoded so it can be made sense of and/or have its data put to use.

People have tried in vain for decades trying to crack the codes, hoping to steal a billion credits from their banks, or tap into their secret communiqués and use them against the CS. But to date, no one has been able to claim the bragging rights to this

feat. Some have managed to actually capture large portions of the signals all at once across the vast spectrum of frequencies, but no one has figured out how to put them back together again. To do that they need the key. And just what is the key?

Decades ago, the Coalition's most brilliant minds came up with a very special and highly complex mathematical equation based in quantum physics. What it does is take a seventeen-digit number and convert it into another with no sequential pattern between one and the next. So to determine what frequency the Coalition military and the CBI is transmitting on at any given fraction of a second, a person needs three things; the key equation, the 17 digit figure to plug into the equation, and a radio configured to jump from one frequency to the next a thousand times a second. The radio isn't that hard to get, and the equation is a highly guarded secret that no one has uncovered as of yet. But the main ingredient to making it work is the ever-changing number that is the key digit tagged to every byte sent out. And what is this number? Nothing more than the time of day. Every long-range communications transmitter the CS has in their 'bots, vehicles, power armors, and so on has a hyper accurate clock inside set precisely to Chi-Town Time. The clock displays time in the hour of the day (01-24), minutes of the hour (01-60), seconds of the minute (01-60), thousandths of a second (000-999), the year (three digits), the numerical month (01-12), and the numerical day of the year (001-365, Julian style). This is just what they do to scramble the frequencies they use, and the military and banking institution use slightly different versions of the key equation so there is no overlap between the two at any given time.

The second part of the key is a triple encryption applied to every package of 113 bytes sent. Unlike the key equation governing the frequency-sequence encryption, these codes are changed on a regular basis. This triple cipher is improved upon and made more impossible to crack every six to eight months like clockwork or sooner as needed. In fact, every time CS Intelligence ever suspects the code may have been in danger of being even close to being cracked, a new code is instated. To this end, every encryption package generated also has a dozen alternate backup versions that can be implemented quickly. Consequently, every time the CS changes their codes the race is on for their computer experts to come out with the next-gen of ciphers before the enemies of the Coalition can break all the variations of the current one.

The Digital Battlefield

The Coalition States Military have been gearing up to use their superior tech and knowhow to conduct a large-scale war for decades. In addition to their tanks, lasers, power armors, and missiles, they have been developing strategies and rekindling the methods and tactics of the old American Empire's extremely successful, globe-spanning military. One of the aspects of the pre-Rifts empire the CS has been working towards for decades is the concept of the Digital Battlefield. However, this is not just a knockoff or adaptation of tech from the Golden Age before the Rifts. Because of the unique challenges the Coalition faced in this harsh, unforgiving world, they practically had to make their version from the ground up.

In essence, the Digital Battlefield is nothing more than the networking of the units on the field and giving them the tech to know exactly where they are at that very moment. Through the system a computer screen lets one know what's happening, who is where at any given time during a conflict, and what they lay of the land and general terrain looks like on a digital topographical map. It assists in navigation so soldiers don't get lost so easily and lets troops know where the enemy has been reported to be so those locations can be either avoided or attacked. The system is also helpful for noncombatants such as transport and supply vehicles going in and out of hazardous areas, and medical teams trying to get to the wounded and out again in one piece.

One of the hardest things about implementing a Digital Battlefield system in the age of **Rifts®** is the continued restricted access to space. This is because many of the aspects of the old system relied on observation satellites and GPS equipment. Since the CS can't use the old satellites nor put any new ones in orbit, they've had to find more earthly substitutes for these necessities. The first major breakthrough came decades ago in the spring of 43 P.A. when Northern Gun made their Nav-Com 1 navigation computer. But as good as it was, the system was too inaccurate for the detailed precision the CS required for their hyper-accurate combat needs. Building on that innovation and making several technical leaps of their own over the decades, the Coalition has recently come out with the next generation and most impressive of their own navigation systems, the Terra Nav-9. With all their new war machines equipped with the new system, and many of the older models being upgraded to accept the system, the CS military could finally get and utilize the level of detail and resolution needed to resurrect the Digital Battlefield.

With the Terra Nav-9, they are able to cross-reference locations and bearings with other combat vehicles that are also equipped with the CECS-7 (or Combat Event Coordination System). The coordination system functions much like the Aegis radar systems on CSN ships, such as the Improved IHA Sea Kings. Through radio transmissions containing compressed encoded data, two or more combat vehicles can share each other's readings collected from their respective sensors and information added by hand as needed. These manual additions can include a more specific "who" it is, clarified classifications, heading, threat levels, or denoting the presence of something that doesn't appear on sensors. These additions supplement the sensor's readings which automatically give a general ID and classification, exact position, estimated direction & speed of travel, and time of last sensor contact with the object. With these two systems working in conjunction, a single unit can access data well beyond their individual vehicle's sensor capabilities and range, acting as though the enemy were fighting a clairvoyant.

In large formations, companies of armored war machines can act almost like a colony of insects with a hive mind, with sensor data being relayed and relayed again to all available units. The forward-most part of the formation can relay information and enemy positions to those behind them, all the way back to the rearmost artillery units that can fire on opponents that they wouldn't have any way to see, scan or target on their own. In much the same way, other units can be directed to where they can do the most damage or be of the most help. Army Air Corps jets, sky/rocket cycles and Eagle Unmanned Aircraft can be, and

often are, used to quickly gather intelligence to be instantly relayed with a series of flybys during the course of a battle. In this capacity the EUA (originally listed in the CS Navy source book) are rapidly becoming one of the most widely used tools for gathering continuous battlefield intelligence over the most dangerous patches of sky. For larger, more important assaults and battles near CS cities and field army base camps, they can rely on the Coalition's sub-orbital satellite drones for much of their sensor data, though even that is still just one of many eyes in the air and on the ground.

All relayed data always includes the transmitting unit's position and ID in addition to their sensors' IFF details to avoid "friendly fire" incidents, or "fratricide" as it's commonly called by the troops. Should the IFF fail to positively ID a blip, it will be rendered in yellow, and the initial sensor operator can manually add extra information quickly in a couple of seconds. Hostile targets are rendered in a bright red while friendlies have medium blue blip-icons. The relayed data is time coded so the CECS-7 can disregard any redundant information, using the most current and relevant of any given area's sensor data, and so it can filter out other relays that might confuse the system. The time coding also serves a secondary purpose. Because the timestamp is the only part of the signals that aren't encrypted in any way, everyone to date has disregarded it as being anything more than what it appears to be. Never once has it ever occurred to anyone that it is actually the key input to the Coalition's frequency encryption. In effect, the numbers to that code are hidden right out in the open, and to date, no one has made the connection.

To reduce confusion and information overload for the person manning the sensors (usually the vehicle's communications officer or a lone pilot), after a blip-icon has been placed or refreshed on the monitor it immediately begins to fade. The sharper the icon the more current it is, whereas faded, ghostly ones could be significantly older and possibly irrelevant. Unless the sensor's operator instructs the computer to save the icon and its position until more recent information becomes available (it can be pulled up from memory too), the blip-icon will fade from the screen in a matter of 90 seconds. Only things identified as fixed structures (by the computer or operator), like buildings, roads, topographical features, and so forth, do not fade from the system, but their forms can be altered to denote radical changes from damage. However, it should be noted that with the system receiving multiple updates every second, given sufficient sensor coverage, icon fading doesn't happen all that often. But the right circumstances do arise often enough for the Coalition's sensor operators to learn how to gauge how old a reading is with a single glance. If the computer is instructed to leave a blip-icon on the screen and not fade, a numeric counter accompanies it to show how long it's been since its information was last refreshed and updated.

Having near omnipotent senses on the battlefield is desirable, but the ability to communicate and make requests through the same system is what makes the CECS-7 so efficient. For instance, a platoon in danger from a superior threat could call for help through a portable unit (TLOD, see below) carried by the communications officer, the commanding officer and/or N.C.O.s on site. With the depression of a short series of buttons they can relay the sensory information gathered by the device to others in

the area and can make a request for support from artillery, air strikes, armor, or additional troops. Conversely, once the distress call is received by the numerous units in the area, it can be responded to by a volunteer, a higher ranking officer could assign some units to the task, or it could go ignored or be put on hold due to other pressing matters. If the call for assistance is ignored or to be delayed, the distressed unit would be notified that help is not coming or how long they'd have to hold out before help can arrive.

With all this data available to battle groups, field armies, and all others down the chain, there is a risk of information overload. Soldiers and pilots only really want to know what's in their range of influence and maybe just a hair more, and that's it. They do not need to know what's fifty miles off in the distance to fight something that's no more than three hundred meters away. Long-range artillery are just the opposite, wanting to know what's well beyond visual range. And regardless of who they are, everyone appreciates knowing if something is coming for them or approaching their flank. Essentially, there is a limit to how much data is desirable, and that limit is different for every type of unit at varying times and in different situations, but is typically defined as their immediate surrounding area of influence. To address this problem the CS came up with a simple solution; they made the viewable scope of the CECS-7 systems adjustable. With a manipulation of the controls the operator can adjust the perceived focus of the sensors and relayed sensor data to cover a specific area, typically set at the vehicle's normal sensor range but able to encompass more if needed or desired. This enables them to take advantage of the Digital Battlefield technology and keeps things from getting out of hand. Should someone need to see the bigger picture, such as commanders in the field, generals directing movements, or the crew of a 'bot just wanting to see the road ahead better, the system can be set to view every bit of relayed data possible over expansive tracts of land. However, this isn't for everyone.

Large-scale conflicts sometimes use a command base with several command level people, each one either monitoring an area scaled up to cover the big picture, or tracking a specific group of units, constantly keeping them and their area of influence in the center of the screen. Such base camps are vulnerabilities though. So when it is deemed that command centers are necessary, they are either well protected or camouflaged as something else like a Mark 7 Slayer APC or supply truck. Some may think that all one need do to stymie an attack is take out one of these mobile command posts, but they'd be wrong. One of the strengths of the Coalition's CECS system is that it has no single weak link. Each properly equipped unit contributes to the overall. There is no one single target to take out to blind or disorganize the army. Destroy one and the overall effort is blinded by just that much and no more. Take out a command center (if there is one) and any of the individual units in the field or nearby are equipped to take over, though possibly not as well. Often the command structure makes one person in the field in charge of a platoon or more similar units. These people take care of the small specific details of their corner of the battlefield and dole out tactics to those under their control. A higher ranking officer elsewhere (either also in the field or in a command center) is in charge of those groups and either receives orders from a higher-up who focuses more on generalities and overall

strategy, leaving the details up to their subordinates, or calls the shots directly. Should any of the players be removed from the chain of command, another quickly and easily absorbs their responsibilities with a minimal of disturbance.

After the issue of making the chain of command as flexible and adaptable as practically possible, there was the issue of security. Their first line of defense is the radio signal used to transmit the data of the CECS-7 itself. A single frequency would be easy to break into or jam, making it less than secure, but several million frequencies are another matter altogether. To keep the signal secure, the systems' transmission frequency seemingly changes at random a thousand times every second up and down the bandwidth as described earlier. But, of course, it isn't random at all, otherwise the whole system wouldn't work. Inside the communications equipment of the units in the field are all the subsystems needed to encode and decode all their transmissions. Should any of this equipment be captured, there is the risk of the enemy using the information against Coalition troops, or possibly feeding false and misleading disinformation to them. This the CS could not risk, so safety measures and safeguards were put in place.

To curb the possibility of having a breach of their transmissions', security procedural precautions were added to make it much more difficult to enter data by hand. For starters, to relay sensor telemetry across the secured data-link, one simply has to flip a switch and it will automatically start broadcasting sensor readings to other units. But to manually enter data like the presence of an invisible menace or to assign a high threat level to a certain blip-icon, an instant security check is required for each entry. Every CECS-7 and communications system is keyed to the unique bio-electric signature of a specific operator upon assignment, usually the communications officer but also including a short list of technicians for maintenance purposes. The security system compares the bio-electric field of the user's fingers to the signatures on record (the new style of Dead Boy body armor was designed to allow its wearer's signature to be read through its gloves). In addition to that, every unit (including the TLOD handheld devices) has a "kill switch" capable of wiping all of the encryption codes & authorized ID signatures from the system and frying its circuitry. Once flipped, it is rendered completely useless to prevent coercion of the crew or capture of the equipment. The self-destruct also automatically engages if an unauthorized person attempts to tamper with the signature record or security system. Consequently, the system will not let the registered operator change or add any new signatures to the record, nor can those listed as authorized technicians operate the system beyond diagnostics and updating files.

In addition to the user security measures, the radio data-link transmissions utilize a triple-encoded encryption to prevent others from catching even a glimpse of the system's data, like CS troop positions and movements. This is based on the time-based 17 digit number generator and key equations, as mentioned before. On top of that, each fighting group (be it a Division, Regiment, Platoon, or whatever) has its own confirmation code that enables them to filter out all other telemetry if they want. Sometimes multiple confirmation codes are entered when two or more groups work together, but most of the time they select just one code for all. Though the key encryption sequence seldom changes, the confirmation code is altered frequently in the field.

So even if someone transmits their sensor data, true or false, its information would go unrecognized by the system unless it too had an up-to-date confirmation code. When active, the only thing that will be displayed is the telemetry transmissions from properly coded units. Should telemetry be available that isn't tagged with the right confirmation code, a small icon in the corner of the screen will appear, but most troops are leery of trusting anything it contains. If the situation requires, the confirmation codes can be deactivated so they can receive telemetry from every unit broadcasting in the area, but commanders are hesitant to do this given that their codes are their last line of defense against misinformation.

Finally, the CS wanted a way to quickly and easily update the files of every CECS and communications systems in their many vehicles *without* making it easy for the enemy to gain access in the same way. As such, all Coalition communications devices and Combat Event Coordination Systems are connected to a special ultra-short-range radio transmission array. The maximum range of this setup is only 10 feet (3 meters) so it's impossible to change any of the codes at any significant distances. As an added security precaution, each of the vehicle's systems must be manually directed to prepare to receive the new codes and abandon the old ones. This makes it impossible to trick their computers into dumping their encryptions at a crucial time or telling the enemy what codes are in use, assuming they're within the short range to try this to begin with. Once manually initiated, the communications computer transmits its own distinct confirmation code and waits for the "pineapple." When a PIEPEL (short for Portable Infield Encryption Programming Emission Legislater, a portable code reprogramming device specifically designed from this function), comes within the 10 foot transmitting range it receives the confirmation signal. This triggers the "pineapple" to send the new code package which is then instantly downloaded and put into use. The beauty of this whole process is that once all the appropriate buttons have been pushed the new codes are input and put into use in a finely split second once the "pineapple" comes into range. So when a group is set to receive their new codes (be it just the unit's confirmation code, the more complex encryption key equation, or whatever), it can be done with a push of a button and a quick flyby of a SAMAS holding a PIEPEL, and that's it.

Though quick, efficient, and secure, the down side of this system is that it could make every PIEPEL a potential treasure trove of vital information. And given that every piece of hardware will eventually fall into enemy hands (it's just a question of time), the CS needed to make these secure as well. To keep things simple, each encryption code-programming unit was designed to have no permanent memory. They only have volatile memory systems. That is to say, once the power is turned off, they lose ALL the data they once held. So the things are only turned on just prior to uploading them with the new codes, and they are immediately turned off when the job is done. Also, once activated they automatically key into the bio-electric signature of the first person who touches them. Should anyone else touch the "pineapple" after this it instantly turns off and loses all its stored information, though bumps from inanimate objects don't affect it. This necessitates them to be programmed and brought to the dispersing pilot in a special carrying tray. The "pineapples" can be programmed to automatically power-down

after receiving a given number of confirmation codes, but this requires them to have a precise accounting of what's in the current inventory, which isn't always possible. So to simplify things, every "pineapple" has a big, easy to flip power switch that the user can work at any time, which is usually used the moment the work is done. And just to be extra cautious, they were intentionally designed to have a short energy life, only able to be on and active for no more 45 minutes at a time, making the capture of one much less likely to be a critical breach of security. The only place in the field where a PIEPEL can be uploaded with the new codes is inside a Field Army's Firestorm mobile HQ (CTX-54 super tank). Of course, inside the fixed bases of the Coalition, the hangars and vehicle storage bays are littered with these devices, built right into the floors and ceilings, enabling them to change all the codes at once in an instant.

In its entirety, the Coalition's Digital Battlefield technology drastically improves the situational awareness of every member of its armed forces. What one scans, dozens to thousands of others will be aware of ten, thirty, or sometimes a hundred miles away. The only limitation is that there has to be a properly equipped unit within radio relay range, be it 'bot, vehicle, power armor, or drone.

Combat Coordination Vehicles

Essentially, these are Mark VII Slayer APCs, Death Bringer APCs, and a few Death's Head Transports that have had their troop bays filled with mass amounts of telemetry reading and communications equipment so they can serve as mobile command units. From any of these command units, major offensive and defensive actions can be coordinated down to the smallest detail. In these moving bunkers the CECS-7 systems allow the higher ranking officers to see exactly what is going on and issue orders to those in the field, be they troops, 'bots, artillery, aircraft or Skelebots. The six DHTs in this fleet are capable of coordinating all activities in, and relaying data out to, a 500 mile (800 km) radius from the air at altitude like a modern day AWACs or JSTAR aircraft, making them invaluable and highly guarded by the thousands of units under their control.

For smaller scale actions there are the refitted APCs. Externally, the Slayers and Death Bringers used in this capacity are 100% indistinguishable from those of the regular variety. They even move with the regular APCs and stay with the pack to complete the illusion. But should a coordination vehicle be somehow singled out and destroyed, or attacked and put out of commission by chance, other commanders in other coordination vehicles or those in the field can take over with minimal disruption in the flow of battle.

Sub-Orbital Satellite Drones

These helpful drones were originally part of the Coalition's communications and navigation network, but have been upgraded with improved radar and IR optical sensors. This enables them to also assist others in the tasks of target acquisition, mapping uncharted terrain, gathering detailed telemetry, and sometimes relaying information from and to the CECS units of the troops below. As the name suggests, the drones hover at high sub-orbital altitudes so they can transmit over mountains and Ley Lines, typically between 110,000 and 120,000 feet (33.5 to

36.6 km) above sea level. In conjunction with their stealth features (undetected from ground based sensors and hefty penalties on sensors in close proximity in the air), this makes them incredibly hard to find and virtually impossible to shoot down. Unhindered by obstacles and threats, their downward looking optical sensors see everything with an unblinking eye, and their ground penetrating radar arrays can target and identify objects as deep as 35 feet (10.7 m) under the surface of the earth, all in addition to their regular navigation and communications duties.

Electronic Aided Artillery

"Artillery is the god of war." – Joseph Stalin

The war years were hard on the Coalition States and its brave soldiers for a variety of reasons. The Glitter Boy Legions of Free Quebec and their army of battle-savvy troops proved to be more of a fight than the CS Army ever thought. On the Western Front the terrifying Iron Juggernauts and near-fanatical magic warriors of Tolkeen managed to blacken the eye of the Death's Head's image of invincibility. Though the war was hard fought in the West, and peace settled in the East, the CS did win out in the end, but at a much steeper price than they imagined. There were many contributing factors for this, including the intelligence failures that allowed Quebec to hide their true capabilities and Tolkeen to conceal their secret weapons of magic. Even so, there was little the CS Army could do about most of these deficiencies as they were under the domain of Chi-Town and politics, and not the military per se. But there was one deficiency the Army's leaders could address: artillery.

The ability to reach out with long-range explosive ordnance and put the hurt on someone has been a staple of military strategy since well before the First World War, Napoleon's campaign of conquest, or even the days of the Spanish armada. However, despite this history the Coalition States had reservations about using unguided long-range weapons because of a long standing (pre-Joseph Prosek) preference for programmable missiles. Though more expensive, missiles can be locked on to a

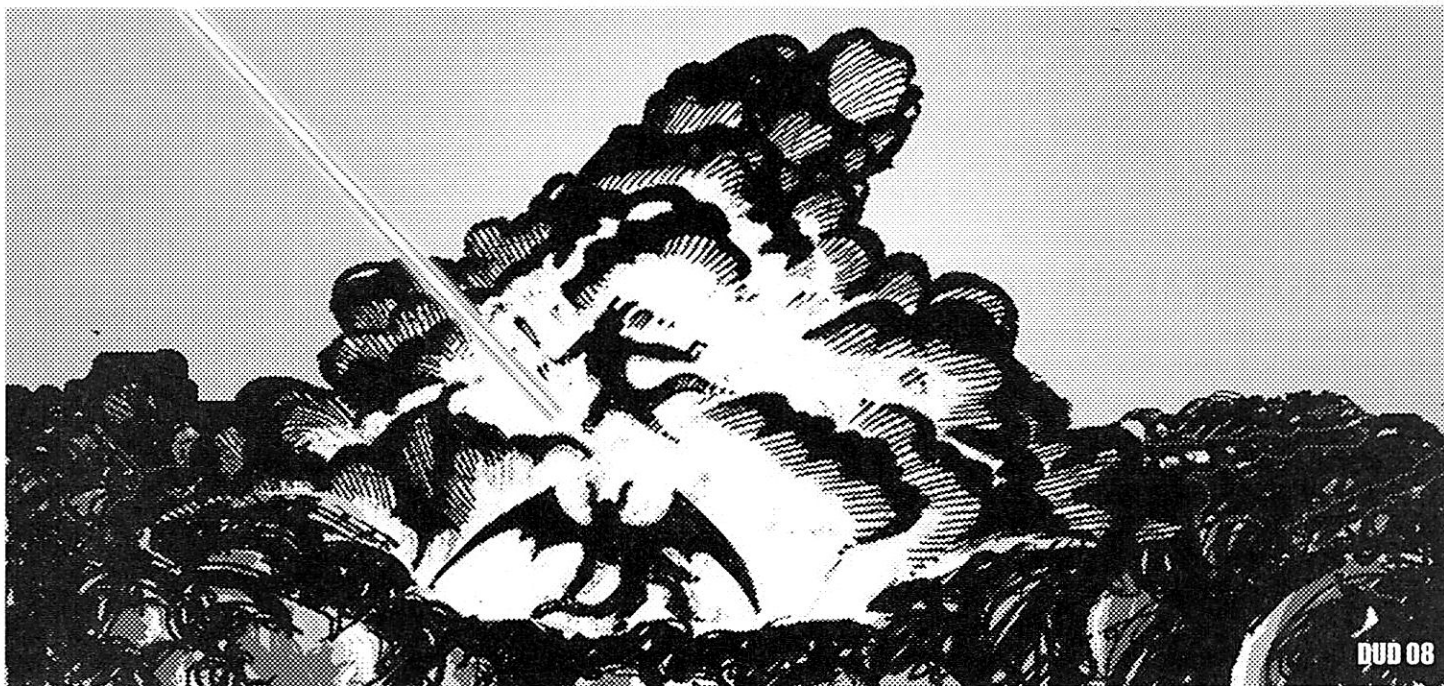
specific target or target area with no vulnerable spotters at risk, can be rerouted in flight, and more importantly, are accurate at great ranges on the first shot. But thanks to new innovations and technological breakthroughs, like the systems surrounding the Digital Battlefield, in addition to reasons of practicality, in the latter months of the war this policy was amended, much to the dread of the many enemies of the Coalition.

With infantry and other units deployed over large expanses of land, the Coalition's military forces will always need additional firepower to help guarantee victory over enemy forces, whether they be on the offense or defense. This is where the use of long-range artillery and hyper-accurate fire control comes into play. Be it from a nearby Abolisher (A, B or C) or a strategically placed firebase, additional firepower is just a radio call away.

CS Artillery Firebase

A firebase is an collection of mobile conventional artillery pieces usually made up of two to four batteries, with each battery consisting of six GR-155 EM Howitzers (total of 12 to 24 cannons), though some also use CM-80A Mortars as well for close in work (see *Rifis® Sourcebook 4: Coalition Navy*, page 61). With a simple call for help they can either lay down fire on a grid coordinate radioed in from the field, or the gunners can assist with more accurate fire using their own Combat Event Coordination System. This system of calling in for artillery support is so quick and efficient that some of the enemies of the Coalition have started calling it the "Dead Boy Death Spell" because it kind of works like magic. They speak the specific words that command forth powers from beyond, and soon after, it begins to rain explosive death and destruction from above, and there is nothing one can do to stop it!

The central bunker is a prefabricated structure that can be airlifted into place in a few parts by helicopters or transports. Its main function is to coordinate the actions of the batteries to make the best use of their capabilities. After a clearing for a firebase has been made (and preferably leveled), it's simply a



DVD 08

matter of airlifting in the cannons and the disassembled bunker and putting everything in place. In this manner a complete firebase can be erected in as much as half a day to as fast as an hour! How fast one is set up is dictated by how urgently one is needed in a given area, and they can be broken down and removed twice as fast as they're erected. The central bunker is not only where the gunnery crews eat, sleep and relax, but also the central nervous system to the entire firebase. In it is a redundant system of CECS-7 units, a small radome (radar with a 50 mile/80 km radius), a communications system (500 mile/800km range), and munitions that are stored in a special room that will protect the men and women around it in case of an accident. There is also a small arms locker with enough weapons for every single person there and more than enough E-Clips to go around.

An artillery firebase is manned by 93 to 165 people, the majority of whom are there to operate the cannons and handle the munitions. The rest are there to give the orders, receive and send communications, monitor the sensor data collected by their own radar and that gathered by the CECS-7 system, or guard against those that would attack the firebase for whatever gain they think they can get. The typical breakdown of the personnel is as follows:

Command Staff: 3 (a Captain and two Lieutenants).

Communications Officers: 3

Medic Technical Officers: 9

Sensor and Telemetry Data Relay Operators: 6

Perimeter Security: 8 to 16 in non-flying PA and 4 to 8 in SAMAS.

Gunners and Gunners' Mates: 36 to 72 (3 per cannon).

Ammo Gophers: 24 to 48 (2 per cannon).

Note that others may be present for whatever reason, such as support units like the new Abloisher "C"s for added protection and additional firepower, or a Death Bringer APC there to resupply the base camp.

Being a semi-fixed site, there is one danger to the firebase. It's highly likely that sooner or later one will draw fire and fall under attack. Consequently, beyond the normal artillery personnel, there is a contingent of soldiers, Dog Boys, and troops in power armor to defend the base. The actual number of defensive troops at any firebase is proportional to the base's size, its level of importance, and how dangerous the area is. Typically, they have a Platoon of troops per battery, and an equal number of Skelebots as well.

The GR-155 EM Howitzer

The muscle of the firebase is provided by the Coalition's primary artillery field piece, the GR-155 Electromagnetic Howitzer. The cannon is a stationary piece of artillery that uses the magnetic accelerating principles of a rail gun to fire a 155mm projectile. With the implementation of the tools of the Coalition's Digital Battlefield tech, a new shell was developed and put into widespread use, the Omen. This shell extends the artillery's reach out from 18 miles (28.8 km) to a maximum range of 31¼ miles (50 km), better than a fifty percent increase over the older *Leviathan 155R-A118* series pioneered by the CS Navy's Nautical Infantry. The new *Omen 155R-Ex227AP, P, F, C, and*

S shells (letter designations listed in order as listed below) incorporate a rocket boosting motor to give it better reach that can also be used to change the shell's flight path in the air, and a radiation-seeking sensor node for targeting assistance. This enables it to better compensate for the wind and home in on its programmed target site, or seek out target designation from the troops on the ground when instructed to do so. In effect, the CS has fielded a cross between a guided missile and cannon round that is economical to use en masse and deadly accurate.

