

Palladium Books® Presents:

THE

RIFTER®

Your Guide to the Me

Inside this Issue...

Giant Monsters Galore!

The Scaring Crow

Nightbane® Morphuses

Telekinesis & Ectoplasm

Wormwood™ Addenda, Part Two

Plus Hammer of the Forge™, and more!



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Violence and the Supernatural

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

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

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



The Rifter® Number 44

Your guide to the Palladium Megaverse®!

First Printing – November 2008

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Palladium Books® Presents:

THE RIFTER

#44

BRANDT-97

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® #44 – October, 2008

Page 6 – Art

Another awesome, giant monster from the twisted mind of Nick “The Brick” Bradshaw. (There are no stats for it because the author failed to provide them despite our pleas for them. A shame, because this is one cool critter.) Artwork by the indomitable Kent Burles.

Page 7 – From the Desk of Kevin Siembieda

The K Man is Palladium’s publisher and chief game designer, writer and business guru. He trips down memory lane to talk about zombies, the undead, Keith Parkinson, meeting George Romero and how Tom Savini shot his daughter, Monica. He also talks about **Dead Reign™**, Palladium’s newest role-playing game about the Zombie Apocalypse. It is all pretty fun and interesting.

Art by Nick Bradshaw.

Page 8 – Palladium News

Why this issue is over a months late, the price of The Rifter® is going up one thin buck starting next issue, but Palladium will try to hold the line on price on most of its game books. Don’t miss out on the Christmas Grab Bag Offer (books signed at roughly half price), start planning to attend the 2009 Palladium Open House in May, and we plan to have a lot of new books coming your way.

Page 10 – Coming Attractions

Dead Reign™ is new, awesome and a true delight for zombie fans as well as role-playing gamers in general. Read all about it and order yours today. Art by Nick Bradshaw, Amy Ashbaugh and others.

The *Minion War™* series is back on track, starting with the release of **Dyval™** and **Dimensional Outbreak™** and followed by several other new RPG products in development at Palladium Books. Just some of the upcoming titles include **Robotech®**, **The Masters Saga**, more **Rifts®** sourcebooks, **Dead Reign™** sourcebooks, **Palladium Fantasy RPG®** sourcebooks, **Nightbane®**, **Heroes of the Megaverse™**, **Warpath™: Urban Jungle RPG**, T-shirts, and much more.

Page 14 – The 2008 Christmas Surprise Package

It has become an annual tradition: \$70-\$80+ worth of Palladium product for \$35 plus shipping and handling. Autographs if you want ‘em too. Items are hand picked by Kevin Siembieda from your *Holiday Wish List*. It is the only way many fans can get autographs from Kevin and other Palladium staff and creators. The details are all here. Order yours soon so you can get it in time for Christmas. Tell your friends, buy two – makes a great Christmas gift and gifts for other occasions. Limited time offer.

Happy Holidays from all of us at Palladium Books.

Page 16 – The Wormwood™ Addenda

Author Braden Campbell presents a smattering of fun and gruesome optional source material for **Rifts® Dimension Book One: Wormwood** (one of our favorite settings). There is back-

ground about the Eastern Dominion, its history, government, military, society, Lost Ezud, Worldgate, the Great Wall, the Drop, and much more.

New Wormwood O.C.C.s start on page 23 and include the Eastern Templar O.C.C. and Long Bowman O.C.C., plus a few new weapons and equipment.

Art by the indomitable Kent Burles.

Page 21 – Your Morphus and You For the Nightbane® RPG

Edward Sauerland is back with more dark delights for Nightbane®. There are optional rules and source material, Psychology in the Shadows, new Morphus Tables, new talents, Talent Shaper O.C.C. and more.

Dream Job/Childhood Fantasy Morphus Table – Page 29

Hobbies Morphus Table – Page 31

Sports/Athletics Morphus Table – Page 33

Car & Motorcycle Morphus Table – Page 34

Military/Biomechanical Morphus Table – Page 36

(Another) New Stigmata Table – Page 38

New Talents – Page 39

Nightbane Talent Shaper O.C.C. – Page 44

Art by newcomer, Stephen Fox. We like his work. What do you think?

Page 45 – Telekinesis & Ectoplasm For Rifts® & Other Palladium Games

Mark Hall takes a closer look at the psionic powers of Telekinesis and Ectoplasm and new uses and applications for these powers throughout the Megaverse®.