Each GR-155 Howitzer is a model of complexity in design, simplicity in function, and ease of use. To aim the cannon the main gunner uses the weapon's integrated CECS, and selects a target. Then the gunner selects the option of whether he wants the shell to get there as directly and quickly as possible, use sickle fire (see below), or mercy fire (see below), and then the howitzer aims itself appropriately, automatically. If the CECS isn't operating or if the older Leviathan rounds are to be used, then the chief gunner needs to enter the exact firing solution by hand into the terminal. After those two factors are punched into the system and the big gun is ready, the gunner depresses the big, red fire button. While the chief gunner is doing all that, the battery's two gunner's mates manually load the cannon's magazine. The magazine feeds the rounds downward and has an open top, allowing them to continually top it off and keep it loaded. As such, even though the GR-155 has a reserve of five shells, the gunner's mates are absolutely critical for sustained fire.

Because the Omen shells are a kind of smart weapon, they can be fired with a minimal amount of aiming of the cannon's barrel. In fact, the shells can be fired as much as 90 degrees off in relation to the actual direction to the target, and still home in on its mark with near perfect precision. Because of this the Coalition has developed a new strategy in affecting artillery barrage called "Sickle Fire." While, like normal dumb shells, the Omens can arc high over terran obstacles in what is called indirect fire, the smart ordnance can also circle around and strike from the side as well. Of course, this roundabout path eats into the distance the shell can travel on a linear measurement, but it allows them to avoid endangering "friendlies" that might ordinarily be under the shell's flight path. This can greatly reduce friendly fire mishaps or make the enemy think they're attacking from a different direction entirely. Alternately, they can position their units to the enemy's side flank some miles off and barrage their rear as the troops and tanks attack from the front. It's even possible to position the cannon at the foot of a large hill and shoot around it, remaining safe from a rear attack. The applications of Sickle Fire are without limit and are sure to give the CS Army an additional edge in the years to come.

Another thing the cannons can do is engage in "Mercy Fire." When a shell is fired, it arcs high into the air and comes down on its target. The higher the arc, the more time it takes for the shell to reach the target. Because of the level of automation in the aiming and reloading of the GR-155, it can change the angle of its barrel's aim and fire relatively quickly. As such, it is possible to fire one round at a steep angle, lower the barrel, fire again at a slightly lower angle (and perhaps a lower velocity), and again up to three more times. When done just right, all the shells will reach the target at exactly the same time, inflicting a multiple round simultaneous impact, or M.R.S.I. for short (pronounced "mercy"). This allows even a single cannon to inflict a

tremendous amount of damage on its first strike while maintaining the element of surprise. The rounds may all strike the same target or can be dispersed over a small area for better coverage. But either way, the attack is as brutal as it is sudden and without warning. However, because the first shell must arc so high into the sky, the overall range of the Mercy Fire is reduced by a third. But on the plus side, this attack can be conducted with either the old Leviathan or new Omen shells, and with the Omens can be combined with Sickle Fire, though the additional reduction in range will severely hamper their reach.

Regardless of how they're fired, the shells travel to their targets very quickly. The older Leviathan shells travel at the speed of 3,500 feet per second (1,067 m/s), fast enough to be fired five miles (8 km) away and hit their target in just half a melee round on a relatively linear path. That gives them the ability to be effective in tactical artillery support from that range given the fast pace of small skirmishes. But beyond that their timely effectiveness begins to diminish. That's why the Omen shells were made to be faster. With an added boost in flight from their guidance rockets and improved aerodynamics, the Omen flies through the air going twice the speed of the older Leviathans, effectively doubling their range of immediate influence in the tactical support role.

Once fired, nothing shy of an impeding physical barrier can stop the shells from reaching their target. *Nothing!* Even with the advances in radar tracking and laser technology, the artillery shell is the most reliable means of bringing the fight to the enemy. In the past this wasn't always so. In the early 21st century, such anti-artillery systems were developed, capable of shooting the shells out of the air in mid-flight. But as in all things, for every countermeasure there is another just around the corner to counter it. In this case, all artillery shells since the Golden Age of Man have been made invisible to radar, making them impossible to track and shoot down. This is done through the use of stealth techniques of continuous curvature and radar-absorbing materials in the shells' design. The Coalition has continued this tradition and added an exhaust cooling element to the Omen's rocket to ensure that nothing stands in the way of its fury.

Away from a firebase, being used as individually towed artillery pieces, the EM Howitzers are versatile and deathly accurate. The key to their usage in this role is their integrated navigation systems and independent CECS-7 modules. When the crew decides to stop to set up the cannon and commence firing, the gun itself already "knows" exactly where it is. As soon as the weapon system is pointed in the right general direction and its two stabilizing legs planted on the ground, the crew of three can begin firing immediately, limited only by their supply of ammunition. And of which, given that these GR-155s are towed by either a Mark V or Mark VII APC, and that each of its rounds weighs only 99 lbs (44.6 kg), they can bring along a standard payload of either 240 or 660 shells respectively.

The following is based on the text detailed in *The Rifter*® #3, page 111, and the Errata & Clarifications section of the Palladium Books web site, but is not a verbatim copy.

Primary Purpose: Assault and Fire Support.

Secondary Purpose: Anti-Ship, Anti-Armor and Anti-Monster.

Shell Types: *Armor Piercing Shells:* Used primarily by the Navy for anti-ship combat, whereas the Army reserves their use

for defense of the firebase itself should it come under attack. AP Shells inflict 3D6x10 M.D. to a 10 foot (3 m) blast radius.

Plasma Shells: Such shells are favored by the Army and best for bombarding shorelines, enemy fortifications, and armored formations (or the equivalent of) and inflict 1D6x50 M.D. to a 50 foot (15.2 m) blast radius.

Fragmentation Shells: These shells are good for general bombardment, antipersonnel, and cheap saturation fire. Also, because they bombard their victims with physical shrapnel, the frags are also excellent anti-magic weapons to overcome the common defensive spell "Impervious to Energy." They inflict 2D6x10 M.D. to a 70 foot (21 m) blast radius.

Chemical Shells: These shells can be loaded with tear gas, fire retardant foam, or whatever is deemed appropriate for the situation. In the event that the Coalition High Command ever decides that chemical warfare is acceptable, these ready-made shells will be their delivery system. Rumor has it that Lone Star's Dr. Bradford already has a nasty biological agent that floats in the air like a heavy gas, eats through M.D.C. substances like salt through a slug, and has a life span of twenty minutes before it dies and becomes inert. Again, this is only a rumor.

Other Shells: Illumination shells are used to light up an area like flares. Smoke shells create small clouds of vision-obscuring smoke over a 300 foot (90 m) radius.

Rate of Fire: A trained crew of three can load and fire the cannon four (4) times per melee round. The automated tracking and targeting system that is tied into the central bunker's CECS-7 system can traverse and elevate the EM cannon, getting it on target in four seconds, while micro-adjustments take no significant amount of extra time. If done by hand (which they have to do from time to time), it takes the crew ten seconds between shots.

Effective Range: 31¼ miles (50 km). When engaging in Sickle Fire the maximum range is dictated by the just how wide of a circle the shell has to travel. If aimed a full 90 degrees off from the target and making the Omen shells fly in a full half circle before impact, the farthest they can reach is 19.9 miles (31.8 km) as measured in a linear A to B manner, though the actual flight path is longer. If made to soar through a quarter circle, firing only 45 degrees off the target's location, they can strike targets as distant as 28.1 miles (45 km). However, the shells can be lobbed at any angle from 0-90 degrees, with these two being provided to aid in estimations. When using Mercy Fire, because of the necessarily high arc of the first shell, the overall range of the strike is reduced by a third. The old *Leviathan* series of shells, which will remain in use till the large stockpiles run out, has a maximum range of 18 miles (28.8 km), and can not engage in Sickle Fire.

Payload: The GR-155 itself has a 5 round magazine integrated into its auto-loading system. It is the job of the gunner's mates to keep that magazine topped off at all times for sustained fire. As for the reserve the gunner's mates draw from to reload the magazine, each branch of the CS military is different. The Navy likes theirs to have 210 shells available per cannon, including 90 AP shells, 60 plasma shells, 30 fragmentation shells, 15 illumination shells and 15 smoke shells. The Army sees no use for the AP shells in long range engagements, but does like it for defending the firebase on the occasions it comes under attack, es-

pecially against armor and 'bots that are in visual range. A firebase will have in excess of 1,000 various rounds for each battery stored in carts of 32 that are wheeled out to the respective cannons by Ammo Gophers. An Ammo Gopher is usually a 'Borg, specially programmed Skelebot, or someone in power armor (typically stripped down, Old Style SAMAS or the newer Mauler). Each battery *always* has two carts ready to go 24/7, covered by tarps; typically one full of Armor Piercing shells and one full of either Plasma shells or Fragmentation shells.

Strike Penalty: -2 to hit targets or target areas smaller than a truck. When they miss, the shell lands up to 1D6 yards/meters from its intended mark, which is still usually well within the blast radius. Direction can be either determined on a D6 if using a hex map or a D8 where each digit represents 45 degrees off of north, and the "8" is 360 degrees due north.

IAR-2C "Abolisher" Assault Robot and Artillery Platform

Another piece of weaponry that entered into service in the final months of the Tolkeen War is the IAR-2C, an improved and more deadly version of the mobile artillery platform, the Abolisher. Where the "A" model added an enhanced sensor package, and the "B" model employed an improved layer of armor and increased its cannons' payload (*Coalition War Campaign*, page 134), the new "C" model implements improved weapons and the ability to take full advantage of the new Digital Battlefield system. These new capabilities help differentiate the Abolisher C's role in the field from such war machines as the Skull Smasher and Hellraiser, which have surpassed the original Abolisher "A" and "B" models' effectiveness in front-line combat.

The primary weapon of the third generation Abolisher is the new CE-144 Auto-Cannon. The new cannons are similar to the venerable C-144s except the newer artillery pieces have an electro-magnetic booster, essentially making them a hybrid of a large-scale rail gun and a conventional howitzer. This combination increases the effective range of traditional shells twofold. Also, the application of EM fields extends beyond the barrels and into the auto-loading system. There it is used to take some of the strain off the mechanical system by alleviating some weight and making the shells' movements almost frictionless. The end result in this is an auto-loading system that operates 50% faster! But the improvements don't end there.

The Coalition's enhanced explosives applications have trickled down from missiles and ballistic grenades to the IAR-2's 144mm shells in the development of the new 144SS-72TXS shell. However, the increased power was not used to give the shell more punch, per se. It was deemed that the additional power would go to better use as the round's propellant to further increase speed and range. The range of the shells is further extended by more advanced aerodynamic designs which include a disintegrating partial armature base (making the new shells resemble a bullet when loaded and an elongated football when fired in the air). A dozen short fin-wings that spring out in flight, and a gyroscopically-aided micro-computer guidance system also add to the shell's range and dead on accuracy. And of course, like the Omen, it too has a radiation-seeking sensor node

for targeting assistance, and can be used to engage in Mercy Fire and Sickie Fire. Due to its lower rate of fire than that of the GR-155, each cannon can hit with no more than three rounds in Mercy Fire, but when using double blasts, this can be increased to six. When fired from the older C-144 cannons of the IAR-2 "A" and "B," the shells can be directed at targets as far out as 26,000 feet (7,925 m), roughly five miles (half that from a CTX-20 Grinning Skull MBT). When fired from the new CE-144 however, the range of the new 144mm shell is 53,000 feet (16,154 m), just a hair over ten miles.

As it was noted before, the destructive power of the shells were not increased per se, but they were made more effective. The armor piercing warheads on the previous generation of 144mm shells have been succeeded by an anti-personnel concussion warhead that utilizes NGR "Slammer" technology. These warheads inflict 2D4x10 M.D. to their target and 1D4x10 M.D. to everything in their 50 foot (15.2 m) blast radius. Also, every living being caught inside of 30 feet (9 m) of the explosion also has an 88% likelihood of being knocked off their feet and a 65% probability of being stunned (add +10% to both rolls if hit by a double blast). And given that "Slammer" tech was originally developed to combat large creatures like dragons, Gargoyles, and Elementals, large and heavy targets as big as Gargoyle Lords and Adult Dragons *are* susceptible to the "Slammer" effect as well. This includes supernatural creatures and those in power armor massing as much as much as three tons. Reduce the rolls by -1% for every tenth of a ton (200 lbs/90 kg) of the target *in excess of three tons*. Those in environmentally shielded vehicles and robot vehicles are immune to the stunning effects of the concessive force, and only things as heavy as thirteen tons or more are completely immune to the knockdown effect.

[*Paragraph excerpted from Rifts® World Book 5: Triax & The NGR, page 70*] If only knocked down, the victim of this attack will have ringing ears and a headache, but only loses one melee action/attack and initiative. A victim of a direct hit is *always* knocked off his feet. If stunned, the victim is dazed, -10 to strike, parry, dodge, roll with impact or punch, is the last to attack (no initiative), and loses half his attacks/actions per melee round for 1D4 melee rounds! Speed is also reduced by half during this period.

Because the new 144SS-72TXS shells have a significant explosive radius that reaches well into the 20 foot (6 m) blind spot of the Abolisher's cannons, an alarm sounds when any of the cannons are aimed at anything on the ground that's within 55 feet (16.8 m) or closer. This was a safety measure to ensure the IAR-2C's gunners don't accidentally damage the robot vehicle should they be forced to fire at point-blank range. Should the crew need to defend themselves in close quarters, the new IAR-2Cs have a limited supply of 40 defensive Armor Piercing shells in a special magazine that the auto-loading system can draw from for short-range engagements. The 144SS-88AP shells are even stubbier than any other 144mm round before it because they do not have a propellant charge. The AP shells are completely dependent on the EM booster of the new cannons to fling them at their target, making them incompatible with the older C-144 cannons of the early model Abolishers. This also means that they have a very short range compared to the 144SS-72TXS shells or even the old-fashioned 144SS-6AP

shells. But what the stout, new AP shells lack in range, they more than make up for in firepower.

In addition to these, a third kind of shell was added to the C's arsenal with a specific kind of threat in mind. The 144SS-91FS rounds are mid-sized Fragmentation shells made to shower foes with deadly shrapnel. These rounds have exactly the same shape and size of the Slammers, making them fully interchangeable and allowing the crews to mix and match shell types as they please in the 'bot's normal magazines. Though no more lethal than the new slammer shells, they can do something the new ones never could; hurt spell casters who are using the incantation of "Impervious to Energy." Because the Frags are not considered to be the primary weapon of the Abolishers, the walking artillery platforms usually carry less of them into battle than the Slammers.

Because of the Abolisher's original stated function of being there to support the troops in the field, its original 144SS-6AP shells were made to be light and swift through the air. As such, they had an impressive average velocity of 4,400 feet per second (1,341 m/s), enabling them to have only three seconds between discharge and impact at maximum range. However, with improved range came the need for improved speed. Thanks to its enhanced aerodynamics and more potent propellant, the new 144SS-72TXS and 144SS-91FS rounds attain speeds that are better than twice that, cutting through the air at 9,843 feet per second (3,000 m/s)! These Mach nine projectiles are able to reach out and strike opponents out to the big gun's maximum effective range in just half a melee round from "Fire!" to arrival. Alternately, because the defensive 144SS-88AP shells are less streamlined and lack any propellant whatsoever, they are only a third as fast as their fellows.

To further augment the Abolisher C's defenses, a more modern CR-2T laser turret, like the one employed by the Spider-Skull Scout, has replaced the older and woefully inadequate CR-3T laser. The main role of this belly gun is to take out minor threats that get too close, but it also serves as the robot's main defense against incoming missiles. But even with the improved defenses, all Abolishers are to be mated with an escort of two Terror Troopers or Hellfires to cover their limitations.

With its enhanced capabilities, the Abolisher C has been given several new missions, filling many holes in the Coalition Army's TOE (Table of Organization and Equipment). The primary role of the IAR-2C is to back spearhead movements by armor and infantry alike, functioning as a support artillery/counter-artillery battery on legs. With mobile artillery platforms such as the Abolisher C following their movements, enemy artillery and counter-movements can be quickly and easily countered in turn. Officers, via CECS-7 coordination computer systems, can also easily direct support fire as needed. In this role the Abolishers will not be used as shock troopers as their predecessors were, but won't be far behind, so they can support such actions from a safer distance. With a simple flyby of the target by a scout, the walking cannon platforms can immediately begin their deadly barrage from distances well beyond visual range and that of ground-target radar thanks, in part, to the Coalition's Digital Battlefield tech. Another role the "C" model Abolishers will fill is that of an anti-aircraft battery alongside units such as CTX-52 Sky Sweepers, Mark IX Missile Launcher Vehicles, and CTX-53 Ballistas. It's been determined that in this role the

enhanced cannons and shells of the Abolisher C can reach targets as high up as 25,000 feet (7.6 km), well beyond the effective range of the Sky Sweeper's lasers and with a price tag well below that of missiles of comparable abilities. However, though the use of missiles is more expensive, they do have a higher probability of hitting. Third among its new roles, the improved combat robots will be deployed as supplemental and support units of the Coalition's firebases. Since a firebase is fixed in position, it is vulnerable to enemy attacks. The presence of an Abolisher is often a good deterrent to keep would-be attackers at bay. Should someone attack, the IAR-2C's more infantry-oriented ordnance is usually sufficient to repel most enemy offensives. Also, their CE-144 cannons can assist the bigger GR-155 electromagnetic howitzers with artillery support within their more limited range.

Future plans for the "D" model, still on the chalkboard, call for upping the caliber of the Abolisher's main guns to 155mm so it can start using the Omen shells, though this is expected to reduce the rate of fire by a third and the payload by half. Along similar lines, there is talk of doing this for the IAR-3 Skull Smasher, replacing its disappointing particle beam cannons with short barrel GR-155s for its "A" model update in 113 P.A.

All statistical data of the "C" model Abolisher is identical to that listed in *Rifts® World Book 11: Coalition War Campaign*, with the following exceptions:

Statistical Data: The added mass from the new cannons and a smaller seventh magazine made the Abolisher gain weight. It now weighs in at 64 tons fully loaded. But a minor upgrade in the efficiency in its legs has enabled it to maintain its previous running speed of 70 mph (112 km).

Weapon Systems

1. CE-144 Auto-Cannons (6): The Abolisher C's main weapons are the six, automatic, self-loading cannons that encircle the area above its shoulders. The enhanced cannons make use of magnetic fields to boost both range and performance. Each cannon has a 90 degree rotation from side to side and up and down, and retains its 20 foot (6 m) blind spot of coverage above the robot's head and from its feet. This gives each cannon a favorable arc of fire, enabling them to attack targets on the ground and sky, near or far, and the ability to assume the 45 degrees of elevation that is so ideal for long range fire. In an emergency, the pilot and/or co-pilot can fire the cannons, but the number of attacks are reduced to a third (one attack per melee).

Primary Purpose: Long-Range Assault, Artillery Support and Anti-Aircraft.

Secondary Purpose: Defense.

Weight: 2 tons each.

Mega-Damage by Shell Type: *Slammer Concussion 144SS-72TXS Shells:* A blast from a single cannon does 2D4x10 M.D. to the target and 1D4x10 M.D. to everything in a 50 foot (15.2 m) radius in addition to the "Slammer" effect as described above. Double blasts (two cannons firing simultaneously at the same target) inflict 4D4x10 M.D. to the target and 2D4x10 M.D. to everything in a 30 foot (9.1 m) radius in addition to the "Slammer" effect, which has a +10% bonus.

Fragmentation Anti-Magic/Anti-Personnel 144SS-91FS Shells: Each Frag inflicts 2D4x10 M.D. to the target and half that to everything in a 45 foot (13.7 m) radius, with a double blast doing twice the normal damage (4D4x10 M.D.). Alternately, the shells can be set to air-burst some 45 feet above a target, resulting in a shower of deadly shrapnel some 64 feet (19.5 m) in radius on the ground directly below. While extending the blast radius by about 40%, the air-burst also means that no single target takes a direct hit and thus full damage.

Armor Piercing Defensive 144SS-88AP Shells: 2D6x10+30 M.D. from a single blast and 5D6x10 M.D. from a simultaneous dual blast from two cannons. The AP explosives have a blast radius of only 10 feet (3 m) due to the focused nature of their charge.

Old-Fashioned 144SS-6AP Shells: Though old and obsolete, the CS still has stockpiles of these previous generation munitions, and they will be used on occasion just so the army can get rid of them. The old shells do 2D4x10 M.D. from a single blast and 4D4x10 M.D. from a double blast. They have no significant blast radius to speak of in the Mega-Damage range.

Rate of Fire: 3, 6, 9, or 18 times. Each cannon can fire once every five seconds, three times per melee round, for a total of 18 single shots or nine double shots. However, to rapid-fire all 18 shots at the same target will mean having to rotate the entire upper body, repositioning each cannon every time, making the last six single or three double blasts -3 to strike. This also means the top hatch gunner and the lower laser can *not* attack for the entire melee round. Also, during the next melee round, the IAR-2C can only fire a total of twelve single shots or six doubles; however, the following melee it may use its full allotment of melee attacks once again.

To fire at one target without rotating the body means two cannons can fire for a total of six single shots or three double blasts per melee round. Of course, it can train its other four cannons on two to four different targets simultaneously in the rear and/or to the sides. One of the advantages of the Abolisher is that it can engage enemies on all sides simultaneously!

Effective Range: 53,000 feet (16,154 m), just a hair over ten miles. However, the cannons' accuracy is not as efficient beyond its shorter to medium ranges. Out to 10,000 feet (3,048 m) there are no penalties thanks to the IAR-2C's state-of-the-art targeting system. From 10,000 to 25,000 feet (3,048-7,620 m) the shells are at -3 to hit their targets. Anything beyond 25,000 feet has a -6 penalty to strike. The defensive Armor Piercing shells lack any propellant of their own and are 100% reliant on the EM booster systems. Also, the stubbier shells are much less aerodynamic because it was deemed that it was more important for them to be compact and streamlined in design. Thus their maximum range is a pathetic (for artillery that is) 7,500 feet (2,286 km), less than half of the old-fashioned shells' improved 20,000 feet (6,096 m).

Payload: Like its predecessors, the "C" model Abolisher has six primary magazines, with each one containing a payload of 40 shells. Four of the magazines store 160 Slammer shells, while the other two magazines store 80 Fragmentation shells. However, it should be noted that if a mission calls for it, the main magazines can be loaded with any combination of ordnance de-

sired. The overall payload can be distributed to any of the six cannons automatically at will, though typically each weapon draws on one magazine at a time. The gunners can also divert payloads from one gun to another (e.g. if the forward guns' ammunition is nearly exhausted while the side cannons' payloads are full, they can have the loading system move the side cannons' payloads to the front). This allows them to diversify each magazine's load as desired. There are also 40 of the stubby, defensive 144SS-88AP Armor Piercing shells in a smaller seventh magazine. The auto-loading system can distribute these shells to any of the cannons as needed or desired.

2. CR-2T Dual Laser Turret (1, Belly Gun): The belly gun was upgraded to something more capable since, in the past, the belly gun had often been all that stood between the Abolisher and destruction due to the cannons' 20 foot blind spot. The superior lasers will protect the robot war machine from small, quick opponents that can make use of the blind spot, as well as defend the 'bot against missile attacks. This weapon is commonly operated by either the co-pilot or third rear gunner, but any of the crew can operate the laser except the communications officer.

Primary Purpose: Anti-Personnel.

Secondary Purpose: Missile Defense.

Mega-Damage: 5D6 M.D. per dual blast.

Range: 2,000 feet (610 m).

Rate of Fire: Equal to the gunner's combined number of hand to hand attacks per melee (usually 4-6).

3. Special Sensory Systems of Note:

1. CECS-7: The Combat Event Coordination System is the heart of the Coalition's Digital Battlefield. It gives the crew access to the sensor readings of their fellow units, greatly extending their sensor range and effectiveness. The system also enables the crew to know which of their fellow soldiers need assistance and allows them to let others know if they need assistance themselves. The system can be used to inform others what it is that's attacking them, where it is, and the approximate numbers of the enemy. And of course, it allows the IAR-2C to attack targets well beyond their sensor range, or those that may be obscured from their sensors, but not others. See the Digital Battlefield section above for more.

2. Terra Nav-9: This state-of-the-art navigation system allows the crew to know exactly where they are and has their position displayed on a digital map. Their location is accurate within a two yard/meter margin of error and the digital maps stored in the computer include the entirety of Coalition territory as well as five hundred miles (800 km) beyond, thanks to decades of surveying. The maps are updated every year or as needed.

3. E-Clip Recharging System: Located just above the "ankles" between the 'bot's legs are two E-Clip recharging banks, one in each leg concealed behind an armored panel. Each of the two banks can be loaded with up to nine E-Clips to be recharged at the usual rates using the 'bot's heavy-duty nuclear energy supply. But should the Abolisher need to power up its power-demanding weapons to fight, the process is put on pause until the 'bot can spare the energy again (sensory equipment, environmental systems, and regular travel aren't a problem). This

feature was added to alleviate some of the logistics problems encountered during the Tolkeen campaign, and to better ensure troops were never too far from fresh munitions for their weapons.

The Soldier's Edge

Though the Coalition has a vast inventory of combat vehicles and armors, for the most part their military is an infantry oriented fighting force. As such, while the new Digital Battlefield tech greatly improves armored and long-range units' ability to coordinate and their efficiency, without applying the new technology to the common soldier it wouldn't be even half as effective as it could be otherwise. Armed with this information-based gear and being able to take advantage of the broad reach and list of options it bestows, a squad that was dangerous before becomes mind-bogglingly deadly now.

Because of the economics involved in equipping an entire army of over a million human and Dog Boy soldiers, the CS High Command decided to cut costs by applying the new systems on a squad by squad basis instead of soldier by soldier. Consequently, on the telemetry broadcast over the Combat Event Coordination System, their blip-icons represent the general location of the whole squad. Individuals can still be seen on closer inspection (for those who adjust their system's scope of view accordingly), but in the big picture they usually appear to be one big blob of overlapping icons with one collective name, that being the squad's official designation.

In all, there are four new tools of the trade for the Coalition's soldiers, them being the Tac-Load, the RFE Tags, the CP-40 Alpha 2, and the Recon Rat. Though budget-minded for the most part, all four were designed to make the soldiers of every squad participating members of the CS Digital Battlefield, capable of contributing to the overall whole and have the overall whole help them in return.

TLOD Comm-Units (a.k.a. "Tac-Load" or "Rat Master")

A Target Location and Observation Device is a small, handheld unit typically given to a platoon's commanding officer, the platoon sergeant, each of the platoon's squad leaders, and the communications officer. Upon issuance, each is keyed to its user's unique bio-electric signature and that of the platoon's commanding officer. Should anyone else try to use it, it will self-destruct, frying its components and circuitry. The device enables these authorized users to collect and use surveillance & telemetry data, to call for help or rescue, or instantly report any surveillance. The TLOD can send data to others' Combat Event Coordination Systems or other TLOD comm-units so long as someone is there to receive the transmission within the comm-unit's 20 mile (32 km) range.

What the TLOD does is use elements of the Terra Nav-9 system to determine its user's position, and an internal micro-radar array to determine the location of all others in the area up to 1¼ miles (2 km) away. All of which is computed, analyzed and instantly overlaid on a digital map with no more effort than a push

of a button. The operator can then touch the holographic readout displayed in the air to select a blip or general area. A push of a button on the unit can then designate the selection with an identification or classification, as well as input other pieces of information like their numbers and the direction they're heading if it's not already readily apparent to the device. The Tac-Load's IFF system has an 85% chance of correctly identifying what its micro-radar detects. For those items that are not identified, the user can use the Sensory Equipment skill to try to determine just what it is and can then add that information by hand to the telemetry, done by holding a second button and finger-writing right on the holographic projection (either in American or a simple code). Depressing the third button relays all the gathered and entered data to other CS units in the area. Before transmitting, a request for help can be added which will make the relayed icon of their position flash and display a smaller icon by it denoting the kind of assistance they are asking for. And also, like all the other units, the portable unit can receive telemetry from others as well. However, it should be noted that the telemetry doesn't have to be transmitted. It is possible that any radio transmissions might be detected and betray the squad's position. Even if this is the case (and most of the time it isn't), the Tac-Load is still a useful tactical tool, allowing its user to see incoming telemetry and see where the enemy is.

Though the micro-radar array is the TLOD's main means of gathering information about its surroundings, it's not its only means. There may be times when other perspectives could be useful, but other linked-in units may not be available or nearby. For times like these, the TLOD was also designed to receive encrypted transmissions from remote observation devices as well as remotely control them through verbal commands. Chief among these remote devices are the Recon Rats, which is where the TLOD gets its alternate nickname, the "Rat Master." In alternative to using a surveillance device, they can coordinate with other infantry squads using their own TLOD comm-units, sharing data, sensor readings, and observations even while miles apart.

The TLOD also gives a platoon or any small unit of troops an offensive advantage by allowing them to take advantage of the Coalition's Digital Battlefield technology. One common tactic the CS is currently using is to have the bulk of a small unit wait nearby in hiding while a flyer (SAMAS, rocket cycle, etc.), posing as a patrol, acts as both bait and scout. In this setup, the moment anything attacks the flyer, those in wait can instantly know how many enemies they face, where they are, and can speculate the best angle to attack them from, all while taking advantage of the element of surprise. Another thing they can do is relay the gathered intelligence to a nearby artillery firebase and watch the fireworks before moving in to mop up. Alternately, they can use remote sensors in hiding some miles off (like a Recon Rat), to determine where the enemy is and what they're doing so the squad leader can use that intel to come up with the best strategy and plan of attack. There are also other tricks and tactics they use to gain the upper hand with this new system, and the soldiers on the ground seem to come up with a new one every week.

Weight: 12 ounces (0.34 kg); about the size of a paperback novel.

M.D.C.: 22 (ruggedized for rough use and conditions).

Range: Radar: 1¼ miles (2 km), and double that in wide open, flat lands. Transmissions: 20 miles (32 km).

Black Market Cost: Effectively worthless. Because of the high degree of proprietary Coalition technology the device uses, even if a functional model were somehow obtained, it is still effectively useless to everyone else, and difficult to salvage for its components without it self-destructing.

CA-6C/EX Armor and the Skelebot Army

The average soldier wearing CA-6 Dead Boy body armor can receive and perceive Digital Battlefield telemetry through the armor's built-in optics if he has a TLOD Comm Unit jacked into the system (usually stowed in a pouch or on the belt line). However, without actually physically manipulating the device, the soldier cannot contribute data to the rest of the interconnected army, only receive. To do more, the suit needs to be upgraded to have a control panel added to the back of the forearm, covered by what appears to be the normal vambrace so it doesn't stand out. Either way, with or without the added controls, this system gives these soldiers fast access to all the information available over the Combat Event Coordination System, remote surveillance from any keyed-in Recon Rats, and excellent situational awareness at all times. Those who need a setup like this are usually CS Commandos or Strike Troopers, operating in situations where they need to know every aspect of what's going on around them as soon as it happens, and it is standard equipment for Platoon Sergeants. In the case of cyborgs, with their ability to react and respond in the blink of an eye, this puts them on an even level of capability with any power armored unit.

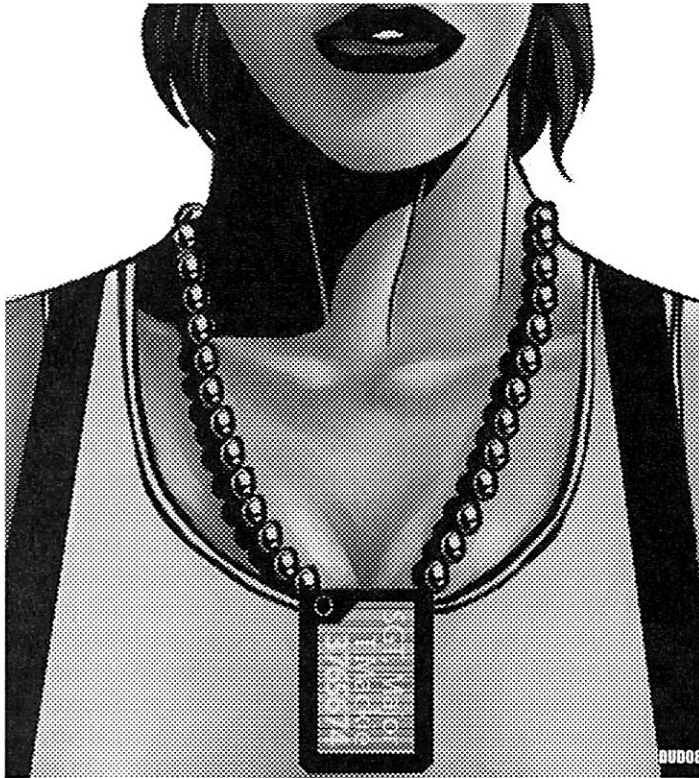
Skelebots, too, have similar capabilities as the Grunts and Strike Troopers in CA-6 armor. The 'bots were originally designed to communicate with each other through short-range radio transmissions, so all it took was a minor software upgrade to enable them to send more than just simple binary communications to their fellow mechanical soldiers. With the new programming, they can now also receive sensor data from their fellows that they can cross-reference with their own sensor telemetry. However, the scope of the data each one can perceive is limited to a two mile (3.2 km) radius to better correspond with each Skelebot's optical and radar sensor range. One out of every ten Skelebots has a simplified but fully functional CECS-7 telemetry relaying system (slightly hampered by the robot's limited radio range of ten miles/16 km, and has no means of adding manual data entries as an added security precaution), so it can be used to filter down commands and telemetry gathered by the regular army personnel to the rest of the robotic killers.

Whereas the Digital Battlefield tech is expected to increase the Coalition's Army's effectiveness by 100% or better, this new tech is expected to improve the effectiveness and usability of the Skelebots even more! During the Siege on Tolkeen, the shortcomings of the Skelebots led to appalling losses that frankly should never have happened. With the advent of the combat event coordination system, however, human supervisors and commanders will be able to monitor what every unit is doing and where they are. The controllers can see exactly which of their 'bots are in trouble, and which are meeting minimal resistance, and can direct them to swarm highly dangerous adversar-

ies (like an ancient dragon) or fall back when confronted with things they can not defeat (like Spectres). Those in charge of Skelebot companies, battalions and divisions no longer have to base their command decisions on fuzzy visual observations up to a mile or better away. With a coordination device derived from the CECS systems, either handheld or jacked directly into a power armor or 'bot's systems, the observers can see what enemy forces are out there and where. Additional Skelebots can be sent to strike at significant threats or the operator can have them hang back to minimize losses. For vast formations of Skelebots, a combat coordination vehicle and large command crew can be used for more diverse and complex maneuvers. With this level of control and information, the CS is hopeful that there will never be another Skelebot Graveyard, great or small, nor another shameful waste of Skelebots like the 18,000 squandered at Cochrane/Adamsville.

With the addition of an improved "Skelebot tactics and strategies" program in the Skelebots' collective software, the 'bots need little direction and can function pretty well on their own if left unsupervised or momentarily neglected. If not given a direct order, the Skelebots will cross-reference their own sensor data, telemetry relays from their fellow robot soldiers, and what they're receiving from the CECS systems. From there, each automated killing machine runs a threat analysis based on the threat levels assigned to the various blips on its sensors in direct correlation to the blip's proximity. Then the Skelebot attacks the target that is of the most importance to it and the mission objective at the moment. So if there is a Greater Earth Elemental two hundred meters away that has been identified with a top priority threat level and a common soldier right in front of the Skelebot, the 'bot will attack the Elemental because the monster poses the greater threat to it and the other 'bots at that moment, regardless of what the soldier is doing. If the soldier attacks the Skelebot, or if the Elemental is significantly further away, then the soldier would become the greater threat of the moment due to his hostile actions and/or proximity. The Skelebot will only turn to assail the Elemental instead in the latter situation if it is given an order to do so by a controller or if the creature moves closer, making it a higher immediate priority target. Also, if there is no one present to assign threat levels, the Skelebots continually monitor their own numbers in combat so if they are taking heavy or rapid losses in one area, then that whole area is automatically marked with a high threat level. More and more Skelebots will gravitate to the area, eliminating everything in sight, zeroing in what is causing the losses so it and it alone can be targeted with the top priority threat level and be dealt with by a sufficient number of 'bots, be it a squad, platoon, or company. But if that single threat remains after it has sustained a certain threshold of damage (in game terms, 22,400 M.D.; what a company of 160 standard 'bots can optimally dish out in 30 seconds), or if losses exceed 25% of the Skelebot formation, then a general retreat is called in that area. If the retreating Skelebots are pursued and the chase lasts for more than a few miles though, they will take a stand and fight to the last 'bot standing. However, a human commander can redirect them as deemed appropriate at any time, meaning that if anyone thinks they can just play the 'bots against their patterns, a clever soldier can use that against them or have the mechanical warriors carry out any strategy that comes to mind.

Skelebot observers use a specialized CECS unit called a SC3D, which is short for Skelebot Command Control and Coordination Device. It works similar to the normal coordination units but is more capable of sending commands to a select grouping of Skelebots or all of them simultaneously. It also receives and translates Skelebot transmissions so the user can not only see what their sensors detect, but also see what they're saying as well and reply in kind (Literacy skill required).



RFE Digital Dog Tags

From as early as the days of the American Civil War, soldiers have been issued necklaces that bear their name for easy identification and access to vital information in case the soldier needs medical attention. Though technology has advanced in the 530 or so years since the tradition first began, the Coalition has continued this practice since its very inception. However their tags are significantly different from those of the past. Though worn around the neck by a chain as they have almost always been, CS dog tags are not made of stamped metal, but instead they are plastic ovals. Each has the soldier's ID number and blood type laser-engraved on its surface. Inside of the plastic shell is a small carbon nano-tubule computer chip and a short-range transceiver. The chip contains the soldier's identification, vital statistics, identifying characteristics (like fingerprints, iris pattern, DNA code, bio-electric signature, and so on), complete medical history, recommended dietary intake, combat & personnel records, and other information. When the tags are brought within a foot (30 cm) of a tag reading device's activating signal, they establish a connection, enabling all their information to be accessed and read in any order. And should a tag's info need to be updated or changed, it can be done by the same wireless connection used to read from its memory.

In the latter days of the Tolkeen War, when the Coalition was introducing its new Digital Battlefield system, the dog tags too received a minor upgrade. Within its plastic shell was installed a RFE, a device that didn't necessarily transmit the soldier's location, but instead generated a radio frequency echo. The way it works is when a person scans the area using a TLOD, the return signal of the radar is imprinted with the soldier's identity and location in relation to the "Tac-Load." This makes it possible see where all the members of the squad are, as well as spot any stragglers, find those who are missing within sensor range, and see who else may be nearby. To prevent this echo from being used against Coalition troops, the radio frequency echo only reacts and works when exposed to radar signals used expressly by the Coalition (with an up-to-date, rotating IFF code) and no others. If necessary, this feature can be turned off completely if a soldier needs to be extra stealthy.

Also, as an added security precaution, each set of tags is keyed to its owner's distinct bio-electric signature when issued. Once the signature is set it can not be altered, and any attempt to do so will cause the tag's internal system to self-destruct, frying out all its components in a small puff of smoke. If the dog tags are not on the soldier's person (or if the soldier has died), the tags will echo what the CS comm techs in the field call a "Dead Signal." Should the tags be put on by a person whose bio-electric signature does *not* match that of the tags' rightful owner, when a CS radar signal hits them, that person will be flagged as a *hostile threat* on every CECS-7 in range.

CP-40 Alpha 2

Target Designator/Pulse Laser Rifle

The new CP-40 infantry assault rifle, put into service in 105 P.A., was intended to be a leap forward in CS weaponry, allegedly making the old and venerable C-12 obsolete and a relic of the past. The plans and designs for the CP-40 were cutting edge and state-of-the-art thanks to some consulting with a few top level Triax engineers. It was going to be everything an army could ask for: exceptional range, vast payload, comparably inexpensive, and acceptable firepower. Once fielded, the new rifle was going to be the envy of the North American continent. Unfortunately, this wasn't how things turned out. In their rush to put one in the hands of 1.8 million Coalition and Dog Boy soldiers for the war, several corners were cut when refitting the production floors, and defects in the rifle's power regulator and other systems slipped through. This resulted in the mass production of a weapon that wasn't much better than a bargain basement Black Market L-20, and actually inferior in other regards. Needless to say, the soldiers were disappointed with the new rifle to say the least, and during the war some refused to carry it. Now, almost half a decade later, with the High Command's desire to update the weapon's platform and bring it into the Coalition's Digital Battlefield, the rifle's designers finally had an excuse to go back and atone for this blunder. A blunder which cost the lives of CS soldiers whose numbers have yet to be counted, but are estimated to be in the thousands.

In addition to correcting the design flaws in the original CP-40, making it a more functional and capable tool of the trade for the common soldier, the Alpha 2's secondary role is to aid in the precision of artillery fire. When switched to its new fifth set-

ting, the rifle can fire a special IR beam, invisible to the naked eye. The target designation laser is designed to make a small spot on the surface of an object radiate energy detectable only on a specific radio frequency. With each rifle's target designation laser keyed to its own distinctive range of radio frequencies, when the laser hits, each and every one of its designating shots is easily distinguishable from the last and next to come. When the shooter hits the mark and is happy with the shot, the soldier can then thumb a button on the side of the rifle that sends a wireless transmission to the nearest handheld TLOD unit in the area (the radio has a short but secure 1,000 foot/305 m range). When the user of that TLOD transmits its sensor data to be received by others through the network of the Coalition's many CECS units, included in that transmission is the exact frequency of the radiating spot on the designated target and its location as of that moment. Simply put, though the laser does *no permanent damage* in and of itself, it makes that target stand out, turning it into a bull's-eye that can be zeroed in on. The irradiated spot enables radiation-seeking artillery and missiles to home in on the target "painted" by soldiers in the field. And because the spot remains active for 1D6+14 minutes, the laser does not have to be held on the target continuously till the ordnance hits the mark, as a traditional laser designator would have to be. Once hit and designated, it stays designated till it's either hit and destroyed by incoming artillery or the radiation's emissions deplete themselves, at which point there is nothing left for the incoming artillery to look for.

Miles away, those using the telemetry can instruct their shells or missiles to strike the designated target. Using the information coming in over the combat coordination system, the gunner has the option of including the radiation frequency that was painted on the target and instantly programs that into the round. If so programmed, when fired the ordnance first flies towards where the target was last known to be (or is suspected to be), and then begins to look for that one specific frequency on its final approach. Because the radiation frequency is all but impossible to detect without knowing what narrow frequency to look for in the first place, it is impossible to jam the signal or hijack it to making the artillery in flight come down on CS forces instead (unless, of course, the marked target has closed the distance and is right on top of them).

When an artillery round is fired from miles away, typically there will be a penalty to hit based on the distance it travels and/or the size of the target. However, if that target is "painted" with a target designation laser from a CP-40 Alpha 2, not only are these penalties removed, it doesn't even matter if the target itself has moved. With the radiated spot acting as a homing beacon, the rounds can redirect their course and aim to intercept even a moving target! The only penalties that are incurred are those applied to a Moving Target. In the alternative, the artillery gunner also has the option of programming the round to detonate at a pre-specified distance from the "painted" radiation marker. The point of this would be to try to cover a larger area, with the blast radius having to contend with fewer impeding obstacles that can be used for cover.

In time, the Coalition's stockpile of CP-50s and CV-212s will have Alpha 2 versions of their own. But with the CS recovering and recuperating from the recent war years, it will be a good many years before they start to show up.

Weight: 9 lbs (4.1 kg).

Mega-Damage: 2D6 M.D. per single laser blast or 6D6 M.D. per rapid-fire pulse (three simultaneous blasts fired one micro-second after each other).

S.D.C. Damage: The weapon can also be set to fire a single S.D.C. blast that does 5D6 S.D.C. or a rapid-fire pulse that does 2D4X10+10 S.D.C. (improved by 50%). In terms of ammo consumption, thirty single S.D.C. blasts use up the equivalent energy of a single M.D. blast, while ten S.D.C. pulse blasts count as one M.D. blast.

Target Designation Setting: This fifth setting was added to enable soldiers to make the most out of the new CS Digital Battlefield tech, aiding in the direction of artillery fire to best benefit ever-changing circumstances in the field. The rifle fires an invisible beam of *non-damaging* IR laser light that makes a small coin-sized spot begin to radiate energy at a very specific and narrow radio frequency for the next 1D6+14 minutes. Coalition artillery units using the Combat Event Coordination System can use this to get their rounds on the target with pinpoint accuracy. Not only does this completely eliminate any size and range penalties the artillery units normally struggle with, but this also adds a +3 to strike for the gunner who fires the missile or shell. And should it miss its mark, it will only be off by 1D4 yards/meters instead of the usual 1D6. But before any of this can happen, the soldier armed with the Alpha 2 has to hit the mark first and foremost. Because the target designation laser is a single shot beam, this can be done with a normal roll to strike, an Aimed Shot, a Called Shot (especially if a specific part is needed to be hit by the artillery), or a Aimed Called Shot. Since a decent amount of power is needed to saturate M.D.C. materials with enough radiant energy to be detected by an incoming shell or missile, each shot on the target designation setting counts as a single M.D. shot in terms of ammo/power consumption.

Rate of Fire: Equal to the number of combined hand to hand attacks of its user (usually 3-6); each single shot or pulse counts as one of the user's melee attacks.

Effective Range: An improved 3,000 feet (914 m)!

Payload: 30 blasts (10 rapid-fire pulses) per standard E-Clip, and 45 blasts (15 pulses) per long E-Clip. When connected to an Energy Canister via an energy cable, the Alpha 2's improved energy converter provides a drastically improved payload of 90 blasts (30 pulses)! An Energy Canister can be carried in a portable hip or backpack, or two in a dual backpack. Like before with the dual units, when one is used up the connector cable is removed from the empty first canister and reconnected to the full second canister (takes one full melee round). A quicker alternate technique (a soldier's trick developed by those in the field) is to simply keep an E-Clip in the rifle as well as an Energy Canister plugged into the port. That way, when the Energy Canister runs dry, all the shooter has to do is pull the energy cable from the rifle's side-mounted connection port and the power regulator will automatically switch to the E-Clip's power supply (only takes one melee action). And then there are a few who have had their power cables modified so the rifle can be plugged into both energy canisters at once, requiring the user to flip a toggle-switch to change between the two. Such modifications are not in compliance with regulations and are frowned upon by some of the

more conservative commanders, but are not uncommon among CS Special Forces.

Optical Sights: The removable scope has passive night vision, laser targeting and 6x magnification. Adds a +1 to strike on Aimed Shots. In place of the CP-40's standard scope, the Computer Aided Laser Targeting scope from the C-10 can be installed, granting the shooter a +3 on Aimed Shots, but its system is just as temperamental as it was 20 years ago (see **Rifts® Ultimate Edition**, page 257, for details).

Black Market Cost: 120,000 credits because the CP-40 Alpha 2 is a rare item at this point. Five years after its introduction, this will drop to 45,000. The CS makes them for only 22,000 per unit.

FASSRR-100 Skelebot Recon Rat

This small autonomous robot is set to be the soldier's new best friend. While in its storage mode, the Recon Rat looks like a blackened steel ball about the size of an orange and can be carried like a grenade. This sphere was made to be able to be thrown like a baseball into areas, tossed through windows & over walls, rolled into small openings, or even dropped down a chimney or ventilation duct. Once delivered, the ball opens up into a rodent-looking robot made to find its way through the area and seek out all threats, be they hiding or out in the open, even tripwires, I.E.D.s, and booby traps in general. This also makes the tiny 'bots ideal for search and rescue missions in crumbled buildings and the like. Everything the Recon Rat sees, hears, and detects is transmitted to a small handheld computer that records and displays all this information, the TLOD, or "Rat Master" as it's been nicknamed when used in this capacity. In its normal configuration the TLOD can receive and record telemetry from as many as 72 different Recon Rats at a time from up to 10 miles (16 km) away thanks to the cyber-rodents' powerful antenna-tail communications array. And with each and every one of these rodent Skelebot scouts being equipped with a 360 degree motion sensor array, passive night vision, UV & IR optics, telescopic vision (8x), laser range finders, a radar detector, and directional amplified hearing (can hear a 10 dB sound at 100 yards/meters), they send quite a bit of information. This includes the locations of everything they perceive relative to themselves, and their individual locations in relation to the TLOD. Once collected, all this data can then be transmitted over the Digital Battlefield to all CECS equipped units to use that information to the Coalition forces' best advantage. Alternately, the user of the TLOD can use that information for the squad's strategic and tactical purposes to act on their own.

The Recon Rats themselves are small and difficult to see (requiring a Called Shot at -4 to hit, plus as much as another -4 due to ground cover), especially in the clutter of urban rubble and trash or the foliage of a forest. They are fairly tough and capable of taking a good beating with no consequences, but M.D. weapons will make short work of the little guys. In combat, a single Recon Rat is next to useless as an offensive weapon, but a pack can be directed to attack en masse with significant results in close quarters. But then again, that was never their intended function. The four-legged mini-Skelebots are tools for gathering information and seeing what's laying in wait around the next

corner. In this role they are exceedingly stealthy and are swift on their tiny feet.

To facilitate their covert nature, although they have an impressive array of sensors, radar is not included. This is so their presence won't be detected by radar detectors. And with them using burst-transmissions to report their findings, though the encrypted radio signal might be detected (scattered over a million frequencies), it won't betray their positions, nature or missions. The rats are masters of covert movement and are programmed to take advantage of their surroundings, making natural camouflage coverings out of what's available when they need to stay in one spot for any significant duration or can move slowly enough to bring it with them. In urban environments they love garbage and loose trash, be it a soda can they can chew in half to use as a full-body shell, or just wads of loose wrappers they can dive into to instantly disappear. In the woods they've been known to use mud and patches of grass to blend in, or hollow out pine cones to fashion traveling disguises they can reuse time and time again.

When functioning autonomously in the field they are often deployed in loose packs of twenty to fifty. The Pack Rats spread out and cover the area as best they can, making sure there are no blind nooks or corners, and nothing goes unnoticed. They stealthily patrol the area, carefully making sure they aren't discovered, but at the same time doing what they can watch out for each other. In that regard, should one come under attack it sends out a distress call to all the others in its pack. If movement won't betray their position, every Recon Rat nearby will scramble to the distressed 'bot, and if there is anything that can be done at that point to save the endangered unit, and if their threat analysis programs think there are enough of them on site to take the threat down, they'll attack en masse. They never attack heavy armor, or power armor for that matter. But should twenty or more Skelebot Recon Rats find a lone person in body armor attacking one of their brethren (who is still functional), he is instantly mobbed and chewed apart in a matter of seconds.

On the broader scale, the Recon Rats can act as the covert eyes and ears over the battlefield or any area they are instructed to observe. One common use for them is to stay hidden and concealed in place and observe the comings and goings of everything that enters their range of perceptions, transmitting their observations when a valid target of opportunity appears or when so ordered to upload their complete sensor logs for analysis. In this role they can stand constant 24/7 guard and vigil over their post, laying in wait for the enemy. When doing so, the small autonomous robots use their size and camouflaging skill to easily go unseen and undetected their entire stay there. Alternately, they can be instructed to covertly follow a group or even an individual to see where they go, reporting in on a scheduled basis with burst transmissions of all they've seen in the intervening time between reports. In this capacity they can act as tracking bugs, spies, and sometimes even as disposable assassins if their controller sees a prime opening that can be taken advantage of.

Alignment: Not applicable, though most people who discover them consider them to be Miscreant due to their aggressive nature (a defensive reaction).

Model Type: FASSRR-100

Class: Fully Automated Self-Sufficient Reconnaissance Robot.

Crew: None; artificial intelligence.

M.D.C. by Location:

* Legs (4) – 7 each for the front, and 12 each for the rear.

* Tail/Antenna – 6

* Head/Sensor Package – 14

** Main Body – 23 M.D.C., enough to survive one or two serious hits and still keep going.

* Every item marked by a single asterisk is a small and/or difficult target to strike. An attacker must make a Called Shot to hit and even then he is at a -8 to strike. The destruction of a front leg will impair the 'bot's ability to climb (-15% to skill rolls per lost limb) but it can still gallop at full speed. Taking out one of the stronger rear legs will cut its running speed by a third, as will taking out both of its front legs. If the Recon Rat loses its tail, the ability to transmit any observations back to the TLOD is lost, though it can still record and store data. Should the tail be lost, the tiny Skelebot will wait till all is clear and then return to where it was originally deployed. If the small reconnaissance 'bot's head is destroyed, it will automatically transmit any stored observations and then self-destruct.

** Depleting the M.D.C. of the main body will totally debilitate the Recon Rat, but it can still observe, hold on to its sensor data, and transmit on emergency power. The robot must be reduced to -10 M.D.C. to completely destroy it. Even the main body of the tiny Skelebot is a difficult target, requiring a Called Shot to hit at a -4 penalty.

Speed:

Land & Water: Speed: 34 (23 mph/37 km) over land and in the water. The Recon Rat can negotiate any terrain, swim through water like an otter, and climb like a squirrel up a tree or any S.D.C. surface it can dig its little claws into (half speed vertically).

Leaping: The mechanical rodent is capable of jumping 12 feet (3.7 m) horizontally or 6 feet (1.8 m) vertically, or twice that with a running start.

Range: About 2,500 miles (4,000 km) through the untamed wilds at the most, given its power limitations on a single charge. That is unless it finds a way to hitch a ride, which it's programmed to do to conserve energy when an opportunity arises.

Statistical Data:

Height: Stands two and a half inches tall (6.4 cm), but is designed to ball up into a three inch (7.6 cm) sphere while at rest and in storage.

Width: Two inches (5 cm).