Page 52 – The Scaring Crow™ For Beyond the Supernatural™

Ghost-buster, Steven Dawes (based on an idea by his daughter, Bobbi Dawes), presents a frightening, new demonic fiend, the *Scaring Crow*, that thrives on fear. This monster is not what you think it is, read and enjoy.

Art by Kent Burles.

Page 60 – Chrysalis A Short Story for Rifts®

The multi-talented madman, Mike Leonard, takes a frightening romp in the world of demons and Rifts®.

Art by Mike Leonard.

Page 62 – Megaversal® Monster Showdown Giant Monsters from Across the Megaverse®

This array of monsters started out as an unofficial contest, online, between Palladium freelance writers and artists to create the biggest, baddest monster of them all. These are just some of the choice creatures we decided to present here in **The Rifter®** for your enjoyment. Each has been expanded from what ap-

peared online, completely statted out, and one even has Hook, Line and Sinker adventures. The monsters are designed with specific RPG settings in mind, Rifts®, Heroes Unlimited™, and so on. Enjoy.

Page 62 – Sansarakhaana – Splicers®

Written by Todd Yoho.

Art and ideas by Brian Manning.

Page 67 – The Eldritch Spider of the Devil’s Tower – Rifts® and Heroes Unlimited™

Written by Allen Manning & Josh Sinsapaugh.

Art by Allen Manning.

Page 70 – Gulgoth – Rifts® and The Minion War™

Written by Brandon Aten.

Art by Nick Bradshaw.

Page 72 – Philly Brood Gulper – Rifts®

Written by Irvin Jackson.

Art by Nick Bradshaw.

Page 75 – Sauradon – Rifts®

Written by Jeffry Scott Hansen & Brandon K. Aten.

Art by Allen Manning.

Page 77 – The Nayk Star Spider

– Rifts® & Other Settings

Written by Mark Hall.

Art by Michael Wilson.

Page 78 – Quiserraica – Rifts® & Phase World®

Written by Chris Kluge.

Art by Charles Walton II. Also see the front cover art.

Page 82 – Mora – Heroes Unlimited™

Written by Carl Gleba.

Art by Mike Mumah.

Page 85 – Scolopendra-Ginamo – Heroes Unlimited™

Written by John C. Philpott.

Art by Brian Manning.

Page 88 – Tyrannus – Heroes Unlimited™

Written by Mark Oberle.

Art by Daniel Krus.

Page 92 – The Hammer of the Forge™

Chapter 44: The latest installment of *James M.G. Cannon’s* epic tale set in the Three Galaxies.

Art by Apollo Okamura.

The Theme for Issue 44

The last issue of the year is always our annual horror and monster issue. This issue delivers both in a BIG way with all kinds of spooky and terrifying monsters and supernatural source

material. As for the monstrosities of the *Monster Showdown*, each is statted out for a particular Palladium role-playing game, but all are easily adaptable to any of Palladium’s game settings.

We hope you find this to be another fun-filled issue that provokes your imagination and inspires you to try new ideas and expand your gaming Megaverse®. You fledgling writers should think about sending in your own ideas for articles, adventures and source material to submit to **The Rifter®**.

The Cover

The cover is by artist, *Chuck Walton*. Chuck is an artistic genius and madman who loves to create highly detailed and elaborate illustrations. We love his work and you can count on seeing more from him in the future. The creature depicted on the cover is *Quiserraica*, a horror from the Thundercloud Galaxy. You can read all about the monster starting on page 78.

Optional and Unofficial Rules & Source Material

Please note that most of the material presented in **The Rifter®** is “unofficial” or “optional” rules and source material.

They are alternative ideas, homespun adventures and material mostly created by fellow gamers and fans like you, the reader. Things one can *elect* to include in one’s own campaign or simply enjoy reading about. They are not “official” to the main games or world settings.

As for optional tables and adventures, if they sound cool or fun, use them. If they sound funky, too high-powered or inappropriate for your game, modify them or ignore them completely.

All the material in **The Rifter®** has been included for two reasons: One, because we thought it was imaginative and fun, and two, we thought it would stimulate your imagination with fun ideas and concepts that you can use (if you want to), or which might inspire you to create your own wonders.

www.palladiumbooks.com – Palladium Online

The Rifter® #45

More great source material, adventures and ideas for Palladium role-playing games of many different settings. Fun and excitement for every taste.

- **Material for Rifts®.**
- **Material for Palladium Fantasy RPG®**
- **Material for Dead Reign™ (tentative).**
- **Additional source material not yet determined.**
- **The next, epic chapter of *The Hammer of the Forge™*.**
- **The latest on the 2009 Palladium Open House.**
- **Palladium’s 2009 release schedule.**
- **Latest news, coming attractions and fun.**

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



big bad bradshaw
2008

From the Desk of Kevin Siembieda

What gamer doesn't love horror and the living dead?