Length: The body measures five and a quarter inches (13.3 cm) long, with the tail adding another three inches (7.6 cm).

Weight: 1.1 lbs (0.5 kg).

Physical Strength: 3 Robotic (incredibly strong for something its size).

Attacks per Melee: Seven.

Cargo: Only the data and information it records, of which it can store a scant 5 terabytes beyond what its already been programmed with, or about 200 continuous days worth of sensor observations (audio, video, and its other perceptions).

Color: Typically, the Recon Rat has a dull black finish, but soldiers have taken to painting them in camouflage schemes or whatever assortment of colors strike their fancy. A few are even painted and made to look as much like real rats as possible, including fake fur.

Power System: Because the Recon Rat is so small and lightweight, there is no way it could ever have a nuclear power plant inside its diminutive frame. As such, it was given a power cell that stores a third as much energy as a standard E-Clip. Though this doesn't sound like much, remember that Mega-Damage weapons draw tremendous amounts of energy, meaning for more mundane uses, E-Clips have vast sums of power to draw from. The 'bot's cell, located in its belly, can provide enough power for it to run at full speed for a week. Under normal conditions, this will allow it to function for three months of nominal use before needing a recharge. If placed in one spot and instructed to stay relatively still and just observe, transmitting only when it has something of interest to report, its power will hold out for over a year if need be.

Cost: The CS makes these little rodent robots for just 37,000 per unit. Due to the high degree of proprietary tech used in their programming and systems, they are next to useless to anyone else, meaning not only are the Skelebot Recon Rats not available on the Black Market, but even if they were there wouldn't be much demand for them.

Weapons and Systems of Note

1. Vibro-Teeth: Though not powerful in the broader sense of M.D. weaponry, the mechanical rat's teeth are more than enough to kill threats like birds, cats and other things that might try to make a lunch out of them. The teeth are also frequently used to tunnel through walls and obstructions of all types.

Primary Purpose: Defense.

Secondary Purpose: Tunneling and Attack.

Mega-Damage: 1 M.D. per bite or second of use.

Rate of Fire: Equal to the combined number of attacks (7).

Effective Range: Melee range.

Payload: Because of the limited power reserves in the 'bot, this weapon is only active while the 'bot is actively engaging in a bite. Every attack or full second of use drains 5 minutes from the Recon Rat's power reserves, and it can use its teeth for no more than 70 minutes before they completely drain the power cell.

2. Hand to Hand: Though the Recon Rat can not engage in any kind of conventional melee combat, with its relatively strong legs and tail able to shoot like pistons and its jaws able to break small bones, even without its Vibro-Teeth, it is far from defenseless.

Piston Kick or Climbing Claw Scratch: 1 S.D.C.

Tail Stab: 1D4 S.D.C.

Unpowered Bite: 1D6 S.D.C.

Combat Bonuses & Limitations: +4 to strike, +6 to dodge and roll with impact (only +5 to dodge attacks from behind). Critical Strike on a Natural roll of 19 or 20. Can not parry at all. Impervious to poison, gas and biological agents, as well as psionic and magic mind control, charms, Bio-Manipula-

tion, and all S.D.C. attacks (although they may knock it back or send it flying).

3. Sensor Systems: Normal color vision, 360 degree motion sensor array, passive night vision, UV & IR optics, telescopic vision (8x), laser range finders, gyrocompass, radar detector, and directional amplified hearing (can hear a 10 dB sound at 100 yards/meters).

4. Speech: Like soldier Skelebots, the Recon Rats are capable of saying only a few words, "Affirmative," "Negative," "Does not compute," "Error," and "Power reserve low." However, when communicating between each other with short-range radio burst transmissions, they speak in a more complex, more detailed binary code that can communicate far more information. When being given their instructions, they understand natural spoken speech patterns which can be given either in person or through the TLOD they are keyed into.

5. Skill Programs of Note: Detect Ambush 74%, Detect Concealment 71%, Tracking (humans & robots) 80% (+10% for counter-tracking), Intelligence 65%, Trap/Mine Detection 70%, Prowl 92%, Climbing 96%/86% (at half their running speed), Gymnastics (for improved maneuvering), Land Navigation 86%, Mathematics: Basic 96%, Camouflage 74%, Surveillance 85% (in positioning themselves and using their own sensors to best effect), Tailing 95%, and Whittling & Sculpting 75% (used to better facilitate the Camouflage skill). Also, their programming allows them to be able to identify all CS military ranks, power armors, vehicles, weapons, and equipment, as well as the upper Generals of the Army and the Emperor himself. To facilitate their reconnaissance role they are programmed to recognize over 5,000 different kinds of vehicles, body armor types, monsters, demons, D-Bees, insignia, uniforms and so on, so they can report their observations all the more accurately. Though there wasn't sufficient memory to include the maps of CS territory and the locations of its cities, they do have enough storage space to memorize the lay of the land they travel, allowing them to do their missions as best they can. As a result, it's not uncommon for Recon Rats to scout out the area when time permits.



The Torque of Amemait

Optional Material Suitable for the Entire Palladium Megaverse®

By Aaron Corley

History

Amemait was the ancient Egyptian god of chaos. He was known as "the Devourer" and was often pictured as a dog with a crocodile's head eager to feast on the souls of the dead. He is associated with the Palladium gods of darkness, though he is no longer a member of their pantheon. Mysteriously, he died and has passed into oblivion since. Little is known of his fate or the whereabouts of his remains, or of the Torque he wore as a symbol of his power and glory.

Millennia before the modern age, Amemait conceived a great plan to appoint himself as ruler of the gods of light and darkness. His ambition was duly noted and some of the others agreed to help him in his designs. Little did he know the faked allegiance would lead to his downfall. Everything proceeded according to the Devourer's plans until Sebek suggested that the king of the gods needed a Torque to symbolize his dominion. Captivated by the idea, Amemait commissioned two Elven Alchemists to create a headdress worthy of his station.

Two years of intensive labor followed. The Alchemists, secretly aided by Sebek (who saw this as the ideal opportunity to eliminate a rival), toiled to create the most exquisite piece of craftsmanship. The result, Sebek assured them, was guaranteed to please their new king. The Alchemists were unaware, however, that Sebek had tampered with their work, adding an evil curse upon the Torque's wearer. To protect this secret, Sebek slew the two Alchemists and destroyed their records on the project, blaming it on the gods of light. Enraged, Amemait swore the first thing he would do as king of the gods would be to destroy their enemies.

Sebek quickly arranged Amemait's coronation, knowing as the other gods of darkness did, that it was all a plot to remove him from their pantheon. Two years following the ceremony, the Devourer had amassed enough troops to wage a bloody conflict against Ra, Thoth and the other gods of light.

At the crucial moment of the battle, when Amemait and Ra were about to face off, the crocodile-faced god of chaos doubled over in intense pain. His body spasmed violently and he fell to the ground. In agony, he cursed Sebek, realizing now that the entire coronation had been a plot against him. Writhing and frothing with anger, he opened a Rift and vanished, never to be seen again. Their conflict over, the gods of light and darkness agreed to an uneasy truce, deciding to continue the conflict at a later time.



No one has seen or heard from Amemait since. In the centuries that have followed, he has largely been forgotten. Even the gods of darkness do not speak his name.

The Torque of Amemait has disappeared as well. The god of chaos wore it into battle on that fateful day. It was on his head when he departed, but like its master, the cursed treasure had disappeared. Unlike its master, the Torque has developed a mythology all its own. As it has resurfaced throughout the Megaverse®, the rumors of its powers have grown and evolved into legend as mysterious and elusive as any other in the Palladium world. For example, history states it was worn by Soogatt the Mad during his campaign against the Dwarves during the Elf-Dwarf War. After many years however, like Amemait, Soogatt went mad and disappeared. Some legends even state he was kidnaped and consumed by the erstwhile god of chaos himself.

Other brief examples have surfaced throughout time. In every one, the wearer of the Torque achieves great political power and influence, only to be visited by the Devourer and destroyed by madness.

Description

The Torque of Amemait is a crescent-shaped, flat, golden collar about an inch and a half (3.8 cm) wide and eight inches (20.3 cm) in diameter. The outside of the collar is decorated with hieroglyphics writing, including the name “Amemait” and the promise that the wearer of the Torque has “power over all men,” thus making him king of the world. The edges of the band are rounded. An inch-tall scarab beetle, a symbol of eternity, sits centered in front. The beetle is flanked on each side by amber sun-discs.

It is lightweight but durable, bringing the total weight of the Torque to just over one pound (0.45 kg). Since the Torque shapes itself to fit the wearer’s neck and shoulders, it doesn’t feel as heavy when worn. By itself, it’s easily valued at a million gold pieces, but its history increases that value at least a hundredfold.

Powers

In a *Heroes Unlimited*™ setting, the Torque of Amemait would be considered a *Bestowed Magic Item*, although it doesn’t necessarily change its wearer’s power category. Instead, it bestows powers like a Rune item would, despite the fact that it is decorated with hieroglyphs and not runes. As such, it has many of the same properties as Rune items, plus some surprising extras.

For starters, the Torque of Amemait is completely indestructible. It cannot be damaged by any kind of impact, magic, energy or other means, which only adds to the mystery surrounding its current location and the fate of the Devourer. Although adventurers have sought it for years, many have incorrectly concluded that it must have been destroyed at some time, when, in fact, it is merely an elusive treasure of a bygone age.

Unlike Rune weapons, the Torque contains no fragmented intelligence; it cannot think for itself, makes no attempts to communicate with its wearer and displays no alignment preference

(although the accompanying curse is definitely evil). Instead, it merely follows a predetermined set of instructions programmed into it by Sebek and further randomized by its original owner, the god of chaos. These traits manifest themselves mostly in the form Sebek’s curse (see below). This gives it the illusion of harboring a distinct intelligence, something even Sebek and the two Alchemists had not intended in their original designs.

Among its other powers is the ability to **Control Others** (see *Heroes Unlimited*™ 2nd Edition, page 267). This power can be used against any intelligent, living being. It can temporarily bend the will of its victim so that he or she is under the complete control of the Torque’s wearer. The affected person will do absolutely anything the controller requests (provided it is not overtly against his alignment). All questions will be answered truthfully and in as much detail as requested. However, the controlled character will only answer the wearer of the Torque and obey that person only.

Range: Twenty feet.

Duration: Five minutes.

Damage: A situation in which the controlled being can be made to fight or do something dangerous. All victims of this control are -2 to initiative and -1 to strike, parry and dodge because of the distorting influence of the Torque. Victims will remember their actions after being controlled.

Saving Throws: For non-psychics, the saving throw is 15 or higher. Minor and Major Psychics must roll twelve or higher; Master Psychics must roll 10 or higher.

Attacks per Melee: One attempt to control another being can be made once every minute, but counts as *half* of the character’s actions for that round.

Limitations: To control another individual, the subject must be visible and within range. If the subject steps out of range or is not visible, control is broken within 1D6 melee rounds. Eye contact is not necessary, but increases the difficulty of the victim’s saving throw by four points. Physical contact increases it another one point.

Asking the individual to do something against his alignment allows him to save again for each suggestion. Each attempt to control an individual beyond the initial five minutes gives the victim a +1 bonus to save per additional five minutes.

The wearer of the Torque can attempt to control multiple people, but each one gets a +1 bonus to save vs mind control per person the wearer attempts to control.

The Torque’s second major power bestowed upon its wearer is a **Divine Aura** (see *Heroes Unlimited* 2nd Ed., page 272) that provides the character with the aura of divinity. The character carries himself with an air of superiority, charisma and of being larger than life. An average person will feel intimidated and may believe the character wearing the Torque is a demigod of sorts.

Horror/Awe Factor: The wearer automatically gains a Horror Factor of thirteen. Those already with a Horror Factor less than thirteen find it raised to thirteen.

Followers: The character acquires a following of twenty individuals per year that he wears the Torque of Amemait. The followers begin seeking out him or her after the first month and will increase gradually every twelve months.

The followers are not likely to be of more than average intelligence, strength and ability, although their loyalty is unquestionable. When defending the wearer of the Torque, they gain +1 to initiative and to strike and ten S.D.C. each. All bonuses are negated within 1D4 minutes of the wearer dying or losing possession of the Torque.

Voice Amplification: The character is able to amplify his voice as if by a loudspeaker. It can be heard up to 1600 feet (488 m) away.

Power of Illusion: Twice each day, for up to one hour each time, the character is able to make himself appear two to three times his actual height. This adds +2 to his Horror/Awe Factor.

Extraordinary Mental Affinity (*Heroes Unlimited 2nd Ed.*, page 231) also results from wearing the Torque. Characters receive a +2D4 bonus to their M.A. attribute and can add +8% to skills involving sleight of hand, deception, seduction, persuasion and picking pockets.

In addition, the wearer of the Torque receives the following attribute and other bonuses: +4 to save vs mind altering drugs, Horror Factor, possession, mind control and all forms of magic and psionics that have similar effects.

After sixty days of continuous wear, the Torque also confers a form of limited **Immortality** (*Heroes Unlimited 2nd Ed.*, page 276). While wearing the Torque, the character is immune to disease and the effects of aging (except as described below). No wrinkles will appear, no loss of muscle tone, no hardening of the arteries, no heart attacks, etc. Note that if the Torque is ever removed, the character will feel the full effects of his actual age within 1D6 hours, until and unless the Torque is put on again. If there is a break in the time the Torque is worn, it will preserve the character from the moment it is put back on. Earlier aging is *not* negated.

The character will also regenerate 3D6 extra S.D.C. or Hit Points per day. The effects of amputation, suffocation, decapitation and radiation damage are not diminished by the Torque.

Other Bonuses: Finally, after a total of ninety days of continuous wear, the character can also add one hundred (100) S.D.C. (restores normally) and +5% to save vs coma and death while wearing the Torque.

The Curse

Sebek claims he never intended for the Torque to do more than cause physical pain to Amemait. In fact, it is unknown how the adverse side effects found their way to the Torque. Maybe the Alchemists, knowing they would eventually be killed to cover up Sebek's treachery, altered the curse for their own enjoyment. Either way, the Torque carries with it a very subtle curse that transforms the Torque's wearer into a terrifying monster over the course of months and years, so that the original species and individual become lost amidst the price extracted by the Torque for its services.

After wearing the Torque for one month, the wearer will become irrationally attached to it, desiring never to take it off, even to sleep. This obsession will consume the being. When wearing the Torque, he can function normally. Without it, he becomes violent and unpredictable. The following permanent pen-

alties apply after the first twenty-four hours of not wearing the Torque:

- Intense and constant rage results in +2 to initiative and +4 to damage. The character loses the ability to pull punches as well.
- The character hears voices, presumably from the Torque, calling him to return to it. This distracts the character enough that he loses one attack per melee and all skills suffer a -10% penalty.
- The character fatigues at half the normal rate, but cannot heal any Hit Points or S.D.C. (even by magical or psionic means) until reunited with the Torque.

After the ninety days of wearing the Torque of Amemait, the true curse comes out. Little by little, the Torque begins changing the character's mind and body. Characters (or Game Masters) should roll on the following table once for every thirty days the Torque is worn, beginning on day ninety. Note that none of these changes are reversible unless the character discards the Torque forever, in which case they will then fade one at a time in reverse order at the rate of one per year until all the effects are gone.

Side Effects

01-28% None. Only when separated from the Torque of Amemait does the character feel the obsessive effects mentioned above and they only apply when separated from the Torque.

29% The character is less appealing to the opposite sex than before. Each time this is rolled, the character suffers a penalty of -1% to seduction, persuasion and similar skills.

30% The character has developed an aversion to metal. Wearing metal armor does one point of damage per minute. Studded armor does one point of damage per ten minutes. Using metal weapons or shields each causes one point of damage every other minute as well.

Meanwhile, metal weapons do an additional point of damage against the character for each time this result is rolled.

31% The first time this result is rolled, the character finds his or her interest in the opposite sex waning.

The second and each subsequent time, the character becomes violent. Around midnight of the next full moon, the character will seek out and senselessly attack the member of the opposite sex with the highest P.B. within one mile (1.6 km). The character will be +2 to strike and damage and have one extra attack per melee until the victim is dead or the wearer's S.D.C. is depleted and he or she retreats. After 1D6 minutes, the character will have no recollection of the attack.

If no such person is within range (or the character is asexual), the character will become moody, bitter and easily angered for twenty-four hours prior to the full moon, resulting in the loss of one attack per melee and the inability to heal by any means during that period.

32% The character's hair (or fur) starts falling out and being replaced by scaly patches. Characters lose 10% of their body hair (cumulative; starts with the head) each time this is rolled.

Characters with no hair find their skin has hardened (+1D4 S.D.C.), their Horror Factor increased by one point (minimum 5; maximum 18) and P.B. is reduced by one.

33% Every time this result is rolled, magic-using characters permanently lose one point of Spell Strength. Once Spell Strength is equal to one, the character's magic has no effect.

34% Every time this result is rolled, the character's snout (the part of the face around the mouth and nose) grows an inch longer than before. Reduce P.B. by one (minimum P.B. is 2).

35% The character can see the invisible within twenty feet (6.1 m). If he already has this power or if this ability is rolled again, increase the range by ten feet (3 m).

36% The character has trouble reading. Reduce any and all Literacy skills by 5% every time this result is rolled.

37% Every time this result is rolled, the character can channel one point more of P.P.E. per attack per melee than before. There is no effect if not a magic-user or if the Game Master does not use P.P.E. Channeling rules (see *The Rifter*® #21 or *The Best of The Rifter*®).

38% The character is less likely to be disarmed and receives a +1 bonus to resist it every time this result is rolled. The maximum bonus is +6.

39% The character can perform a power strike doing triple damage on a successful hit (but counts as all of his attacks that melee round and must be declared first). This can be done once per day for each time this result is rolled.

40% The character feels braver than before, resulting in +1 to save versus Horror Factor every time this result it rolled. The maximum bonus from this is +6.

41% The character cannot tolerate cold temperatures as much as before, and loses one attack per melee and speed is reduced by half in temperatures below 20 degrees Fahrenheit (-6.6° C). Each time this result is rolled, however, that maximum temperature rises five degrees F (2.8 degrees C). Prolonged exposure over 1D6 hours will result in a coma.

42% The character cannot tolerate hot temperatures as much as before, and loses one attack per melee and speed is reduced by half in temperatures above 120 degrees Fahrenheit (48.8° C). Each time this result is rolled, however, that maximum temperature drops five degrees F (2.8 degrees C). Prolonged exposure over 1D6 hours will result in a coma.

43% The character develops one multiple personality each time this result is rolled. The additional personalities know nothing of the Torque or of the original personality and may attempt to remove the Torque at any time.

44% The character gets +1% to track by smell and track blood scent each time this result is rolled. If the character did not already have these abilities before, they both start at 10%.

45% The character has developed an aversion to civilization and suffers a temporary insanity for every week he has to live in settlements larger than two thousand people. He even hates to be around his followers and routinely avoids them. For each time this result is rolled, the maximum tolerable settlement size decreases by one hundred people.

46% The character's digging speed increases by one point for each time this result if rolled (if the character does not have digging, it now starts at 1D4).

47% The character gets +3% to recognize enchantment (starts at 10% if the character does not have the Lore: Magic skill).

48% The character is now slightly more resistant to heat and fire (but not smoke). Each time this result is rolled, the amount of damage he takes from normal fires is reduced by 10%. Magical and M.D.C. fires do normal damage. Rolling this result ten times basically makes a normal character immune to fire damage. Disregard after the eleventh roll.

49% The character has developed a chameleon-like ability equal to the spell invocation of the same name. It lasts for four minutes. It can be used once per day for each time this result is rolled.

50% The character can sense magic equal to the spell invocation of the same name. This ability cannot be turned off. Its range is ten feet (3 m) for each time this result is rolled.

51% The character has developed an affinity for rats and has found that he can summon and control ten per time that this result is rolled. The ability is otherwise equal to the spell Summon & Control Rodents except that it requires no P.P.E. and is constantly in effect.

52% The character's blood has turned acidic. The first time this is rolled, it does one point of damage on contact to human flesh and other organic material for 1D4 melee rounds or until washed off. The fourth time it does 1D4 damage and increases by 1D4 on the eighth, twelfth, etc. time this result is rolled. The acid is ineffective against metals and plastic.

53% Every time this result is rolled, double the length of time the character can hold his breath (1D4 minutes for most humanoids).

54% The character becomes more ambidextrous. The first time this result is rolled, the character gets the Paired Weapons skill automatically. Every other time this result is rolled (including the first time if he already has Paired Weapons) the character gets +1% to Climbing, Pick Locks, Palming, Concealment and any other skill requiring coordinated work between his limbs.

55% The character's body becomes more double-jointed, resulting in +3% to the Escape Artist skill when tied or chained up for each time this result is rolled.

56% The character's skull has thickened into a triceratops-like plate (Natural A.R. 12 for the head only). Each time this result is rolled add 1D4 to head butting damage (no P.S. bonus), increase the head's Natural A.R. by one point (maximum 18), but -2% to Acrobatics, Gymnastics and any other skills requiring balance.

57% The character permanently loses 5% of his P.P.E. for each time this result is rolled.

58% Roll once on the Obsession Table each time this result is rolled.

59% If a vegetarian, the character now craves meat. If he ate meat before, he now craves it raw. If the character had no problem with raw meat before this, he is now tempted with cannibalism. If he was a cannibal before, he finds it increasingly difficult to fight the urge, resulting in a temporary psychosis for each month (thirty days) he goes without indulging this craving.

60% The character's immune system improves, resulting in +1 to save versus poison every other time this result is rolled, and +1 to save versus disease on the rolls in between.

61% Roll once on the Phobia Table every time this result is rolled.

62% Psionic characters permanently lose five points from their personal I.S.P. every time this result is rolled.

63% Roll once on the Psychosis Table every time this result is rolled.

64% The character is becoming more animal-like in his behavior, resulting in the loss of one point from his I.Q. every time this result is rolled (note possible effects on skill bonuses, too). Minimum I.Q. is 2.

65% Roll once on the Neurosis Table every time this result is rolled.

66% Roll once on the Affective Disorders Table every time this result is rolled.

67% The character's alignment changes, becoming more evil. For example, a Principled alignment become Scrupulous, Scrupulous becomes Unprincipled, etc.

68% The character becomes increasingly unable to function during the daytime, losing one attack per melee when in direct sunlight. In addition, he fatigues at twice the normal rate and is unable to heal by any means in direct sunlight.

After the second time this result occurs, the character finds he is unable to function during daytime hours, losing one attack per melee and being unable to heal by any means between dawn and dusk.

After the third roll, the character gains one attack per melee and heals at double the normal rate at nighttime or in total darkness only. The penalties listed above for daylight still apply.

Starting the fourth time this result is rolled (or first if the character is already a vampire or has the Nightstalking minor super ability), and each subsequent time this result is rolled, the character takes an additional 1D6 damage for every melee round he is in direct sunlight, and is unable to heal it back until after nightfall. Globe of Daylight only inflicts damage if the character is already a vampire.

69% The character's toes and feet become more prehensile, allowing him to use them like another set of hands. The first time this result occurs, if they aren't prehensile already, the feet start out with a -40% skill penalty, and unable to use weapons. On each subsequent roll (or if the character already has prehensile feet), they are able to use some weapons (-6 to strike and parry) resulting in one additional attack per melee. Each time this result is rolled afterward, the character's penalty is reduced by 5% or -1 as applicable. Forever after, the character avoids wearing shoes, preferring to go barefoot.

70% The character constantly emits a foul odor that signals others to his presence. The odor can normally be smelled within five feet (1.5 m) of the character and increases by two feet (0.6 m) every time this result is rolled. It reduces the character's Prowl, Counter-Tracking, ambush and hiding attempts by an additional 5% every time this result is rolled.

71% The character's ability to speak is reduced. Reduce speaking (and singing) skills by 5% every time this result is rolled. The character understands as normal, but has trouble formulating intelligible sounds.

72% The character's back arches forward slightly every time this result is rolled, reducing his height by one inch (2.5 cm). His mass stays the same, however, requiring him to adopt a more animal-like stance.

73% The character grows an inch (2.5 cm) taller every time this result is rolled. Weight increases by 5% as well due to the added mass. Add 5 S.D.C. or M.D.C. as applicable.

74% The character grows a small tail. It grows one inch (2.5 cm) every time this result is rolled. Characters that already have tails notice their tails are becoming increasingly more prehensile. Tails longer than more than half the character's height can be used as an extra hand: +1 attack per melee, but -4 to strike and parry with weapons and -20% on all skills.

75% The character begins growing spines down his back. At first, there are six spines, one inch (2.5 cm) long each. With each subsequent roll, the number of spines increases by 1D4 and any previous spines grow an inch in length. The spines cannot be removed and thrown, but are strong enough to be used as a weapon: 1D4 damage if a victim is crushed against them. Note this will affect the character's ability to wear regular clothes and armor.

76% The character's Physical Strength attribute increases by one point. After rolling this result five times, characters with normal P.S. are upgraded to Superhuman Strength. After rolling this result ten times, those with Superhuman Strength are upgraded to Supernatural Strength. If characters already have Superhuman Strength, adjust the change accordingly.

77% The character grows two small, devil-like horns on his forehead. At first they are only an inch (2.5 cm) long and do no damage, but for every four inches (10 cm) in length, they do 1D4 damage. Characters that already have horns simply increase their length by one inch each time this is rolled.

78% The character's legs become stronger and more bowed, adding one foot (0.3 m) to his natural leaping ability, but reducing his running Speed by one point every time this result is rolled.

79% The character finds it increasingly difficult to walk upright, reducing his speed by half. Characters who do not already walk upright, or who have rolled this result before, find their arms/front legs have grown an inch (2.5 cm) longer, making it easier to walk on all fours. After ten rolls, the character prefers a non-bipedal stance, but can walk similar to a bear if desired.

80% The character prefers to spend more and more time in water, and can hold his breath for one minute longer than normal every time this result is rolled. In addition, his Swimming skill is increased by one percentage point and he finds himself needing to drink 10% less water than before. Rolling this result ten times makes the character impervious to thirst.

81% The character's P.P.E. base increases by 1D6 points as he becomes more aligned with the Torque of Amemait and its strange powers.

82% The character notices an increase in his nightvision: five feet (1.5 m) every time this result is rolled. The eyes also grow slightly paler each time this is rolled, until after ten times the irises fade away completely.

83% The character gets a bonus of +1% to save vs coma and death every time this result is rolled. The character also finds his metabolism has increased, requiring him to eat 1D4 pounds of meat more each day than he had previously needed.

84% The character's ears grow larger, increasing his normal hearing range by ten feet (3 m) and five decibels every time this result is rolled. Every fourth time yields a +1 bonus to initiative

as aural sensitivity increases (reduce P.B. by one every fourth time as well).

85% The character develops the ability to melt into shadows equal to the spell invocation Shadow Meld for two minutes. The new ability requires no P.P.E., but can only be done once per day for every time this result is rolled.

86% The character's skin becomes harder. Every time this result is rolled, the character gains 1D6 S.D.C., but for every ten S.D.C. gained, he loses one point of Physical Beauty (the minimum P.B. is 2).

87% The character develops the ability to spit an acid his body now naturally produces. The acid does 1D4 damage with a range of five feet (1.5 m) per time this result is rolled, and also gets a +1 bonus to strike per time this result is rolled. It can only be spit once per melee round.

88% The character gains a +1% bonus to Prowl every time this result is rolled.

89% The character begins growing spines along the outsides of his arms. At first, there is a single, one inch (2.5 cm) long spine, but with each subsequent roll, another spine grows and any previous spines grow an inch longer. The spines cannot be removed, but are strong enough to add one point of damage each to applicable attacks.

90% The character's fingernails and toenails (or existent claws) harden and grow stronger and longer, giving them +1 to damage and +2% to Climb every time this result is rolled. Unfortunately, for every three rolls, the character takes a permanent -5% penalty to all other skills requiring precise and steady finger work.

91% The character's ego is transformed along with his body, reducing his Mental Affinity by one point each time this result is rolled (the minimum M.A. is two). Others find him arrogant, cocky and difficult to work with.

92% The character is unable to keep up with the changes happening to him, reducing his Physical Prowess by one point each time this result is rolled (the minimum P.P. is 2).

93% The character's skin grows a shade darker, regardless of the original color, every time this result is rolled, until it eventually turns a black, oily color.

94% The character has gained ten pounds (4.5 kg) of muscle over the last month, resulting in +1D6 S.D.C.

95% The character develops webbing between his toes and fingers, increasing his Swimming skill by 1% each time this result is rolled. Unfortunately, it also reduces his ability to perform complex manual attacks by 2% each time it is rolled.

96% The character suddenly loses a lot of mass. Permanently reduce his S.D.C. by five points, his height by 1D6 inches (2.5-15 cm) and his weight by ten percent.

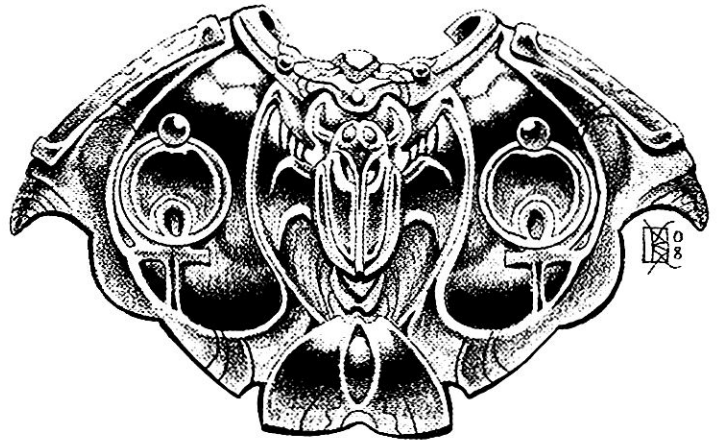
97% The character's canine teeth increase in length. Characters without a previous bite attack can now do 1D4 damage while all others (including those who get this result more than once) receive +1 damage to bite attacks.

98% The character falls into a deep hibernation that lasts the next thirty days. The only way to awaken him is to take the Torque off his body. If this happens, the character will spring to life in a maddened frenzy and receives the following bonuses until he recovers the Torque: +2 attacks per melee, +4 to initia-

tive, double Speed attribute and double damage. After the Torque is replaced about his neck, he will return to hibernating (two hours for each hour recently spent awake). If the Torque is not recovered within six hours, the character falls into a coma and may die (the standard save versus coma & death rules apply).

99% The character develops scales resulting in an increased Natural Armor Rating, starting at A.R. 5 for characters who previously had none. Those already with a Natural Armor Rating increase theirs by one point each time this result is rolled (to a maximum of 18).

100% The character's sense of smell improves. Characters without a natural ability to track by smell start out with a 25% skill level. Those with a natural ability, or who have rolled this option more than once, gain +1% every time this result is rolled.



Implementation

Using the Torque in your campaign should be pretty easy. The best way, in my opinion, is to introduce a powerful enemy who has been in possession of the Torque for at least a few years and gathered a small cult of followers, and have the character group work their way up to meeting the Torque's current owner. Once defeated, the characters are then faced with the task of destroying it or keeping it for themselves. Because of the potentially unbalancing effects this could have on any campaign, Game Masters should focus on the role-playing side of the Torque rather than on the bonuses it bestows. The fall from grace and subsequent rise to power makes for interesting role-playing and could eventually result in the characters having to fight each other to destroy it once and for all.

Game Masters and players who introduce the Torque should be prepared to do some extra record keeping. If a player character chooses to wear the Torque, the Game Master should ensure that the player is able to role-play each progressive change to the character effectively and believably. This will enhance the experience for everyone involved.

As with any magic item taken from one part of the Megaverse® and inserted into another, some adaptations may be necessary. The Torque does not change S.D.C. beings into M.D.C. beings or vice versa, but works with their original state to create something new. Game Masters are free to change this, or any other characteristic, to fit their campaign.

Nightbane®

THE WARLORDS OF BOSTON

Optional Background and NPCs for the Nightbane® RPG

By Dale W. Glaser

Brady Gilman hopped off the T and started to run down the street. Before he could round the corner, with the rattling of the departing train echoing in the night, he forced himself to slow down. Be cool, he thought, just be cool. He put his hands in the pockets of his hoodie, took a deep breath, and ambled onward.

He soon reached a playground where most of the streetlamps had long ago burnt out or been smashed. The backboards of basketball hoops were covered in graffiti, dominated by stylized "W"s. Just past the basketball court, the ground rose in a grassy hill, and a pedestrian tunnel cut through the earth. Brady made his way toward the tunnel, trying to will his heart to stop hammering in his chest.

A figure emerged from the dark mouth of the tunnel, wearing combat boots, baggy jeans and a tanktop. Gold chains hung around his neck and a Red Sox hat perched at an angle on his head. "Sup, L'il G?" he asked.

"Hey, F-F-Frankie," Brady answered, cursing inwardly at his failure to sound unaffected.

"Ahh, don't be nervous, L'il G," Frankie said. "Got somebody here who wants ta meet ya. This is Toro."

Another shape appeared from the shadows. The newcomer towered over Frankie; Frankie was tall, but his companion was close to seven feet of solid, bulging muscle dressed in khaki and flannel. A pair of horns curved forward from the sides of the big man's head, ending in wicked points that shone in the moonlight.

Toro looked at Brady, hard and unflinching. "How old are you, 'manito?'"

"Sixteen," Brady said.

Toro snorted. "That's a lie. If you seen thirteen it was last week." Toro considered the boy a little longer. "You ever been in a fight?"

"Once or twice," Brady answered. "Nobody messed with me after the second one."

"We'll see," Toro answered. "See, Frankie here says you're a good kid. And Frankie says you interested in hangin' with us. But there's only one way to prove you ready for that." As if on cue, three more men exited the pedestrian tunnel. The first was

covered in scarlet, reptilian scales, the next had an ancient-looking helmet bolted to his skull and metal spikes running down his tattooed arms, and the last appeared to have had his forearms and hands replaced with giant, black scorpion pincers. All three wore smiles filled with razor-sharp fangs as they formed a loose circle around Brady.

"What ... what's going on?" Brady demanded.

"This is your big test," Toro said coolly. "Sal, D.D. and Crazy Pete here are gonna go to work on you. I don't expect you to take them all down. Hell, I don't expect you to take down any of 'em. They're just gonna go until I tell them to stop, and if you can't stand up, we'll send you home in an ambulance."

"If you're lucky," the scale-skinned one hissed.

"But if you're on your feet in the end, well ..." Toro smiled. "Welcome to the Warlords."

A scorpion claw tore into Brady's side, sending him down to one knee as pain exploded through him. Brady screamed, then transformed into a four-armed Cyclops made of stone. He double-backhanded his clawed attacker, then beckoned the scaled and helmeted Warlords to bring it on.

Boston has been dying a slow death ever since Dark Day. While some cities are the new seats of power for various Nightlords, and others are battlegrounds for the war between darkness and light, Boston is simply a casualty. The population of the city is vastly lower now than it was before the Ba'al invasion, and although the ruling forces of darkness keep the trains running and maintain other appearances of normalcy, Boston is a shadow of its former self. The city has gone bad, and the bad parts of town have gotten far, far worse. In the new order of this decimated city, it has been possible for a group which would once have been on the fringe of society to rise to dominance. The Warlords gang is just such a group.

History of Boston

The city of Boston, Massachusetts was founded in 1630 by English Puritans seeking freedom from the persecutions of state-sponsored religion. It slowly grew from a small settlement village to a teeming city over more than a century, and was a hotbed of incidents which would ultimately lead to the American Revolution in 1776. Boston continued to play a key part in American history throughout the centuries, becoming an important manufacturing and shipping center. By 1999, it was a modern metropolis with a rich sense of history, home to the oldest university in America – Harvard – as well as numerous other colleges, colonial-era churches, and the navy's eldest ship, the USS Constitution.

Boston After Dark Day

Gone are the days when Boston drew hundreds of thousands of tourists every year. In the time after Dark Day, travel and tourism is a fraction of what it once was. Perhaps something in Boston itself causes the city to suffer the effects of this worse than most; where once the spirit of American Revolution was kindled centuries before, now the new world order of the Nightlords crushes freedoms and kills hope, making the birthplace of liberty seem more like its tomb.

Gone, too, are the students who came from all over the world to learn in the finest institutions of higher education available. While some pursuits of study are needed now more than ever, too many students choose to stay close to home after Dark Day, and too many free-thinkers were purged by Preserver Party initiatives for the academic community to survive at even a fraction of its former size.

As such, many neighborhoods in Boston seem like ghost towns. Apartment buildings which housed college and graduate school students stand in derelict disrepair. Stores have been abandoned and stripped clean. Restaurants destroyed by mysterious kitchen fires remain charred husks, never to open again. These signs of urban decay do not tell the entire tale, of course. They stand side by side with residences still occupied, shops still in business and eateries still serving dinner every night. But they contribute to the feeling that the city on the Charles River is being eaten away and may not survive much longer.

Boston technically falls under the direct rule of Lord Moloch, but is effectively governed by a Night Prince named Gurga, who also oversees the Nightlands city of Offal Point, Boston's counterpart on the other side of the Mirrorwall. The politics of the city of Boston are similar to most other East Coast cities under Moloch's rule. The mayor is a Doppelganger, the city council members are Ashmedai and Preserver Party loyalists, the police are Hollow Men and other minions of Moloch. Prince Gurga now attempts to keep Hunter and Hound activities in the city to a minimum; on Dark Day the foot soldiers of the Nightlands engaged in a true Boston massacre. Countless humans were slaughtered, in numbers disproportionate to the killings in most other urban centers on Dark Day, and many of Boston's survivors fled the memories of carnage in a mass exodus immediately afterwards.

The Nightbane population in Boston divides mainly along two faction lines: the Seekers and the Warlords. The two factions have very little contact with one another, each pursuing their own agenda. The Seekers attempt to preserve the community of men and women educated in the occult arts, while the Warlords attempt to amass territorial power through fear and intimidation.

The Warlords' Emergence in Boston

At the dawn of the year 2000, dozens and dozens of gangs operated in the city of Boston, active mostly in the South End, Roxbury and Mattapan neighborhoods. These gangs ranged in size from less than ten members to more than one hundred. A complex web of alliances and rivalries pervaded the organized criminal elements, preventing any consolidation of power.

In the chaos of twenty-four hours of darkness spanning March 6th and 7th of that year, gang warfare was a bloody and explosive element of the terror. Many small to medium-sized gangs were wiped out completely, some as the panic caused old feuds to be finally, fatally settled, others at the pointed ends of Darkblade swords and spears wielded by rampaging Hounds and Hunters, still others for attempting to victimize a Nightbane who turned the tables with his or her first Becoming.

But a few gangs found some of their own members now bore nightmarish visages of their own, giving them just enough of an edge to survive. In a subculture where strength equaled power,

the Nightbane were now the de facto leaders. Four gangs emerged largely intact: the Posse Rojo, the Buzzards, the Marten Street Gang, and the Ill Boys.

The four dominant gangs might have turned on each other and wiped each other out in the days and weeks immediately after Dark Day, if not for the timely arrival of Alejandro "Toro" Torres, a powerful and charismatic Nightbane and leader in the Posse Rojo. Toro fused the survivors into a hybrid gang with an emphasis on Nightbane, rechristening them the Warlords after a Nightbane gang from New York City. The Warlords of Boston rose up and have since shown no sign of declining. They have enemies (see below) but, if nothing else, the Warlords love a good fight.

Notable Characteristics of the Warlords

Initiations: The Warlords generally allow would-be members to hang around with the gang for some time, performing various demonstrations of loyalty. Aspiring members who are siblings or family friends of current Warlords may be entrusted with low-level gang business; others will simply be put to work as menial errand boys. Conversely, if a young Nightbane is discovered, the Warlords may actively pursue a new member. Once the Warlords have determined that they want to initiate a new member, the candidate is "jumped in" – several Warlords administer a brutal beating, and if the recipient is still standing after ten minutes, he is a Warlord.

Tattoos: Most members of gangs have at least one tattoo, and many have full sleeves covering their arms or legs. In addition to any prior tattooing, all members of the Warlords receive a spider web tattoo shortly after their initiation. The styles and locations vary, although the ink usually appears on the neck or the back of the hands.

Hand Signs: Warlords greet and identify each other with a hand sign. The sign is made by holding the wrist against the chest, spreading the thumb, index and middle finger, with the index finger pointing at the neck, in a rough approximation of a "W."

Colors: As a hybrid gang, the Warlords have assimilated multiple gangs with their own gang colors and styles of dress. Officially, the Warlords of Boston have no colors; unofficially, they tend towards the speckled red which originated with the New York Warlords.

Drugs: The Warlords make money selling drugs, just as the component gangs did before Dark Day. Thanks to the more hellish aspects of life after Dark Day, especially in Boston, demand for narcotics has reached new heights, and the Warlords profit greatly from this. However, while dealing is practically mandatory, drug use by members is absolutely prohibited.

Respect: The Warlords command respect. Any perceived sign of disrespect will be met with violent reprisal; disrespect of one member is considered to be disrespect of the entire gang.

Morphus Forms: Most, but not all, of the members of the Warlords are Nightbane. A Warlord Morphus tends to exhibit animal characteristics, violent stigmata, or both. Their Night-

bane nature is embraced and glorified within the gang. Those who can remain in Morphus form full-time generally do, only reverting to Facade when absolutely necessary for interacting with non-Warlords.

Enemies: The Warlords have consolidated much of the gang power in Boston, but a few stragglers were reluctant to be taken in. Additionally, the Nightbane dominance of the Warlords is an open secret which provokes strong reactions in others. This, in turn, has contributed to the resurgence of the Judgment Day Killers, a supremacist gang promoting “human pride.”

Notable NPCs

The following are some of the key players in the gangland turf wars in Boston.

Alejandro “Toro” Torres (Warlords)

Alejandro Torres was only ten years old when he started running with the Posse Rojo in Boston in 1992. Tall for his age and slight as a bird, he was given the nickname “Toro” to poke fun at his physical build but also as a sign of respect for his willingness to charge into a fight. By his teens, Toro was becoming a leader, loved and feared by his fellow gang members in equal measure.

In late 1999, Toro and two of his Posse Rojo brothers took a trip to New York City for a major narcotics score. Unfortunately for Toro, the DEA had been tipped off and the deal had been subverted into a sting operation. Toro was arrested, and rather than implicate any of his fellow gangbangers, he took the fall, even though he was now eighteen and would be tried as an adult. This earned him even more prestige within the Posse Rojo, and the gang did what they could from outside to make his time on the inside tolerable.

The most interesting aspect of his time spent at Riker’s Island, however, was that Toro met an inmate called Big Yobachi. Yobachi was a member of a relatively new gang in New York City called the Warlords, led by a figure known as Chowdown. As time went by, Yobachi slowly revealed to Toro the secret of Chowdown’s success, namely the fact that he was not at all human, and in fact, had been jumping in more and more new Warlords who were more than flesh and blood. Yobachi believed that a time would come when the true monsters would rule the streets, and Toro began to believe as well.

Then came Dark Day, and a prison riot on Riker’s Island of epic proportions. Some said that black-armored terrors were literally slicing open the penitentiary walls, freeing the inmates and helping them to slaughter correctional officers. Toro saw a few of the inmates switch into nightmarish creatures, drawing the murderous attention of the dark skeletal invaders. Toro saw Yobachi metamorphose into a dog-headed giant with machine-gun arms, only to be hacked apart by a swarm of black. And Toro felt himself transform as well. Fearful for the first time in years, Toro ran.

Toro crossed the bridge to Queens on foot and found that the rest of New York City was under siege as well. Chaos was exploding in every direction. Toro finally saw his own reflection in a darkened storefront window. He had grown taller and more muscular; his physique was now something a pro bodybuilder



would envy. Bull’s horns now grew from the sides of his head. Toro regarded himself with fascination, and realized that in his new form, he had very little to fear.

Toro spent the remainder of Dark Day equipping himself for a trip home, an easy enough task in the midst of the looting. Any Hounds that crossed his path soon found that Toro was far stronger than he looked, and Toro discovered that, in addition to his fearsome physical might, he could wield whips of dark energy at his mental command. Within a few hours, Toro was riding a boosted motorcycle across the George Washington Bridge on his way to Boston.

Back in his hometown, Toro set to work assembling the four remaining gangs in Boston into a new chapter of the Warlords, incorporating everything Yobachi had explained to him. He encountered virtually no resistance in restructuring the gangs and assuming a position as their leader. As he had expected, Toro found that several other members of the new Warlords had al-

ready discovered their previously unknown supernatural sides. Toro then began his campaign to recruit even more monsters.

Toro

Note: All attributes and stats in brackets are available to the character only in his Nightbane Morphus form.

Alignment: Anarchist.

Attributes: I.Q. 10, M.E. 12, M.A. 22, P.S. 14 (28), P.P. 12 (18), P.E. 13 (26), P.B. 9 (21), Spd 12 (22).

Hit Points: 35 (91).

S.D.C.: 30 (135).

Horror Factor: 8

P.P.E.: 208

R.C.C.: Nightbane.

Level of Experience: 6th

Natural Abilities: All the basic powers, abilities and bonuses of the Nightbane R.C.C.

Morphus: A tall, muscular, attractive man with large bull's horns growing from the sides of his head (Unusual Facial Features: Large Horns; Uncanny Beauty: Animal Magnetism and Physical Perfection).

Disposition: Toro is very accustomed to getting his way, and is usually easy-going, charming, and even has a good sense of humor, provided that he is shown the proper deference and complete obedience. Under any other circumstances, his savage temper results in violent outbursts. Toro is loyal to the Warlords and expects the same from his brothers; the vast majority of the time, his history of proving himself combined with his supernatural animal magnetism guarantees this loyalty. Toro enjoys leading the gang because it affords him the means and opportunities to get what he wants. Anything outside of the Warlords culture is either a means to his selfish ends or an obstacle to be destroyed.

Psionic Powers: None.

Magical Knowledge: None.

Talents: Darkwhip, Doorway.

Combat Abilities: Facade: Hand to Hand: Expert. Morphus: Hand to Hand: Martial Arts.

Attacks per Melee Round: Facade: Three. Morphus: Three.

Damage: Facade: 1D4 S.D.C. punch and 1D6 S.D.C. kick.

Morphus: Restrained punch does 2D6, full strength punch inflicts 4D6 S.D.C., and power punch does 1D4x10 S.D.C. (counts as two melee attacks).

Bonuses (Facade): +2 to strike, +3 to parry/dodge, +2 to roll/pull punch.

Bonuses (Morphus): +1 on initiative, +6 to strike, +7 to parry/dodge, +5 to roll/pull punch, +13 damage.

Vulnerabilities/Penalties: None.

O.C.C. Skills of Note: Streetwise 64%, Streetwise: Drugs 55%, Prowl 55%, Pick Locks 60%, W.P. Knife, W.P. Automatic Pistol, Pilot: Automobile 72%, Pilot: Motorcycle 84%, Concealment 44%, Detect Concealment 55%, Detect Ambush 60%.

Transportation: Often driven around by other Warlords.

Weapons: Barracuda FN Revolver (4D6 damage), switchblade (1D6 damage).



Eduardo "Porkchop" Zelaya (Warlords)

Eduardo Zelaya came up through the Posse Rojo around the same time as Toro, although in much less memorable fashion. At the time his gang sign was simply "EZ," and he was a forgettable street thug who dealt small quantities of drugs. Dark Day, however, brought out another side of EZ.

EZ was sound asleep when the Dark Day phenomenon began, but at 10 AM the sound of screaming in his apartment building woke him. He stumbled out into the hallway in time to see his neighbor Mr. Pioquinto impaled on a spear held by a Hunter. EZ lashed out in a rage and attacked the Hunter, in the process transforming into a massive, lycanthropic man-pig. Once the Hunter lay in a pile of shattered obsidian armor and black ichor at his feet, EZ returned to his apartment in a state of shock, refusing to venture outside until he had reverted to his Facade form.

Human once more and armed with two .45s, EZ found his fellow Posse Rojo members and joined in the fight for survival. He said nothing about his shapeshifting experience and was able to avoid any further manifestations of his Morphus form.

When Toro returned to Boston and assumed command of the gang, he immediately recognized EZ's true nature and encouraged his friend to embrace the monster as he had. EZ reluctantly agreed, as Toro elevated him to a lieutenant's rank within the newly-formed Warlords. Toro also gave EZ his new nickname, "Porkchop," an obvious reference to the pig attributes of his Morphus. Porkchop became one of Toro's most trusted advisors and confidants and proved more than worthy of the gang leader's faith in him.

Porkchop

Note: All attributes and stats in brackets are available to the character only in his Nightbane Morphus form.

Alignment: Unprincipled.

Attributes: I.Q. 10, M.E. 11, M.A. 12, P.S. 14 (26), P.P. 11 (17), P.E. 14 (28), P.B. 10, Spd 12 (22).

Hit Points: 30 (62).

S.D.C.: 46 (246).

Horror Factor: 12 (+1D6 when living tattoos are noticed).

P.P.E.: 221

R.C.C.: Nightbane.

Level of Experience: 4th

Natural Abilities: All the basic powers, abilities and bonuses of the Nightbane R.C.C.

Morphus: A large man with pointed ears, a pig-nose and tusks, barbed wire snaking in and out of the flesh of the neck and shoulders, and constantly shifting tattoos covering the arms. (Alien Shape: Living Tattoos, Stigmata I: Barbed Wire, Porcine Form: Pig Humanoid – see New Morphus Forms below.)

Disposition: Porkchop might not have become a gangbanger if he had had any other options in life. He is neither violent nor cruel by nature, interested only in protecting himself and those he cares about – his family, his neighbors and his fellow Warlords. He justifies the illegal activities of the gang, and the victims of those crimes, in the name of self-preservation. In general, he has more compassion and more patience than the average Warlord. However, he is extremely stubborn and can rarely have his mind changed by any effort once it is made up.

Psionic Powers: None.

Magical Knowledge: None.

Talents: Nightbringer, See Truth.

Combat Abilities: Facade: Hand to Hand: Expert. Morphus: Hand to Hand: Martial Arts.

Attacks per Melee Round: Facade: Four. Morphus: Four.

Damage: Facade: 1D4 S.D.C. punch and 1D6 S.D.C. kick.

Morphus: Restrained punch does 2D6, full strength punch inflicts 4D6 S.D.C., and power punch does 1D4x10 S.D.C. (counts as two melee attacks). Bite attack does 2D6.

Bonuses (Facade): +2 to strike, +5 to parry/dodge, +3 to roll/pull punch.

Bonuses (Morphus): +1 on initiative, +5 to strike, +8 to parry/dodge, +5 to roll/pull punch, +11 damage.

Vulnerabilities/Penalties: None.

O.C.C. Skills of Note: Streetwise 51%, Streetwise: Drugs 55%, Prowl 55%, Pick Locks 65%, W.P. Knife, W.P. Automatic Pistol, Pilot: Automobile 73%, Boxing, Concealment 46%, First Aid 65%, Automotive Mechanics 45%.

Transportation: Porkchop drives a ten-year-old Chevy Impala.

Weapons: .45 Colt (2) (4D6 damage).

Mikael “Zigzag” Hainey (Warlords)

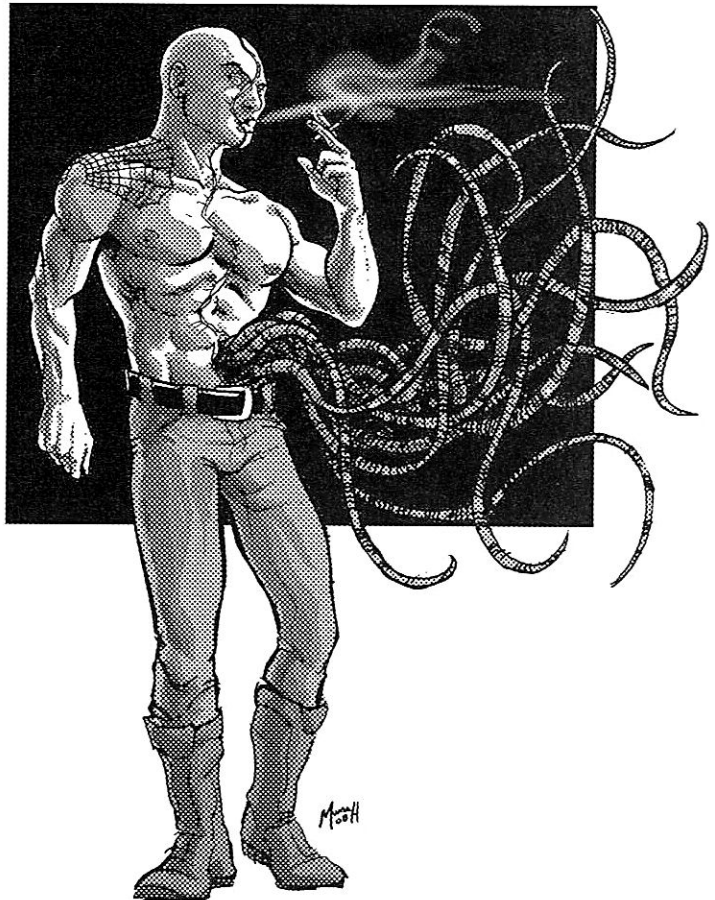
Mikael Hainey ran with the Ill Boys prior to Dark Day, a gang well-known for terrorizing various areas of South Boston. Mikael himself was a driving force in the Ill Boys’ campaign of intimidation and brutal violence, and was under investigation by government agencies. He had been in and out of juvenile halls as well as penitentiaries over the years and would have been approached by federal officers on his next visit to prison to discuss cutting a deal. Pieces were being moved into place during the first week of March in the year 2000, as arguments were made as to whether a sadistic, drug-addicted low-life such as Mikael could be trusted to turn state’s evidence or would be better left to rot in prison.

The Nightlords’ invasion made the point moot. Dark Day threw the law enforcement community at all levels into total disarray and most of the Massachusetts state officers and federal agents who had ever heard of Mikael Hainey were murdered and replaced by Ba’al minions who were devoted to different agendas. Mikael once again slipped through the cracks.

Surviving Dark Day on the streets was no easy task, either. As a whole, the Ill Boys did not fare well as Boston was plunged into riotous darkness. Most of the gang was in the wrong place at the wrong time, looting a liquor store located across the street from an occult bookstore specifically targeted by the minions of the Ba’al. Two Hound Masters, riding on a Living Chariot and leading a pack of Hounds, orchestrated the burning of the bookstore and merciless slaughter of the small coven hiding within. As the Hounds exited the store, the Ill Boys opened fire on them. A spectacularly bloody battle erupted in the street, and the Ill Boys were overmatched.

Mikael survived mainly by staying out of the action; more than once he threw a fellow gang member to a waiting Hound or used one as a human shield. Mikael and a few other Ill Boys ran for their lives, and once they were a few blocks away from the conflagration, Mikael expected to call the shots for their next move. To his surprise, the other Ill Boys ran away from him with the same terror-born speed as they had fled the Hounds. Mikael looked at his hands and chest to discover his skin bizarrely discolored and a hideous slash bisecting his torso. However, he felt better than he had in years, and spent the remainder of Dark Day reveling in the violence.

When Toro began reaching out to other gangs to establish the core that would become the Warlords, Mikael was initially re-



sistant to working with the rival Posse Rojo. But the Ill Boys had been decimated and Mikael was smart enough to read the writing on the wall. Survival via strength of numbers was worth the compromise, especially given his newly-discovered Nightbane nature. However, Mikael never became a model Warlord. He continued his heavy drug use. He preferred to remain in Facade form rather than Morphus. And he never considered the gang to be a family – only a useful resource to draw on when necessary. It is unknown whether Toro nicknamed Mikael “Zigzag” simply because of the shape of the scar running the length of his torso, or because at some level, Toro suspects that Zigzag’s loyalty is equally unpredictable.

Zigzag

Note: All attributes and stats in brackets are available to the character only in his Nightbane Morphus form.

Alignment: Miscreant.

Attributes: I.Q. 9, M.E. 12, M.A. 10, P.S. 15 (25), P.P. 11 (17), P.E. 14 (23), P.B. 10, Spd 11 (21).

Hit Points: 34 (68)

S.D.C.: 40 (162).

Horror Factor: 13

P.P.E.: 123

R.C.C.: Nightbane.

Level of Experience: 5th

Natural Abilities: All the basic powers, abilities and bonuses of the Nightbane R.C.C.

Morphus: An athletically built man with a jagged, oozing scar running down the midline from the crown of his head to his belly button. The skin on the left side of the gash is blue and the skin on the right side is purple. Intestinal tentacles can emerge from the bloody wound at will. A purple tail with blue spikes extends from the spine. (Stigmata I: Eternal Wounds, Stigmata II: Gut Tentacles, Alien Shape: Unusual Skin Color, Unnatural Limbs: Spiked Prehensile Tail.)

Disposition: Zigzag has very few redeeming qualities and is tolerated within the Warlords because of a combination of the gang’s code of loyalty and the fact that most Warlords would rather have Zigzag as an ally than an enemy. Zigzag, on the other hand, knows no true loyalty and cares little about who his allies or enemies may be. He is supremely selfish, lazy, and arrogant, considering himself an expert on the finer things in life: drugs, alcohol, and women who enjoy the same. Zigzag takes what he wants and enjoys sadistically thrashing anyone who tries to stop him. He especially delights in using his Mark of the Nightbane Talent to “gut” opponents, but he tends to pick fights only with weaker targets; Zigzag is a coward at heart.

Psionic Powers: None.

Magical Knowledge: None.

Talents: Mark of the Nightbane, Bloodbath, Soul Shield, Shadow Storm.

Combat Abilities: Facade: Hand to Hand: Expert. Morphus: Hand to Hand: Martial Arts.

Attacks per Melee Round: Facade: Three. Morphus: Five.

Damage: Facade: 1D4 S.D.C. punch and 1D6 S.D.C. kick.

Morphus: Restrained punch does 2D4, full strength punch inflicts 3D6 S.D.C., and power punch does 6D6 S.D.C. (counts as two melee attacks). Tail strike does 2D6.

Bonuses (Facade): +2 to strike, +5 to parry/dodge, +3 to roll/pull punch.

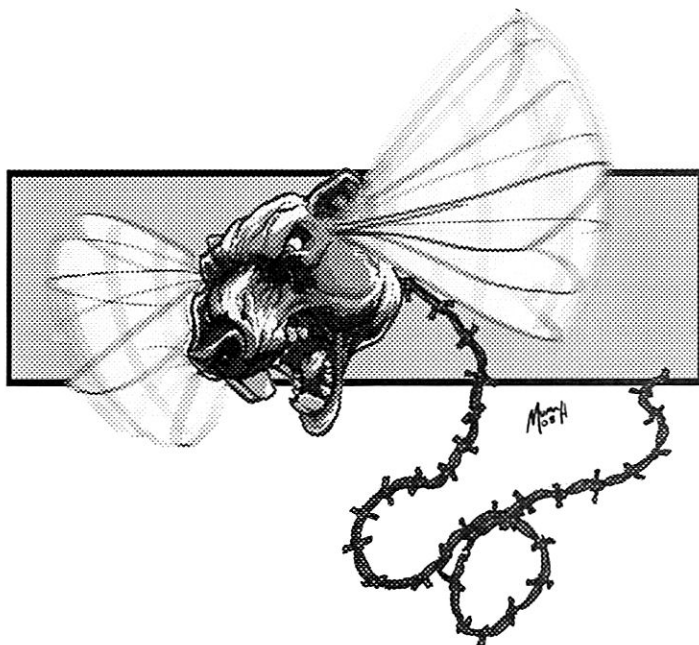
Bonuses (Morphus): +1 on initiative, +5 to strike, +8 to parry/dodge, +5 to roll/pull punch, +11 damage.

Vulnerabilities/Penalties: None.

O.C.C. Skills of Note: Streetwise 55%, Streetwise: Drugs 60%, Prowl 60%, Pick Locks 70%, W.P. Chain, W.P. Automatic Pistol, Pilot: Automobile 70%, Body Building, Forgery 45%, Palming 45%, Interrogation Techniques 65%.

Transportation: Zigzag’s prize possession is his custom white Cadillac.

Weapons: 9mm Mini Uzi (2) (2D6).



Johnny “Gnat” Natoli (Warlords)

Johnny Natoli was a Marten Street Gang wannabe from an early age. He hung around with the wise guys, always trying a little too hard to ingratiate himself to them. Johnny was the youngest of seven children, living in a cramped row home with his parents and his paternal grandmother. Johnny saw the gang as a way not only to escape from poverty but also to finally be noticed and important. The Marten Street Gang, for their part, tolerated Johnny, but mostly considered him to be an annoying little gnat – and the “Gnat” nickname stuck.

Still, even a wannabe can be of great use to a gang. Gnat was often called on to run errands for the Marten Street paisanos – carrying contraband, looking out for cops, and so on. Gnat took to these tasks with gusto and no small amount of pride, and acquitted himself reasonably well. However, this was never enough to gain him full membership in the gang. He seemed destined to forever remain a hanger-on, yet was blinded by his desperate need for acceptance and belonging. Gnat never gave up hope that he would one day be a true member of the gang.

As was the case with most other gangs in Boston, the Marten Street Gang suffered many casualties on Dark Day. The Natoli

family suffered as well, as Gnat's parents and his oldest brother Vincent were killed by a Shadow Scorpion unleashed on their neighborhood. Gnat and his other siblings scattered, running for their lives; Gnat immediately sought out the protection of the Marten Street Gang.

By the time Gnat found the gang, they had been harried by Hounds and Hunters for most of the day and were making a last stand against the minions of the Nightlords. Gnat, driven by his unfathomable sense of loyalty to the Marten Street Gang, threw himself into the fray. Fortunately, the combat roused the Morphus within Johnny Natoli. He transformed into a savage rat – at least, the head of a giant rat, with sharp rodent teeth slaving to rend the Hunters' black armor. The only appendages on the rat's head were a pair of shriveled wings and a whiplike tail composed of braided, rusty barbed wire. The Nightbane was able to turn the tide and allowed the gang to fight back and survive.

When it became obvious that Toro was more likely to accept the few surviving members of the Marten Street Gang into the Warlords if they included Gnat among their ranks, the gang members behaved as if Gnat had always been one of their most trusted brothers. Gnat believed he had finally won the respect of the Marten Street Gang, and the Warlords, and had finally found the family he had always been looking for.

Gnat

Note: All attributes and stats in brackets are available to the character only in his Nightbane Morphus form.

Alignment: Anarchist.

Attributes: I.Q. 10, M.E. 12, M.A. 14, P.S. 14 (24), P.P. 12 (18), P.E. 13 (23), P.B. 9, Spd 12 (60, flight only).

Hit Points: 24 (50).

S.D.C.: 35 (195).

Horror Factor: 13

P.P.E.: 150

R.C.C.: Nightbane.

Level of Experience: 3rd

Natural Abilities: All the basic powers, abilities and bonuses of the Nightbane R.C.C.

Morphus: A gigantic rat's head with vestigial insect wings (which, despite their appearance, do allow Gnat to fly) and a tail composed entirely of rusty barbed wire. (Insectoid Shape: Insect Wings, Stigmata I: Barbed Wire, Head Form: No Body – see New Morphus Forms below.)

Disposition: Gnat is a fervent, almost fanatical believer in the Warlords' way of life. He sometimes behaves as if he still has something to prove in order to be deemed worthy, but more often than not, enjoys taking every advantage offered him by his standing with the Nightbane gang. Gnat is so excited to finally be a gangbanger that he seems oblivious to the abject horror which has consumed the City of Boston. His surviving siblings have all fled the urban environment, leaving Grandmama Natoli as his only family, and indeed the only person he cares about outside of the Warlords enclave.

Psionic Powers: None.

Magical Knowledge: None.

Talents: Swarm Self.

Combat Abilities: Facade: Hand to Hand: Basic. Morphus: Hand to Hand: Martial Arts.

Attacks per Melee Round: Facade: Three. Morphus: Five.

Damage: Facade: 1D4 S.D.C. punch and 1D6 S.D.C. kick.

Morphus: Restrained punch does 2D4, full strength punch inflicts 3D6 S.D.C., and power punch does 6D6 S.D.C. (counts as two melee attacks). Tail strike does 2D6.

Bonuses (Facade): +2 to strike, +5 to parry/dodge, +3 to roll/pull punch.

Bonuses (Morphus): +1 on initiative, +5 to strike, +8 to parry/dodge (additional +1 to dodge in flight), +5 to roll/pull punch, +11 damage.

Vulnerabilities/Penalties: None.

O.C.C. Skills of Note: Streetwise 47%, Streetwise: Drugs 50%, Prowl 50%, Pick Locks 55%, W.P. Knife, Tracking 40%, Counter-Tracking 40%, Escape Artist 50%, Computer Operation 55%, Pick Pockets 50%, Concealment 42%, Running.

Transportation: None.

Weapons: None.



Christian Grutzner (Judgment Day Killers)

Christian Grutzner spent his entire life in Boston and hated almost everyone he ever met. His father, William Grutzner, managed to accomplish all of the following in less than a year: He met a young girl named Tara, bedded and impregnated her, alienated her entire family, hastily married her, beat her on several occasions before and after the marriage, lost his job, and left Boston never to be seen again. By then Tara was friendless and nearly penniless. Her baby boy Christian arrived into that cold, lonely void and never truly escaped.

Despite her treatment at William's hands, Tara never faulted Christian's father for their misfortunes. One thing they had shared in common was a sense of "white pride" and the attendant racist disdain for all other peoples. Tara blamed Hispanics for saturating the job market and causing William to lose his job, and inevitably leave his young family. She blamed Afri-

can-Americans for the high crime rates in her neighborhood. She blamed Asians for her own difficulties finding decent wages.

Christian inherited all of his mother's prejudices, and added one of his own. He blamed Tara for being weak, for never bettering herself and for failing them both. Christian grew up to be a misogynist as well as a racist. When he became aware of the Judgment Day Killers as a young teen, he found in them the ideals of his own warped sense of family: an all-white, boys-only club angry at the world and all too eager to take out their aggressions and frustrations on minorities, women, and authorities. Christian never felt more at home than the day he shaved his head during his JDK initiation.

In addition to the usual gang-related crimes of robbery and extortion, Christian spent the majority of his time with the Judgment Day Killers establishing the gang's superiority over rival, non-white gangs. The JDK existed in a state of perpetual warfare with gangs such as the Posse Rojo and the Ill Boys. Some battles were resolved in fistfights; others took the form of drive-by shootings. Christian committed his first murder at age 16, putting a bullet through the back of a Latino gangbanger's head, because the other boy had made sexually suggestive comments to a JDK's sister.

By the time Dark Day engulfed Boston, Christian had become the leader of the JDK, and he believed the shadowy Armageddon was an opportunity for the gang to live up to its name. The Judgment Day Killers slithered through the twenty-four hours of supernatural night as a roving death squad, racking up a body count to rival packs of Hunters. But whereas the minions of the Ba'al targeted sorcerers, mystics and Nightbane, the skinhead gangbangers singled out Koreans, Pakistanis and other non-whites for execution.

Ironically, by single-mindedly focusing on murder, the Judgment Day Killers saved the lives of most of their members. The gang remained in close physical proximity at all times, weapons drawn defiantly. Some fatalities were inevitable, both mundane and supernatural, but, as a whole, the gang survived Dark Day intact. However, in the aftermath of the Nightlord invasion, the JDK came to realize that the world around them had changed. In response, the gang's priorities changed as well.

True monsters had come to Boston, their very otherworldly nature a far greater affront than the color of a person's skin. The Judgment Day Killers rededicated themselves to purifying their city, and the monsters would be the first against the wall. The gang draws no distinctions between Nightbane, minions of the Nightlords, or other supernatural creatures; they see only humanity, and the inhuman. It is now far more likely that the victim of a JDK-led beating would be a Nightbane – Caucasian Facade or no – than a human foreigner.

The Warlords, their ranks composed mainly of minorities who also happen to be Nightbane, are, of course, the Judgment Day Killers' favorite targets. And Christian Grutzner remains at the forefront of the struggle, utterly convinced that he is on the side of decency and right.

Christian Grutzner

Alignment: Miscreant.

Attributes: I.Q. 9, M.E. 12, M.A. 15, P.S. 12, P.P. 17, P.E. 14, P.B. 12, Spd 11.

Hit Points: 15

S.D.C.: 25

Level of Experience: 4th

Disposition: Christian Grutzner is as hateful as any human being can be. Before Dark Day, he believed the world was a broken and unfair place; the circumstances of the Nightlords' rise to power have increased that sense tenfold. Christian is driven and humorless, completely dedicated to the dominance of humans (preferably white humans) and secure in the belief that the Judgment Day Killers will be instrumental in achieving that goal. While not bloodthirsty, Christian is coolly merciless; he does not enjoy killing but often views it as a necessity. In fairness, Christian does not enjoy anything, and may, in fact, be incapable of actual happiness.

Psionic Powers: None.

Magical Knowledge: None.

Combat Abilities: Hand to Hand: Expert.

Attacks per Melee Round: Three.

Bonuses: +1 on initiative, +2 to strike, +4 to parry/dodge, +2 to roll/pull punch.

Vulnerabilities/Penalties: None.

O.C.C. Skills of Note: Streetwise 61%, Prowl 55%, Pick Locks 65%, W.P. Chain, W.P. Automatic Pistol, Pilot: Automobile 73%, Tracking 45%, Escape Artist 50%, Computer Operation 60%, Pick Pockets 45%.

Weapons: Bicycle Chain (1D6), Browning GP 35 (2D6).

Ray Berenford (Judgment Day Killers)

In the earliest period of post-Dark Day regrouping of the Judgment Day Killers, Christian Grutzner was aided immensely by a man named Ray Berenford. Ray showed an uncanny ability to predict Christian's needs and desires. He also proved to have a seemingly limitless supply of contacts and favors, which meant no resource, tangible or otherwise, remained out of JDK reach. Ray quickly became indispensable as Christian's right-hand man, and Christian never thought to ask where the quiet, competent skinhead had come from.

Christian would be less than pleased to learn that his trusted friend has always been, in reality, an Ashmedai called Raalohg'dizehk who serves the Night Prince Gurga. Recognizing the threat represented by the Warlords in Boston, Gurga tasked Raalohg'dizehk with fueling the fire of the war between the Nightbane-led gang and their human-led rivals. The Ashmedai took the assignment begrudgingly.

Some time before Dark Day, Raalohg'dizehk had once been the leader of an insurgency in Doom's Harbor, attempting to wrest control of the labor camps near the Darkblade forges away from Lord Moloch. Several Ashmedai had agreed to rule that sector of the city together and farm the human slaves as a self-sustaining supply of ready P.P.E. Their plan failed, and most of the Ashmedai were killed, but Moloch reserved special punishment for Raalohg'dizehk. The shapeshifter was tortured, physically and mentally, and then indentured as a servant of Gurga in the wretched city of Offal Point.

When Gurga first commanded Raalohg'dizehk to infiltrate the Judgment Day Killers, the embittered Ashmedai saw it as an expedient egress from the Nightlands. As time has passed, how-



ever, Raalohg'dizehk found certain enjoyable elements in the task. Boston proved to be a fearful place, yet the remaining humanity was not yet completely numb to its horrors, providing strong emotions to fuel feasts of P.P.E. Raalohg'dizehk also took no small pleasure in goading the Judgment Day Killers into attacking other servants of Gurga's, including Hounds, Hunters and doppelgangers. Subverting the Night Prince's desires and playing the hapless human gangbangers against both Nightbane Warlords and minions of the Ba'al are great sport for the Ashmedai.

Ray Berenford

Alignment: Diabolic.

Attributes: I.Q. 22, M.E. 18, M.A. 21, P.S. 24, P.P. 19, P.E. 23, P.B. 3, Spd 30.

Hit Points: 80

S.D.C.: 170 in human form; 270 in true form.

Horror Factor: 14 (when true form is revealed).

P.P.E.: 6

R.C.C.: Ashmedai.

Level of Experience: 3rd

Natural Abilities: Supernatural vision, shape shifting.

Disposition: In the presence of fellow Judgment Day Killers, Ray Berenford is stoic. He attends to Christian Grutzner's needs with a quiet, business-like confidence. Away from the gang, Ray shows slightly more emotion, a cruel smile here or there as he relishes stalking victims and causing pain. The true Ashmedai form of Raalohg'dizehk still shows the scars of Lord Moloch's torture, including a broken fang in the upper right corner of the mouth, and a permanently paralyzed tentacle.

Psionic Powers: Alter Aura, Empathy, Mind Block, See Aura, Telepathy.

I.S.P.: 90

Magical Knowledge: None.

Combat Abilities: Supernatural.

Attacks per Melee Round: Four.

Damage: Restrained punch does 2D4, full strength punch inflicts 3D6 S.D.C., and power punch does 6D6 S.D.C. (counts as two melee attacks). Tentacle in true form adds 1D6+6 damage.

Bonuses: +3 to strike, parry and dodge, +5 to roll/pull punch, +3 save vs magic, +5 save vs psionics, +8 save vs Horror Factor.

Vulnerabilities/Penalties: None.

O.C.C. Skills of Note: Streetwise 61%, Streetwise: Drugs 65%, Prowl 55%, Pick Locks 65%, W.P. Knife, W.P. Automatic Pistol, Pilot: Automobile 70%, Tracking 45%, Escape Artist 50%, Computer Operation 60%, Pick Pockets 45%.

Transportation: None.

Weapons: None.

Adventure Ideas

The Warlords are best utilized to add an element of depth to a Nightbane campaign. Over time, players may become too accustomed to the standard battle lines of the struggle against the Ba'al: Nightbane on the side of good, minions of the Nightlords on the side of evil. The Warlords are on no side but their own, and can be used to challenge the assumptions of players and introduce more shades of gray. This is especially true in Boston, a city which was hit harder than most by Dark Day and which never fully recovered. In Boston the struggle to stay alive is dire and difficult, and heroic ideals are hard to come by. The Warlords are survivors, but they are also thieves, murderers, and worse, and players who have dealings with them should never forget it.

Race to Recruitment: A young Nightbane in Boston has just undergone his (or her) first Becoming, and the player characters are reaching out to the Nightbane on behalf of their faction. If some or all of the players are involved with the Underground Railroad, this should be fairly standard operating procedure, but other factions may have their reasons as well: the young Nightbane may have powerful mystic inclinations foretold in the clairvoyant dreams of a Seeker, or may be incredibly physically resilient, ideal for a frontline member of the Resistance. By the time the player characters arrive in Boston, however, Toro has already set his sights on recruiting the Nightbane as a Warlord. The player characters may show varying degrees of willingness to come to physical blows, but the Warlords will have no hesitation. Even if brutal violence does not erupt, the player characters may be hard-pressed to convince the young Nightbane that their faction's constant struggle against the Ba'al is preferable to the comparatively easy living of the Warlords, content to rule their turf, take what they want and live as they please.

Unlikely Allies: The player characters trace a Nightlord plot all the way to Boston, determining that a large number of arcane artifacts have been confiscated by the Boston Police Department, under the control of Night Prince Gurga. The artifacts are stashed in evidence lockers in various precincts, and are soon to

be shipped to the Nightlands for delivery to Lord Moloch. The player characters may have need of a specific artifact, or simply wish to spoil Gurga's plans. In any case, the well-known enmity between the police and the Warlords should lead to the idea that the Warlords may be of some help. Obtaining that help from the Warlords, on the other hand, may prove difficult. The Warlords may insist on cash for their services, for example. For that matter, if the player characters encounter the Warlords on the streets of Boston, they may not be allowed to pass through Warlords turf without some kind of payment in kind, whether or not the Warlords have any intention of joining a suicide raid on a police station. If, against the odds, the Warlords can be convinced to join forces with the player characters, they still may not make the mission much easier. Warlords are good in a fight but have little patience for anything more sophisticated than a smash and grab, which can complicate an attempt at subtlety and could tip the police (Doppelgangers and Hollow Men) off early enough for them to hide or destroy the artifacts.

Gang War: The player characters are drawn into a deadly escalation of violence between the Warlords and the Judgment Day Killers in Boston. The player characters' involvement may be due to an NPC caught in the middle who begs for protection, or simply because the player characters wish to defend fellow Nightbane against the anti-supernatural antagonism of the JDK gang. Obviously, this scenario should be combat-heavy and bloody, but not necessarily simple. The incendiary event which sets off the gang warfare might be an act committed by any of the Warlords, any of the Judgment Day Killers, or possibly Gurga himself. The stakes of the struggle may be high, or the whole conflict may be inherently senseless. The player characters should find themselves asking what price is being paid by both sides, and what, if anything, can be won in the end.

In any scenario, be sure to convey the darkness of both the city of Boston and the hearts of the Warlords. The city may serve as a grim harbinger of the fate awaiting the world if the Nightlords succeed in conquering Earth completely. The Warlords, on the other hand, represent what may become of the player characters themselves if they give themselves over to the feral or warlike aspects reflected in their Morphus natures.

New Morphus Tables

Porcine Forms

Some people think pigs are cute, as any number of stuffed animals and children's cartoons will attest. Others think that pigs are disgusting and unclean, wallowing in mud and eating garbage, and see the animals as embodying the human vices of sloth and gluttony. Some people marvel at the biological similarities between pigs and humans, from pigs' intelligence to their ability to sunburn to human diabetics finding their condition treatable with pigs' insulin. Others find pigs, in a word, delicious.

Pigs are yet another animal for which characteristics often manifest in Nightbane Morphus forms. This includes both domesticated farm swine and wild boars. Nightbane who manifest porcine forms can therefore have any kind of temperament, from surly antisocial types (boars) to lazy louts (pigs).

01-20% Full Porcine: The Nightbane's Morphus is a large pig or boar, generally larger than a normal pig, standing nearly four feet (1.2 m) tall at the shoulder. Bonuses: +4 to P.S., +6 to P.E., +1D6 to Spd, +2D6x10 to S.D.C. and +2 to Horror Factor. The porcine form cannot use weapons, but a bite attack does 3D6, or 4D6 for a gore with tusks if the porcine form is a wild boar.



21-40% Were-Boar: A huge pig- or boar-like creature that walks like a man. A hairless were-pig may be mistaken for a human in extremely low light; a shaggy were-boar generally will be too monstrous. The were-creature does have hands which can perform skills requiring manual dexterity, but at -10%. Bonuses: +2 to P.S., +4 to P.E., +2D4x10 to S.D.C. Bite attack does 2D6 or 3D6 with boar tusks. Add +3 to Horror Factor.

41-70% Pig Humanoid: A large creature, human in shape, with many porcine characteristics. At the very least, the Morphus has an upturned nose, smaller than normal dark eyes, and a severe underbite, possibly with small tusks. The Morphus may or may not be covered in hair. There is also a 50% chance that the pig humanoid Morphus will be grotesquely obese, weighing 400 pounds (180 kg) or more! Bonuses: +2 to P.S. (+3 if obese), +4 to P.E. (+6 if obese), +1D6x10 to S.D.C. (+2D6x10 if obese), -2 to P.P. (ONLY if obese), and -1D6 to Spd (ONLY if obese). Bite attack does 2D6. Add +2 to Horror Factor (+3 if obese).

71-80% Pig Centauroid: The Nightbane has the upper torso of a were-boar and the lower body of a full, four-legged boar or pig. This massive creature will have a difficult time fitting in enclosed spaces. Bonuses: +6 to P.S., +8 to P.E., +1D6 to Spd, +3D6x10 to S.D.C. Bite attack does 2D6 or 3D6 with boar tusks. Add +1D4+1 to Horror Factor.

81-00% Pig Head: A normal looking human with the head of a pig or boar. Bite attack does 3D6, or 4D6 for a gore with tusks if the head is a wild boar. Add +1D4 to Horror Factor.

Head Forms

Despite the distribution of vital organs throughout the body and the abilities granted by human limbs – walking on legs, manipulating the environment with hands – the head is still considered by many to be the part of the body rightly associated with the concept of the self. Therefore, it is no surprise that many Morphus forms manifest with strange attributes for the head. Heads may take on unusual prominence, or be grotesquely misshapen. Sometimes a Morphus may even boast more than one head!

01-10% Pinhead: The Morphus form's head is somewhat larger than normal, although it tapers to a point at the crown. This is the only big-headed form which might pass for human. -2 to I.Q., -5% on skills in Morphus form. +2 to Horror Factor.

11-30% Egghead: The Morphus form's head is at least three times the size of a normal human head, with the brainpan, especially, tending to be swollen. +4 to I.Q. (minimum 20, include skill bonus) in Morphus form. +3 to Horror Factor.

31-50% Two-Headed: The Morphus form has two independent heads, each set slightly off-center on the body's shoulders. If the Morphus form has any other Nightbane characteristics affecting the head, they may affect both heads or only one. For example, a Nightbane with two heads, stigmata, and animal characteristics may have one human head covered in bloody spikes and one wolf's head. Or they might have two wolf's heads, but only one afflicted with the spikes. +4 to Horror Factor, +1 action per melee.

51-70% No Neck: The Morphus form's head is nothing more than a mound of flesh (or stone, or metal, or whatever the case may be) which slopes upward from the chest, shoulders and

back. The facial features are also several times wider than normal. +3D6 to S.D.C., +3 to Horror Factor.

71-85% No Head! The Morphus form is completely devoid of a head. Despite this seemingly crippling deficiency, the Nightbane can still see, hear and speak, with the voice emanating eerily from the neck. +6 to Horror Factor.

86-00% No Body! The Morphus form is a giant head, many times the size of a normal human head (approximately four feet (1.2 m) from the crown of the head to the tip of the chin). The arms and legs (if any, depending on other Morphus attributes) are normal size, with arms growing out of the head's temples and legs growing out of the neck. +5 to Horror Factor, +1D6x10 to S.D.C. (the Morphus body has the proportional toughness of a thick skull).

UNDER THE SKIN

Supernatural Leather Working, Looming, Bio-Alchemy and the Kezel For Palladium Fantasy® and Rifts®

By Joseph Larsen

Introduction

Life in hostile environments inevitably increases the relevance of ancient survival skills and techniques. In settings where the supernatural interacts with the natural, this knowledge becomes more important than ever to aid in the protection from countless dangers. Even though the supernatural can bring with it many dangers, it also brings supernatural materials to utilize with these skills. Two examples of these renewed survival skills include leather working and looming. In addition, a new and useful trade called Supernatural Bio-Alchemy has been invented.

Supernatural leather working utilizes the skins from all types of supernatural creatures to craft super-durable leather products. These products can be enhanced with magic properties, among which includes self-regeneration. Armor and other items that are fashioned from the supernatural materials are more durable, even though their uses remain the same as their ancient counterparts.

Looming is another ancient technique that has been enhanced by the supernatural. Fibers from numerous supernatural sources such as wool, fibrous plants, and cocoons can be woven into super durable cloth. This aids in providing much needed protection for mortals in the increasingly hostile world.

As a byproduct of these other two trades, Supernatural Bio-Alchemy has arisen to enhance many survival techniques of magic users and non-magic users alike. Potions, salves, dusts, and other magical items can be crafted from the remains of supernatural beings. These are available to those who may or may not have a magic affinity.



Supernatural Leather Working

Humans have always used the hides of beasts for survival. This trade is just as relevant even since the appearance of the supernatural in the human habitats. One particular group of humans, known as the Kezel, actively share the fruit of their experience in this trade. Using the hides of natural and unnatural beasts, they can craft an endless variety of useful items. This trade has allowed the Kezel to survive in their original hostile environments well enough to be able to send out traveling crafters to help their fellow humans.

One of the more notable items they can craft from the supernatural leather is a suit of armor that can regenerate. They can make barding for riding beasts as well. These leather items heal so well that even the seams where pieces are sewn together eventually heal completely. So, if given enough time to heal after being damaged, these special items would never need to be repaired.

The Kezel are even able to use magic to revitalize the leather enough so that it can provide the wearer with one or two unique abilities of the original being. For example, a creature with the ability to blend into its surrounding area could be used for leather with the same ability.

The Kezel don't always add extra enchantment to supernatural leather. In fact, the most common items are the regular tanned leather items. These non-enchanted items from supernatural leather are still more durable than standard leather. In the **Palladium Fantasy RPG®** setting, these items have *three times* the durability of normal leather items. In the **Rifts®** setting, they are Mega-Damage items (convert S.D.C. to M.D.C.). Some universal items made and sold include gloves, hats, pants, boots, belts, chaps, barding (animal armor), weapon grips, pouches, quivers, sheaths, whips, tents, tarps, armor, blankets, and trinkets. But these also cost three to five times the amount of their normal counterparts.

The Kezel never condone the slaying of non-evil intelligent beings; nor will they fashion any product from the remains of one. In fact, they'll refuse to have any further dealings with anyone that is known to be guilty of this.

People of all sorts seek the Kezel to commission and quest for the magically imbued supernatural leatherworks. The enchanted leather's versatility has made them coveted items. The only notable people who avoid these items are the North American Indian Traditionalists, who refuse to use the items for fear of insulting the spirits and gods who provide them with fetishes.

The supernatural leather items are the most delicate when they are new. Any major damage (70% or more) to the armor during the first 1D4 weeks will remove any enchantments and abilities. Also, the leather items have an extra movement penalty these few weeks depending on the grade of armor.

For the sake of ease, the grade of armor is determined by the size of the beast compared to the size of the wearer. Larger animals generally have thicker skin and can provide much more leather than a smaller animal with thinner skin.

Light leather consists of many leathers of small creatures sewn together. This class of leather has an 8% temporary movement penalty for the first few weeks, but no penalty after that time.

Medium leather is created from a creature as large as the armor wearer and may need two or three beasts to construct full body armor. This class has a temporary 10% movement penalty for the first few weeks, and a 5% penalty after that.

Heavy leather comes from a creature larger than the armor wearer by far. Only one animal hide is needed to make a full leather item or many items. These have a temporary movement penalty of 15% during the first few weeks, and a 10% penalty after that.

Exoskeletons or scales from supernatural beings can also be used for plate armor. *Light shell or scale leather* is crafted from a creature smaller than a human. These have a 22% temporary movement penalty during the first 1D4 weeks, and a 12% permanent penalty after that. *Medium shell or scale leather* is crafted from a creature that is the same size as a human. These have a temporary movement penalty of 30%, and have a 16% penalty after a few weeks. *Heavy shell or scale leather* is made from an exoskeleton or scaled creature larger than a human. This starts with a 35% movement penalty and retains a 20% movement penalty after the weeks of breaking in. The benefit of the exoskeleton armor is that the original creature's Natural Armor Rating applies to the armor pieces or items made from it.

The Kezel can make liners for the armor from several possible sources. Linings can be made from supernatural or non-supernatural materials. These make the armor more comfortable and have the potential to make it more protective. In the case of using supernatural cloth, the easiest source is if the beast being skinned has wool. See the Supernatural Looming section in this article for more information on supernatural cloth.

The down side to having these enchanted leather items is that other creatures' senses, except for sight, will sense the leather item as if it were the original live creature. Standard non-enchanted leather items don't have this disadvantage. Another disadvantage is that these items do require some amounts of P.P.E. When worn, these enchanted items temporarily require 2D4 of a magic user's base P.P.E. per item used. If the wearer isn't a magic user, then 2D4 of the wearer's Hit Points are required per object. Any P.P.E. or Hit Points lost will recover at the normal rate when the items are not being worn.

Supernatural Leather Acquisition

G.M. Note: These quests are intended to be challenging due to the nature of the items and their abilities. The payment and acquisition of the materials should be part of the adventure and be the most fun. Tracking an animal safari-style isn't as simple as picking up the tracks and following them. It may include convincing frightened or unfriendly locals to talk about stories, experiences and known aspects of the sought creature. All of these might reveal key information to aid in capturing it. Use this as a means to get players to go to a part of the map you'd like. Introduce fun NPCs, conniving con men, desperate adventure seekers, or even potential foes to bring back later on in the game. After all the hard work, the reward should be appropriately satisfying.

In order for the player characters to acquire any *enchanted* leather items, several conditions and tasks should be required. The Kezel will not accept monetary payment for enchanted items because they normally don't have spare time or spare manpower to acquire the materials. Plus, they have ulterior motives for providing these services in the method that they do. These are described in the Kezel description later on in this article. The *non-enchanted* leather items are always for sale though. The following are the steps for commissioning an *enchanted* leather item.

First, the requesting character or group needs to decide the desired product and needs to take into account the material availability. They should keep in mind that imbued abilities can only be inherent abilities of that species. These abilities will be at the creature's level at the time it is slain. (No magic spells or psionics can be given.) These abilities can be used up to three times per day for 3D4 minutes. In order for any of the magic properties and abilities to be available, the object has to be worn as close to the skin as possible. It can't be on the exterior of composite armor, for example.

Ideas for special abilities can be things like extraordinary healing to the wearer, underwater breathing, resistance to specific elements, enhanced sight, temporary speed boost, power kicks, chameleon, spikes or spines, claws, expulsion of smoke, ink, acid or electricity, odor, poison, shocks, stingers, teeth, tusks, gliding like a flying squirrel, gripping or climbing bonus,

web spinning, natural lights, extraordinary armor, or prowling. The possibilities are only limited by the player's and G.M.'s imaginations.

Second, the payment for the service is required up front. This is an act of good will for the Kezel. These could be tasks such as collecting a debt, pacifying a threat, delivering products, acquiring an object or substance, settling scores, silencing enemies of the tribe, slaying an elusive threat, bringing food, or other types of service the group chief sees a need for. (G.M.s should make these fairly difficult and can be used as a great side adventure.)

The third step is where the Kezel determine the amount of time that it will take to make the item. Normal tanned items need to tan for 2D4 weeks. Surprisingly, magical items take only half as long (1D4 weeks) to prepare as traditional tanning. This is due to the lack of preserving steps. If the Kezel have a large workload, then double or triple the time needed.

Fourth, the player or group needs to acquire all of the ingredients. Here are common ingredients for all magic items (Game Masters may opt to require any other magic item or alter the list as they see fit):

- Live specimen or fresh carcass: The player or group needs to acquire the creature(s) from which the leather will be made. Alive is always preferred. The carcass can't be dead more than two days. When considering how much leather is needed, the size of the item needs to be compared to the size of the animal whether light, medium, heavy, etc.
- The creature's predator: This allows an enchanted needle set to be crafted. The whole carcass of the predator is always preferred. If a whole carcass can't be provided, then the G.M. rolls from the list below to see what is needed for the recipe. (Once determined for the recipe, then the G.M. should write down the recipe.) If the creature has no natural predators, then a magic plant or insect can be gathered as a substitute. The G.M. is free to decide in this case.

Random Needle Requirements (Roll only once per new recipe):

01-16 Tooth (1D4 needed).

17-35 Coarse hair (2D6+2 needed).

36-48 Bone (1D4 needed).

49-64 Claw, hoof or horn/tusk (2D4 ounces/60-227 grams).

65-80 Enchanted plant's thorns (2D6+2 needed).

81-90 Pure silver (2D4 ounces/60-227 grams).

91-00 G.M.'s choice (can even be a known, but rare item or substance).

- The prey of the creature: A special tanning solution is created from this, which allows the leather to heal. If the creature is a carnivore, its most common prey is required to make the tanning solution. If its an herbivore, then enough food for one day's eating per animal is required.
- Thread: In order to sew the leather together, a supernatural thread is also needed. The Kezel can use cut leather strips for larger items, but for finer items like gloves, they need some kind of silk or other Mega-Damage thread. (See Supernatural Looming for ideas on where the thread can be acquired.)

Some of the more interesting and unusual ideas for barding are to have the leather of multiple beasts sewn together. With this technique, inherent abilities of other animals can be added.

Some clever examples of these are things like leather pouches from the animal's innards which lay 1D4 eggs every 1D4 days. Another is leather barding that still has some meat on it. This allows the owner to cut off and cook the meat while the healing ability of the barding continues to grow the meat back. Another clever idea is to attach udders which magically produce milk.

Farmers and ranchers often desire these magical leather items to help them protect their farm as well as make their beasts of burden more useful. An example of this is using a strong beast's leather barding on a weaker beast of burden. If this barding were infused with the strength of the original beast, then the farmer's beast would be just as strong.

Properties of Enchanted Leather Items:

- Items heal at the rate of 1D4+1 S.D.C./M.D.C. per 24 hours while the items are worn or while P.P.E. is provided. Healing spells and salves will be effective to speed up the healing.
- The wearer/wielder can use any abilities up to 3 times a day.
- Each of the abilities' effects last 3D4 minutes when activated.
- Requires 2D4 P.P.E. from the P.P.E. base of the magic user per item or 2D4 Hit Points of a non-magic user. This is not accumulative each time the armor is removed and replaced before the wearer can recover.
- Number of abilities and damage by size (healing is standard).
- When worn, the leather would be perceived (except by sight) as the original creature by other supernatural creatures' senses within a 1 mile (1.6 km) radius.
- The enchanted leather has the same inherent weaknesses of the original creature.
- An optional 4D6 M.D.C. can be added with supernatural cloth lining (see the Looming section below).
- Any object the same size or smaller than a helm can receive a single ability. A set of armor for legs and the main body can each receive two abilities.
- Full armor with natural physical features will have a Horror Factor that is equal to half of the original creature's.

Rifts® Armor

Light Leather

Size: Custom made.

Mobility: Excellent mobility. No movement penalties.

M.D.C by Location:

Hat – 10 M.D.C. (Optional in place of a helm.)

Helm – 20 M.D.C.

Arms (2) – 13 M.D.C. each

Legs (2) – 19 M.D.C. each

Main Body – 38 M.D.C.

Black Market value: 220,000 credits.

Medium Leather

Size: Custom made.

Mobility: Good mobility, -5% to Climb, Prowl, Swim, or perform Acrobatics and similar Physical skills.

M.D.C by Location:

Hat – 15 M.D.C. (Optional in place of a helm.)

Helm – 30 M.D.C.

Arms – 21 M.D.C. each

Legs – 28 M.D.C. each

Main Body – 55 M.D.C.

Black Market value: 330,000 credits.

Heavy Leather

Size: Custom made.

Mobility: Fair mobility, -10% to Climb, Prowl, Swim, or perform Acrobatics and similar Physical skills.

M.D.C by Location:

Hat – 25 M.D.C. (Optional in place of a helm.)

Helm – 40 M.D.C.

Arms – 30 M.D.C. each

Legs – 38 M.D.C. each

Main Body – 70 M.D.C.

Black Market value: 450,000 credits.

Light Shell or Scale Leather

Size: Custom made.

Mobility: Fair mobility, -12% to Climb, Prowl, Swim, or perform Acrobatics and similar Physical skills.

M.D.C by Location:

Helmet – 35 M.D.C.

Arms – 25 M.D.C. each

Legs – 30 M.D.C. each

Main Body – 60 M.D.C.

Black Market value: 380,000 credits.

Medium Shell or Scale Leather

Size: Custom made.

Mobility: Poor mobility, -16% to Climb, Prowl, Swim, or perform Acrobatics and similar Physical skills.

M.D.C by Location:

Helmet – 42 M.D.C.

Arms – 35 M.D.C. each

Legs – 45 M.D.C. each

Main Body – 80 M.D.C.

Black Market value: 520,000 credits.

Heavy Shell or Scale Leather

Size: Custom made.

Mobility: Poor mobility, -20% to Climb, Prowl, Swim, or perform Acrobatics and similar Physical skills.

M.D.C by Location:

Head/Helmet – 52 M.D.C.

Arms – 45 M.D.C. each

Legs – 55 M.D.C. each

Main Body – 90 M.D.C.

Black Market value: 630,000 credits.

Palladium Fantasy® Armor

| Supernatural Item | Cost | A.R. | S.D.C. | Weight |
|------------------------|-------|------|--------|--------|
| Cloth (full) | 60g | 5 | 9 | 2 |
| Padded or Quilt (full) | 150g | 8 | 23 | 4 |
| Soft Leather (full) | 225g | 10 | 30 | 6 |
| Soft Leather (half) | 110g | 6 | 15 | 3 |
| Hard Leather (full) | 450g | 11 | 45 | 8 |
| Hard Leather (half) | 425g | 8 | 18 | 5 |
| Studded Leather (full) | 600g | 13 | 57 | 15 |
| Studded Leather (half) | 300g | 9 | 30 | 8 |
| Scale (full) | 1950g | 15 | 113 | 34 |
| Scale (half) | 900g | 11 | 53 | 15 |
| Plate (full) | 2100g | 16 | 123 | 38 |
| Plate (half) | 1200g | 12 | 60 | 17 |

Barding

The average barding provides 15% of the mount's S.D.C. worth of armor for Light Leather, 30% of the mount's S.D.C. worth of armor for Medium Leather and 45% of the mount's S.D.C. worth of armor for Heavy Leather.

Other Sold Items

As a side business and to help further their fight against the undead, the Kezel keep 1D4+1 Darkvare cocoons on hand to barter with. The payment for a cocoon is usually as simple (or as difficult) as bringing a living, intact specimen of a rare or difficult to catch supernatural creature. (Game Masters, decide which creature will be needed. This should be made into a side adventure or adventure hook. It's meant to be a fairly difficult task.) For the same price, a Wraith Weapon can be purchased as well. (For more information on the Darkvare and Wraith Weapons, refer to *The Rifler*® #38.) In *Rifts*®, the black market value of a Darkvare cocoon and a Wraith Weapon can each go for about 1D6+2 million credits or more if sold to the right person. If the G.M. decides to introduce the Darkvare into the **Palladium Fantasy**® setting, these can go for 1D4+1 million gold.

Supernatural Looming

Looming is the skill of weaving thread together to make cloth. In a supernatural world, the Kezel have taken the art of cloth making to the supernatural level. They can weave silks, wools, and linens from supernatural sources to create super durable cloths to help people survive in a hostile world.

The Kezel can create cloth from several different supernatural sources. One is from supernatural plants with fibrous flowers that can be harvested and spun to make cotton-type materials. Another is from wool fur from some supernatural beasts to be spun into workable yarns then woven into cloth. Lastly, silks can be made from sources such as supernatural cocoons or spider webs.

The cloth made from these materials is very durable and protective. These usually have 2D6 M.D.C. or 3D4+2 S.D.C. per square yard (0.84 square meters) in the respective settings. Roll for durability for each new type of thread and document for future use of that kind of thread.

Supernatural creatures that start out as larvae or that spin webs are a good source of silk fibers. The threads from the cocoons of supernatural larvae can be gathered to make "natural" silk. Natural silk cloth isn't as large as it could be because the creature inside already broke out of the cocoon and broke the continuous strand. The best source of long, continuous threads comes from victims of large supernatural spiders or from unhatched cocoons. The Kezel unravel the continuous strand from the cocoons to create variable sizes of silk. In the case of spider silk, the size of the spider victim is proportionate to the size of the loomed silk cloth. Larger spiders likely have larger possible victims to harvest. It requires a cocoon the size of a human to fully clothe a human in the silk. The same applies for the smaller cocoons of supernatural creatures. Simply compare the size of the cocoon to the potential cloth wearer.

If the players acquire silk from a spider victim, they never know what kinds of items can be found on the corpse of larger victims, especially if it was an intelligent being. The Kezel will extract the contents of the cocoon and let the group search for valuables. (G.M. Note: These contents could also be a source of possible adventure hooks. Adventures could be sparked simply by finding items such as cursed or Rune items, victim's heirloom, valuable items, treasure maps, sacred items to the locals, etc.)

Once the looming material is acquired and brought back, the Kezel will generate as much fabric from it as possible. This usually averages to about 75% of the size of the cocoon for silk, 60% of the beast's length from fur and 60% of the plant's raw fiber mass. The cloth results are measured in square yards/meters. The Kezel ask for 10% of the yield as payment for their services.

It takes 1D4 weeks to finish the fabric if the workload isn't heavy. In the case of a heavy workload, add 1D4 weeks. Using the silk, they can produce all sorts of durable items. Common items include clothes, blankets, bags, and linings for leather armor. These cloth linings will add to the comfort and durability of the leather armor. Unfortunately, the cloth isn't able to heal or be imbued with any magical properties of the creature that made it. This doesn't mean that other enchanters couldn't use this cloth for their own enchantments. For the sake of the Kezel's use, they're often made into extra-durable cloth products.

Amazingly, the Kezel can produce quality cloth even though they are consistently moving from place to place. The reason why they can do this without an excess of equipment is because the Kezel use their *auras* to form looming tools. These aura tools can include extra hands, special shaped arms, and other specialty tools needed to thread the fibers. They can simply deactivate their aura when not needed and the tools will disappear. They still do have some equipment that they need, but the aura advantage definitely makes for quicker, better cloth.

These super-strong fibers aren't only used in cloth making. They're used for making extremely strong cords and rope that are very helpful in a dangerous world. Even the thin, supernatural silk strings can support a great amount of weight. The strength of the silk thread makes it excellent for making light-weight ropes and gadgets. Most single silk threads can hold 80 lbs (36 kg). But when woven into thin ropes, any of the supernatural materials can hold one ton of weight. Thicker ropes can hold as much as 10 tons.

Supernatural

Bio-Alchemy

Supernatural Bio-Alchemy has come about because the Kezel try to use as much of the skinned carcasses as possible. Supernatural animals brought to them for leather working are theirs to keep as part of the payment for their skills. With these, they have been experimenting with the best uses of each part of the remains.

This skill can help people to survive even in the most hostile parts of the world in many ways. This type of Alchemy brings the power of magic spells to common people. Many of the products are popular with farmers, ranchers, and towns. In these cases, these products assist with protective measures such as re-marking boundaries every few (2D6) months, thus keeping predators out and their livestock in. Other potions and salves are made for curing sick people, as fertilizers, for pest control, and for many other uses. Each Alchemy item provides two, four or six applications and provides the same power of a level 4-7 (1D4+3) spell of the same ability. As an added benefit, these don't require any P.P.E. from the user to provide the magic results. The potions and salves have a 6-16 (2D6+4) month shelf life.

The Kezel have a skill of 85% to create an Alchemy item from a creature that they have encountered before. If they haven't encountered the creature before, then they have a 45% chance success rate. They catalog any new findings for future creation of the same products. Like the cost of the Leather Working and Looming skills, the price for creating these items is to acquire the beast from which the item will be made. The Kezel will create 6-8 items from large beasts, 4-6 from human sized beasts and 2-4 from smaller than human beasts. All but one will go the requestor. The Kezel keep the one to sell. The Kezel also create these items from the leftover carcasses from leather working. These items can sell for 1D4 million credits each in **Rifts®** or 1D4x10,000 gold in the **Palladium Fantasy®** world.

One popular use of the Bio-Alchemy products for towns and ranchers is to create "scarecrows." These can be vessels of various shapes and sizes. They can even look like classic scarecrows if the owner desires. Inside the scarecrows are enchanted innards of various predators that emit its scent and pseudo-presence. If one knows the enemy of a threatening beast, then they can put enchanted innards inside the scarecrow to ward away that threat. In addition to warding away beasts, these can be used for other purposes such as luring or deceiving beasts in other ways in an effort to protect the territory around designated areas. Their effective range is a 2 mile (3.2 km) radius.

The Kezel also use this art to make other useful items that are as potent as the original creature's ability level or its size whenever appropriate. Each creature, supernatural or not, has internal organs that perform basic and complex functions. Those organs, if the function is understood, have the potential to be turned into an Alchemy item that can perform a similar effect on the recipient. For example, a salve made from a supernatural creature's liver may filter out or draw out poisons from creatures smaller than it, a salve from a heart could be used for healing, and so

forth. The G.M. can decide what the effect will be and then roll for the Kezel's skill to see if it was made correctly. For ideas on the Alchemy item's result, select from a magic spell in any book for possible effects. The creature's level (if applicable) will determine the level of the spell's effectiveness.

Ideas for Alchemy items from the carcasses can include, but are not limited to, any of the following: Warding salves and luring salves from the scents of beasts; dusts from bones for spells or potions; magical preserving solutions or dust; trinkets from tusks, scales or bones; poisons and antitoxins; sense-enhancing potions; powders for rituals; healing salves; acids (their container can be made from the intestines of the beast that made the acid); water-breathing potions; antidotes; daggers and other items from teeth; fertilizer enhancer; any salves with various effects of the organ functions (like hearts, livers, and lungs and their respective functions).

The Kezel Alchemists don't condone or practice Biomancy or Necromancy, even though their produced items may be components for these practices. The Kezel won't knowingly sell Alchemy items or other services to people who follow these two practices.

The Kezel (NPC Humans)

Description and Brief History

The Kezel are a group of humans who have a unique ability due to a rare and dormant gene. This gene causes them to generate excessive amounts of organic energy. The energy allows them to create a protective cloudy-blue but transparent aura around their entire bodies. It surrounds and protects their whole body and emanates out 5-8 inches (13-20.3 cm) from the Kezel's skin. This aura is ethereal by default, but with the expenditure of P.P.E. the Kezel can use this aura in exciting ways. For example, it can be changed to a solid or super-solid (M.D.C.) substance at the will of the Kezel. This aura can even be shaped into body objects like extra appendages like tails, wings, or extra arms and hands. They call these extra aura appendages "extendages." Even melee weapons can be formed out of this aura.

Other inherent features of the Kezel include faster health regeneration and unusually long lives. The Kezel use their aura as a catalyst to perform other impressive feats and abilities. When active in a person, this gene suppresses any other abilities like psionics or super powers from manifesting.

According to the legends of the relatively few remaining pure descendants, the Kezel originated from refugees of volcanic lands that were destroyed long ago. They were called the "Volati Kezeltu" which means "molten handlers" in their language, but they use "Kezel" for short.

Forced to leave their home and stranded in a new land, their ancestors had little choice but to merge into society. Many Kezel descendants married non-Kezel and raised families. All the while, they hid their severely weakened auras and powers from the public view. In a few short generations, all but a few Kezel descendants forgot their history and therefore the potential of their powers. The gene continued to pass through bloodlines and manifested itself with less frequency with each passing generation.



Despite this, there remain some Kezel who have kept their traditions. They call themselves “Bestowed Kezel.” They are descendents of a few original Kezel family bloodlines who kept the traditions and the training as alive as possible. Having dwelled in the northern volcanic regions for many generations, these Kezel understand and practice many of their original abilities. Yet these abilities are still only at a fraction of the strength of those of their ancestors. People who have this active gene, but discover their powers on their own, are referred to as “the Lost” or “the Unbestowed.” Without help and training, the Lost will never be able to attain their full potential.

The Bestowed Kezel have found that their abilities have the strongest potency during specific times of the year and in specific places that they believe to be sacred. These places include volcanoes and areas of magic. The volcanoes are where they handle molten lava to construct weapons and building materials for hidden castles and dwellings. Most of the castles are carved out of mountains to hide their massive size. All along they have lived off the land of the northern wastes (Alaska in **Rifts®** and **Chaos Earth™**). They have been forced to keep their numbers small for the longest time in order to survive. Their massive structures are proof of their faith in prophecies that predict the return of their true power and numbers someday.

Now that the lands are richer with magic, new creatures, and more volcanic activity in some places, they notice that their powers are available constantly. They are able to use these

stronger powers to gather more food and resources. As a result, the Bestowed’s population has blossomed and they have begun their search for the Lost. This, they hope, will bring new members into their bloodlines as well as increase their numbers.

The Bestowed Kezel are sympathetic to all humans, including altered ones and those by mutations. Their primary goal is to find the best way to exist in the world and help others survive. However, there are also a few rogue Kezel who are not as benevolent who may be seeking the Lost for their own purposes.

Zariel Liviast is the master Kezel who orchestrates the arts of Leather Working, Looming, and Alchemy. She is in charge of all of the nomadic groups that are sent out to share these arts. Zariel has set the requirements for gaining the services of the groups.

Adventurers who come to the Kezel to commission Supernatural Leather Working, Looming, and Alchemy products have to first prove themselves worthy. A series of tests need to be completed before requesting a personalized suit of armor. Usually these tests start with an act of good faith that the group chief deems appropriate. The next step involves the acquisition of enough supernatural creatures to provide the amount of leather (alive is preferred) needed to work with. Other tasks consist of things like retrieving special ingredients such as items to make an enchanted needle, for magic tanning fluid, etc. While these tasks provide ingredients for the desired armor, they also serve as payment to the Kezel for their craftsmanship. One condition is that the Kezel get to keep the remainder of the carcasses, with the exception of the leather, for their own uses.

The Kezel are performing these services for their own secret purposes. There are actually several reasons why they have traveled from the North.

First, they are gathering information about the supernatural monsters, demons and beasts that now populate the land. They are documenting many things about them. If the creatures are brought alive, they see if they can communicate with that beast’s kind or not.

Second, they are looking for the Lost to train and help them to know their heritage. They hope to recruit them to join them in the northern dwellings to strengthen their numbers.

Third, they hope to perpetuate the Darkvare among the undead fighters. They try to keep a supply of cocoons to sell. They will also offer instructions on safe usage.

Finally, they want to find ingredients to perfect their Alchemy and leather working profession to help people remain safer in the world. Thus, they try their best to use the entire remaining parts of the beasts that are brought for leather working. The uses range anywhere from making durable pouches and other life necessities to making magical instruments and objects. They can make potions, powders, trinkets, and other mystical items. In fact, the carcass remains are more valuable to them than the leather that was used for the armor.

Zariel requires the nomadic groups to keep logs and information to aid in their purposes. She hopes these may help provide information to purge the world of supernatural creatures and bring balance. If this can’t be achieved, they hope to find ways to better survive in this world.

The nomad groups are very secretive, well equipped, cunning, and skeptical of others outside their tribe. They ensure that

any stranger/potential customer who comes in contact with their camp will not be able to find out how many of them there are in the tribe or be able to judge their strength. Their tents are made out of the very leather that they market and have magic abilities used to hide and protect them. There are a lot of tricks that they can use to keep safe, including using Alchemy. They also freely use technology and Techno-Wizardry. Each of them is combat trained and has a variety of powers listed below. On top of this, their aura and abilities make them formidable opponents if anyone did dare attack them.

No one knows exactly how many members of the tribe there are, but there are estimated to be about 18-25 families of varying sizes. A tribe usually consists of 9-12 magic leatherworkers, 6-8 Alchemists, and 6-8 loom workers. The majority of the rest work and generate un-imbued leather items and armor. Each group is sent out for three years to complete these goals as best as possible. Then they start their trek back to the northern homelands.

Bestowed (full-fledged) Kezel

Alignment: Any.

S.D.C.: 2D4x10.

Attributes: Standard except M.E. 4D6 and P.E. 4D6+2 (may roll extra 1D6 for 16 or higher).

Hit Points: Standard.

P.P.E.: Equal to P.E. + 4D6X10. Add 4D6 per level. Regenerates at 10 per hour if resting, 5 per hour if active.

Average Life Span: 180-250 years.

Height: Average human.

Weight: Average human.

Bonuses (in addition to attribute bonuses): +1 attack per melee round, +2 to strike, parry, and dodge, +3 to save vs poison and magic, +10% to save vs coma and death.

O.C.C. Skills: Body Building, Hand to Hand: Expert or Martial Arts, Cooking (+10%), Running, Literacy, Language: Other: Three of choice, Boxing, W.P.: Two of choice. Plus Enchant Leather, Bio-Alchemy and Supernatural Looming, and the following.

Use Extendages: This is for the more difficult maneuvers such as martial arts moves and back flips. **Base Skill:** 65% (plus any I.Q. bonuses), +6% per level.

Psionic Abilities: None. (They cannot have any other abilities such as psionics or super powers.)

Cybernetics: None. Internal cybernetics are usually rejected by the body. Kezel shun mechanical enhancements because they prefer to rely on their natural abilities.

Magic Abilities: Conventional magic spells are not commonly practiced even though they have P.P.E. The initial tribes that were sent out don't have any spellcasters.

Technology: The Kezel will use technology freely and gladly.

Inherent Abilities

1) Create Full-Body Ethereal Aura: The Kezel's aura can act as a body shield that covers him and his equipment 5-8 inches (13-20.3 cm) from his body. With practice, "extendages" and other shapes can be formed that extend further.

With this aura the Kezel can survive hostile environments for a long period of time using his body's organic energy excess. It will keep the Kezel at a comfortable temperature in the presence of temperatures as hot as 392 degrees F (200 C) and as cold as 0 degrees F (-17.8 C). However, this aura will not protect from touching an extremely hot or cold item. This ethereal state can also withstand and will minimize the effects of radiation. It is a "Ghost Aura" that surrounds the whole body. This body shield will not protect from physical attacks, but will protect from ethereal or magic attacks, including possession.

This aura, in whatever state, will also allow paralyzed parts of a Kezel's body to move. It will act like external bionics that can move the body for a short period of time (½ the P.E. attribute number in melee rounds). Doing this will reduce the speed and bonuses of the Kezel by half for the duration of the paralysis.

This ethereal aura will also damage ghosts, apparitions, those in the spectral realm, or any other ethereal/intangible object or being. This only applies to the aura's ethereal state. The Kezel will need to be able to see the invisible in order to attack those in the spectral realm or who are invisible. A normal punch will do 3D6 S.D.C. to the ethereal being or object.

Range: Self.

Duration: ½ P.E. in minutes, +1 minute per level.

P.P.E.: 1

S.D.C. (Special): 40 S.D.C./M.D.C. Normal weapons will not harm the aura itself. Instead, the Kezel himself will receive the damage, since this state provides no physical protection. Other ethereal objects or beings, as well as magic, psionics, Astral Travelers, and ectoplasm, can damage it, and the aura provides protection from these attacks until its S.D.C./M.D.C. is depleted.

2) Change Ethereal Aura into Tangible State: This ability allows the Kezel to change his ethereal body aura into a tangible state and provides an S.D.C., full body environmental shield. This state will keep the Kezel comfortable in temperatures as hot as 750 degrees F (399 C), and as cold as -200 degrees F (-129 C), which is more than the ethereal state. Unlike the ethereal state, this tangible form will protect the Kezel from hot or cold objects up to the previously noted temperatures without any damage, but it cannot hold or damage other ethereal beings/objects. However, like the ethereal form, it will also minimize the effects of radiation.

Changing from this S.D.C. aura to the ethereal aura or back happens instantly, and does not cost the Kezel any attacks/actions. If the body shield is destroyed, the Kezel must use one melee attack to recreate the destroyed body shield.

If a limb is missing, the aura will still appear as if the limb was present. In the solid form, the extendages can act as a lost limb with no penalties.

If the body shield or extendages are damaged, the Kezel can spend 1 P.P.E. per 2 S.D.C. to repair the body shield or aura. Repairing 10 S.D.C. will take one attack.

Duration: ½ P.E. in minutes, +1 minute per level.

P.P.E.: 3 to activate. Each time the aura is activated it will be undamaged.

S.D.C.: 30 at level one, +10 per level.

3) Change Aura to Super-Hardened Energized State: This ability is the energizing of the Kezel aura. It causes the S.D.C. form to change to M.D.C.

Normal fire and lava do NO damage to the supernatural aura and extendages.

If the aura is destroyed, it requires one attack to create the hardened armor shield again. The body shield in this state will then protect against temperatures as hot as molten lava, up to 2200 degrees F (1204 C) and as cold as -450 degrees F (-268 Celsius/0 Kelvin), which is the temperature of deep space.

If the body shield or extendages get damaged, the Kezel can spend 1 P.P.E. per 2 S.D.C. to repair the body shield or aura.

Duration: ½ P.E. in minutes, plus 1 minute per level of experience.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 2 per 10 M.D.C. (round up; 2 per 50 S.D.C. in S.D.C. worlds).

M.D.C.: Converts the current S.D.C. of the solid aura into the equivalent M.D.C. In S.D.C. settings, this ability instead triples the S.D.C. of the current solid aura and extendages.

4) Create Different Shapes of Extendages: There are four places on the body that a Kezel can shape extendages: head, arms, legs, and back (like wings and tails). The shapes, such as wings, claws and horns, are fully functional. New shapes must be declared at a new level. Wings that have a total wingspan which is the same length of the body will allow flight. Smaller wings will allow gliding capability. The Kezel commonly create melee weapons to go with their larger hand extendages.

Each unusual feature will have a Horror Factor of 1D4+1. The Horror Factor needs to be determined at the time the shape is first determined, and is always the same for that shape unless the size of the extendage is changed. If using more than one shape at a time, then the Horror Factor is accumulative. So, for example, a Kezel could have large wings, horns, clawed feet and arms and he would have an accumulative Horror Factor for all four shapes.

The Kezel aura has a default aura extendage that consists of larger hands that emanate from the body shield. It is the same ghost-like substance as the body shield. The Kezel body shield must be activated at the same time in order to use the extendages. If the body shield is destroyed, the extendages also are destroyed. If the body shield or extendages get damaged from combat or lava, the Kezel can spend 1 P.P.E. per 2 S.D.C. or 2 M.D.C. to repair the body shield or aura, up to 10 S.D.C. per attack.

Duration: ½ P.E. in minutes, +1 minute per level of experience.

P.P.E.: 2 per shape if not default.

S.D.C.: 25, +10 per level (will be changed to super-hardened state once that ability is used).

Damage: Only possible in tangible state (P.S. damage bonus may be added if applicable).

Hand Normal Punch – 3D6 S.D.C. (or M.D. when in M.D.C. form).

Damage from a formed Weapon – 4D6 S.D.C. (or M.D. when in M.D.C. form).

Horror Factor: 1D4+1; roll for each form.

Advancement: +1 foot (0.3 m) reach per level. This size increase adds +1 to the Horror Factor of that form.

5) Heal Twice as Fast: The Kezel naturally heal twice as fast as the average human, because their bodies have so much more energy to work with. Unlike most humans, the Kezel will not lose more Hit Points if their wounds go untreated. They will gain 4 per day with first aid. For professional treatment they will gain 4 for the first two days and 8 every day after that. Scarring is a rarity. Even tattoos will disappear in 1D4 years.

Duration: Permanent and constant.

P.P.E.: None. Automatic.

Also see *Bonuses* above.

6) Enhanced Physical Speed and Physical Abilities: This power temporarily gives the Kezel a heightened speed that comes from his energy excess. This can function with or without the body shield.

Range: Self.

Duration: Equal to P.E. in melee rounds, plus 2 melees per level of experience.

P.P.E.: 5

Bonuses: +3D6 to speed.

Jump 20 feet (6.1 m) high and across plus 2 feet (.61 m) per level.

+2D4 to P.P.

+3 to P.S. per level (becomes supernatural when this power is used).

+1 attack per melee round while using ancient handheld weapons (including ancient extendage weapons).

+2 to initiative.

Automatic dodge.

7) Heal Others by Touch: The Kezel can transfer their life energy to others. This allows them to heal others with a physical touch.

Range: Touch.

Duration: Permanent effects. The healing process takes one minute per 3 S.D.C. or Hit Points, during which the Kezel must maintain physical contact with the recipient.

P.P.E.: 1 P.P.E. per 3 S.D.C. or Hit Points healed.

8) Power Devices with Aura (Rifts®): The Kezel's energy allows them to efficiently power machines as small as a watch and as large as energy weapons. The energy cannot be stored, and must be used right away.

Range: Touch.

Duration: Small machines hold the charge for 3 attacks, medium energy rifles for 2 attacks, large energy rifles and rail guns for 1 attack.

P.P.E.: 3 for small machines like energy pistols and radios, for 3 consecutive attacks.

5 for medium energy rifles and rail guns for 2 consecutive attacks.

4 for large energy rifles and rail guns for 1 attack.

Rate of Fire: Each use takes one melee attack.

9) Enchanting of Leather: See the *Supernatural Leather Working* section above.



The Hammer of the Forge™

Chapter Forty-Two

Yet Another Movie

By James M.G. Cannon

A cold, blustery wind blew across the estate of Hiram and Kornelia Acherean, outside the capital city of the planet Alexandria, last bastion of the Atlantean race within the Three Galaxies. The wind brought with it the promise of more snow, to pile upon the drifts of icy white stuff that already layered the estate and its grounds. The sky, a hazy white, gave the grounds a ghostly, washed-out look.

The pseudo-Greek Atlantean architecture looked incongruous within the winter setting, at least to the eyes of Caleb Vulcan, late of Earth and now a Knight of the Cosmic Forge. He had never seen Greece in person, but he knew it from television and books, and he always pictured it sunny, warm, and without so much as an inkling of snow. But the winters in this part of Alexandria were not the relatively mild ones of the Mediterranean coast of Caleb's homeland. Nor did they resemble the dry, cool winters of his Arizona childhood.

Still, he didn't mind it. His body, inured to the environmental dangers of the void, hardly registered the low temperatures or the biting wind. It was also a welcome change from the seemingly changeless worlds on which Caleb had been traveling. This was the first snow he had seen in some time. Besides, the hospitality of Hiram and Kornelia Acherean was legendary, and though he had tarried on Alexandria for weeks, he was not yet close to exhausting it.

However, news had filtered in to the United Worlds of Warlock from the Consortium of Civilized Worlds that alarmed and concerned Caleb and his friends. His vacation was about to be cut short.

Caleb stood out in the vast field that led down from the main house to the hibernating vineyards. For the sake of his hosts, he had acquiesced to wearing a heavy coat, but he really did not feel the cold, even as he stood ankle deep in the snow. It wasn't even melting around him, because apparently his body didn't generate the same kind of heat a normal human's did. At least, not all the time.

Caleb watched the sky, waiting.

After what seemed like hours, Caleb heard snow crunching behind him. He turned to look, and saw Kassiopaea Acherean, Atlantean Undead Slayer extraordinaire, making her way gingerly down the slope, wrapped up tightly in several layers of protective garments, including heavy boots, a coat, and a long, multi-colored scarf that wrapped around her neck three times and yet still dangled down to brush the top layer of snow. She carried two steaming mugs in her hands. Caleb couldn't resist a grin.

"Thought you might be getting lonely," Kassy said as she approached and handed Caleb a mug.

He took it gratefully. Caleb didn't need to eat or drink any more than he got cold in winter, but he still enjoyed the creature comforts of mortal life. He sipped the brew, then sighed in contentment as the hot chocolate hit his stomach. "Thanks."

"No problem. You looked so forlorn standing out here." Kassy's blue eyes narrowed a little. "You're not going to speed up the trip waiting out here."

"I know. But it's such a beautiful day." Caleb emphasized his words with a sweep of his arm, taking in the leaden sky, bleak countryside, and acres of snow.

"Yes, I see what you mean," Kassy said, her voice dripping with sarcasm.

Caleb shrugged. "What can I say? I miss weather." Then, shifting topics, he asked, "How's Joriel doing?"

"He's up and about, but still not a hundred percent." Joriel, the crimson-winged Celestine, a psionic synthetic being, was brutally damaged during their last adventure. Only now were his self-repair systems, with a little boost from Atlantean tech and magic, beginning to undo the full extent of his wounds. Joriel and Kassy were supposed to be an item, but she wasn't as broken up about Joriel's condition as Caleb would have assumed. Perhaps Atlanteans grieved differently than humans.

"He's ready to go, though. I think he's a bit stir-crazy. Spending this much time on one world is not normal for Celestines, apparently. Actually, it's unusual for Cosmo-Knights, too. I don't think I've ever seen you stand still this long, Caleb."

Another shrug, and a sip of hot chocolate. "It's terribly irresponsible. I have 'vast cosmic power' at my disposal, and I've been charged with safeguarding the lives and livelihoods of sapient beings through the Three Galaxies. But after the last few months, I just felt like I needed a vacation. I think the Forge agrees with me. I haven't 'heard' anything from her in a while, in any case."

Kassy sipped her own mug. "And then we got the news."

"And then we got the news," Caleb agreed.

Suddenly, they both felt the air pressure rise, and a shuddering crack split the sky. The clouds parted, and a huge asteroid appeared, dropping rapidly to Alexandria's surface. It looked like it was coming directly for them. Kassy looked startled, and then terrified for a split second before Caleb put a reassuring hand on her arm.

"This is who I've been waiting for," he said. "Just watch."

Incredibly, the asteroid slowed its descent, then cartwheeled into a standard approach pattern and came to a dead stop over the field where Caleb and Kassy stood. It looked like an ugly chunk of space rock, nicked and pitted by debris, but it was much more than that.

"What in Hera's name just happened?" Kassy demanded.

Caleb laughed. "It's a K!ozn ship. About as far advanced from standard Three Galaxies tech as standard Three Galaxies tech is from my homeworld."

"You've met someone from the K!ozn Continuum?" Kassy looked impressed.

"Um... not exactly."

A silver light appeared in the side of the asteroid, about midway up its length, as a wedge of rock seemed to flow away, revealing an open door. A figure emerged from the opening and vaulted easily down to the snowy ground.

The newcomer was clad in a suit of power armor, slim frame encased in a lightly designed suit that offered speed as well as strength. The armor looked vaguely insect-like, with smooth limbs and slightly rounded edges. It was painted in a dazzling array of day-glow colors, although in a few places nicks and scrapes in the armor's surface showed the bright, silvery sheen of the metal's original color. There were no obvious weapon systems, but the armor still managed to look dangerous.

Caleb stood, suddenly uncertain, for a long moment, but then the figure extended an armored hand. Caleb took it. "You got my message," he said.

"Both of them," the armored figure said, the voice dry and mechanical. "But it was the second one that caught my eye."

"Really?" Caleb couldn't quite keep the disappointment out of his own voice.

The figure gently disengaged from Caleb and turned to Kassy. "Sammadar Orak, Galactic Tracer, at your service." Sammadar executed a short bow, difficult to do in the power armor.

Kassy bowed as well. "Kassiopaea Acherean. It's... good to meet you."


"This is your spread?" Sammadar asked.

"No," Kassy admitted, "the estate belongs to my parents."

"Still living with mommy and daddy, I see. I have my own spaceship." The words were incongruous with the harsh, insectile appearance and mechanical voice. Both Caleb and Kassy stood staring at the bounty hunter for a long moment, but for two very different reasons.

Before Kassy said or did something, Caleb hurriedly said, "Relax, Sam. Don't insult my *friends*." He emphasized the latter word, hoping the bounty hunter would get it and Kassy wouldn't notice. Apparently it worked, because Kassy just shook her head and began to lead the way up the snowy slope to the house. Ca-

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leb and Sammadar followed just a little bit behind. The introductions to the rest of the team were a little less awkward, but Caleb could tell that Kassy didn't care for Sammadar. He hoped that wouldn't cause problems further down the line.

As the others scattered to collect their meager belongings, Sammadar headed back to the asteroid-like craft. Caleb followed. Sammadar didn't say a word until they were both through the airlock into a gleaming silver, rounded corridor and the strange door was flowing closed. Then the bulky power suit whirled around and the bounty hunter wrapped megasteel clad arms around Caleb in a huge bear-hug. The helmet folded back with a hiss of escaping gas, revealing the pixyish, green-haired and violet-eyed face of the vivacious woman who wore the garish armor. She puckered up, and was halfway to kissing Caleb when he flexed a little bit of his strength and pushed her away.

"Not in that thing," he said. "And not after that little comment outside."

Sam pouted, which only made her look more cute. "I can't help it if I don't like poor little rich girls. Some of us have to work for a living."

"That's not what I meant. I sent you a message as soon as I landed on Alexandria to make sure you were still alive after the *Shadowstar* incident. And again a few days ago when I heard about the prison break on Hala. Why'd you come after the second message and not the first?"

"For the credits, Caleb." She stepped back and regarded him coolly. "I told you, some of us have to work for a living. Besides, I'm not entirely sure I believe your story about that backwards world you spent the last few months on. I think you've been avoiding me."

Caleb opened his mouth to speak, then shut it. Had she actually said that? That had to be one of the stupidest things anyone had ever said to him. But before he could fully respond, the airlock cycled open and Doctor Abbot, a shadowy man in a rumpled trenchcoat and fedora, stepped aboard the ship. He was closely followed by his ward, the athletically built Arwen Griffin, Celestial Monk. Sammadar's helmet flipped back over her head and resealed itself almost instantly.

"We're not interrupting, are we?" Doctor Abbot asked with his English accent.

Caleb shook his head. The conversation was shelved, but hardly over.

* * *

But Sammadar proved difficult to corner on the trip to the prison world. So by the time they broke orbit over the planet, Caleb still had not had a chance to corner her and have "the talk." The last time he had traveled aboard her ship, a squad of CCW marines, two other Cosmo-Knights, and an former TGE weapons researcher had filled the rest of the guest quarters. There were much fewer people on this trip, but it seemed more crowded. Doctor Abbott walked around the ship, exploring every inch of it, while Arwen spent a lot of time running around the corridors (and along the walls and ceilings once she built up enough speed) and practiced her martial arts in the hold. Kassy seemed to always turn up wherever Caleb did, and Joriel was

never far behind her. Caleb wasn't sure who was following whom, but the whole thing gave him an odd feeling. He remembered being jealous of Joriel when he and Kassy became a couple, but that felt like a million years ago now.

The prison world was called Hala, and it looked even less impressive than it actually was. A tiny ball of rock and ice, it boasted a threadbare atmosphere and no native life forms. The gravity was a little higher than Caleb and the others were used to, but since the planet's surface was deadly to almost all of them, and the prison had functioning grav plates, that wasn't going to be much of a problem. The prison itself hugged Hala's equator, which was slightly more rocky and less icy than the rest of the planet.

The prison staff were expecting Caleb and his allies. Sammadar guided her ship into the docking bay with a sure hand, despite the hanging power lines and damaged walls. There was one working ship besides theirs in the bay, a Hunter-Class Destroyer that had clearly seen better days. It was they who had answered the distress call, quelled the riot, and recaptured most of the prisoners in the past few days. Now they were working to repair the damage done to the station by the riot, including putting the robot guards back together after the prisoners tore them apart.

An officious looking human in a CAFFCO uniform waited for them on the docking bay floor as the airlock cycled open. A bored looking Noro with blue hair spikes stood beside him.

"They're clean," he said as Caleb and the others approached. "Can I go now?"

The human nodded and the Noro sauntered away. The human gave an apologetic look. "Just a quick psychic scan to verify your identity. A precaution, nothing more. The Captain doesn't think Blue Bennie will return, but he doesn't want to take any chances." The officer extended a hand towards Caleb. "Lieutenant Commander Falcon."

"No problem," Caleb said, taking the proffered hand and introducing himself. "But what's a Blue Bennie?"

Lt. Comdr. Falcon suppressed a shudder clumsily and began to lead them out of the docking bay and into the prison proper. "Blue Bennie is a powerful four-dimensional being, not really native to the Three Galaxies. A notorious pirate and killer, it took considerable firepower and luck to capture him in the first place." Lt. Comdr. Falcon looked sideways at Caleb. "They say he killed two Cosmo-Knights before he was defeated."

"Anyway, it was his gang that assaulted the prison. Once they freed him, he fried the station's electrical system, including all the 'bots. His crew took him and a small collection of the most ruthless prisoners when they blasted out of here. Half the fleet is out there looking for them right now. No offense, but I don't know what the six of you are going to do."

"An extra pair of eyes or six never hurt," Caleb said with a smile. Lt. Comdr. Falcon didn't smile back. He led them through damaged corridors littered with refuse and 'bot pieces to the heart of the station, a huge room with a layout similar to a starship bridge. The place crawled with uniformed CAFFCO staff, putting things back together. It looked like they were re-wiring the entire room. A few working monitors showed other crew members spread throughout the station, doing similar repair work, cleaning, and guarding the remaining prisoners.

A broad-shouldered man in a captain's uniform surveyed the crew's progress, but he turned as Caleb and his friends approached. "Captain Orestes," Caleb said in complete surprise. "It really is a small universe."

Captain Orestes of the *Gabriel* smiled. "Caleb Vulcan, as I live and breathe." The two shook hands, and Orestes clapped Caleb on the shoulder. "Been a while, hasn't it? How's the 'verse treating you?"

"Like a sack of hammers," Caleb said.

Orestes laughed. "That's the life of a Cosmo-Knight for you. Should have tried a life in the CAF. Three squares a day, a bunk, and all the grun you can clean up."

"Yeah, I'll bet. This as bad as it looks?"

Orestes' face darkened. "Worse." He surveyed the group, and welcomed both Abbott and Kassy, who he remembered, and looked askance at both Joriel and Sammadar. "There are some things you should know, before you go chasing after Blue Bennie and his gang." He led the way over to a computer bank and began hitting keys. A screen flickered to life over the bank and data streamed across it.

"In the prison's third sub-basement," Orestes said, "CAFFCO had a top secret weapons lab. Lots of theoretical stuff, lots of black tech." Orestes frowned. "The kind of stuff that doesn't represent the uniform I wear or the ideals I protect.

But some people within the Consortium fund this stuff because they're afraid of what the Transgalactic Empire is cooking up on their end of the Three Galaxies. I can't prove that the researchers down there were experimenting on prisoners, but considering what was left of them when I got here, I have to wonder. In any case, while he was shutting the system down, Blue Bennie found the lab. And he cleaned it out."

The seven of them stood silently for a long moment.

"Well," Doctor Abbott said lightly, "it's never easy, is it?"

Orestes snorted. "Some days, Doc, it doesn't pay to get out of bed. Now, CCW space is jammed with a good chunk of the fleet and half the bounty hunters in the Three Galaxies looking for these guys."

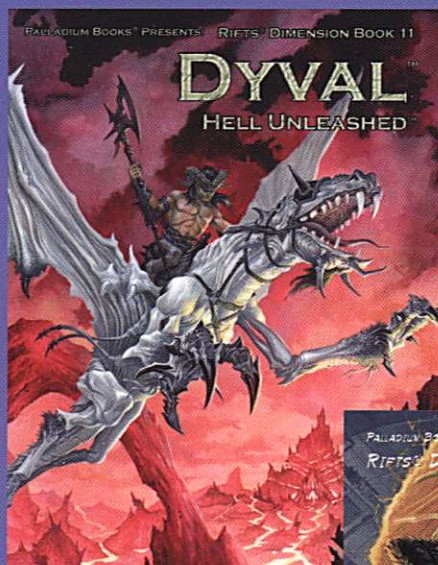
"But they're not in CCW space," Kassy said. It wasn't a question.

Orestes shook his head in agreement. "Would you be? No, they're off to sell what they've found. And Blue Bennie is no idiot. He could get top dollar from the TGE, but he'll sell to the highest bidder, not the smartest bet."

"Center?" Caleb said.

"Center," Orestes agreed.

"Center," Kassy and Doctor Abbott said in unison, neither thrilled by the prospect.



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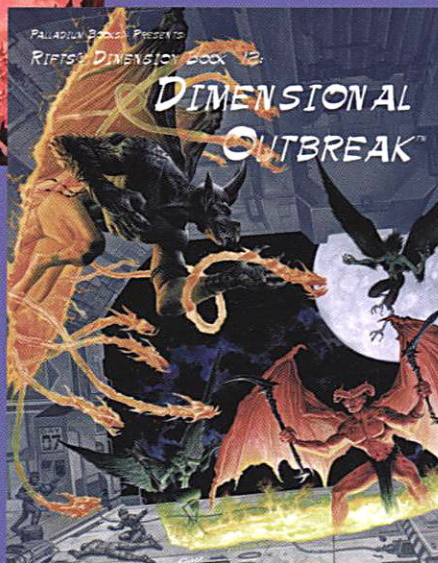
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