The very first *Keith Parkinson* painting I purchased was **Lord Soth's Charge** – a dozen armored skeletons riding across a windswept mountain valley upon demonic horses with blazing red eyes.

Another favorite Parkinson painting is **Arcane Summons**. It was the cover to **Adventures in the Northern Wilderness** and depicts a Wolfen mage summoning forth skeleton warriors from a half-frozen river. Clutched in the Wolfen's hand, a human-sized crystal skull. Keith even included Palladium Fantasy runes on the tattered cloth skirt worn by the Wolfen that look cool, and when translated reads, "Boy, what a tough job I've got." Awesome.

Both paintings hang in my office, so whenever I need inspiration about dark magic and the living dead, all I have to do is look up.

Horror, the supernatural and the living dead have been part of Palladium's games since the company's inception. Even **Rifts®**, a game that blends all genres together in one epic setting – horror, the supernatural, science fiction, high technology, fantasy, magic, superheroes, giant robots and post-apocalyptic adventure – is packed with demons, monsters and undead. The very first **Rifts® World Book** was **Vampire Kingdoms™**.

It's no wonder then, that we'd eventually do a game about *zombies*.

I can't take credit for that. **Dead Reign™** crawled out of the imagination of fan and freelance writer, *Josh Hilden*. He joined forces with his longtime friend and undead co-conspirator, *Joshua Sanford*, to create the initial manuscript. I then took the manuscript and molded it into the *zombie role-playing game* just released. Artist *Nick Bradshaw* contacted me and begged to be allowed to illustrate the book, and so did angelic looking *Amy L. Ashbaugh*, whose zombie contributions are often as gruesome and evocative as Nick's. Then came *Mark Dudley* and *John Cooney* begging to be part of **Dead Reign™**. They were both so emphatic I just couldn't say no. All of us added something to this gruesome chapter of Palladium role-playing games. Thus, **Dead Reign™** is the amalgamation of at least six twisted minds. How appropriate after all, don't zombies eat brains?

Doomed from Childhood

Looking back at it now, I was doomed to publish science fiction and horror. Born in 1956, the television airwaves were filled with cheesy and wonderful sci-fi movies and horror flicks from the 1950s and 1960s. Vampires, Frankenstein, ghouls, zombies and monsters all thrilled my young, impressionable mind. Gosh, I loved the Hammer horror films in particular. And the first time I saw **Night of the Living Dead** – wow. Hmm, throw comic books and animated cartoons into the mix, and it seems to explain everything about me, doesn't it? I never had a chance. I had to write and publish stuff like this.

I met George "Night of the Living Dead" Romero

Back in the 1970s, Detroit was a happening place, and one of the centers of the comic book world. For a while, the running joke of the 1970s was, "All new comic book talent comes from the Detroit area, gets work in New York, and moves to California." Talent like *Jim Starlin*, *Al Milgrom*, *Terry Austin*, *Rich Buckler*, *Tom Orzechowski*, *Keith Pollard*, *Mike Vosberg* (those **Tales from the Crypt** covers you see in the TV show, those are Mike's), *Arvell Jones*, and others! Heck, Alex and I saw Jim Starlin's art portfolio (gorgeous!) the week *before* he presented it to Marvel Comics!

Back then, Detroit hosted one of the first and fastest growing comic book conventions in the country, the **Detroit Triple Fan Fair (DTFF)**. An annual (and later, twice a year) extravaganza that rocked our world. It was "*Triple*" Fan Fair because it was comic books, film and television.

In 1973, I got to meet *George Romero*. I had seen the original, black and white, **Night of the Living Dead** on TV as a kid when I was something like 12 or 13. Even then, I knew the horror film genre would never be the same. **Night of the Living Dead** changed that forever. At the *October, 1973 Detroit Triple Fan Fair*, George Romero was the special guest of honor. He beguiled us with the uncensored cut of the, already classic, **Night of the Living Dead**, with an extra 10 minutes of suspense and zombies, and his new sf film tentatively titled **The Crazies**. (I don't know if *The Crazies* was ever released to the public or if the name was changed, because I never saw it in the theaters. However, I often wondered if it was the inspiration for Steven King's *The Stand*, and think of it every time I watch the movie *Outbreak*.) I wrote about it under the pen name, Samuel Evans, in a horror fanzine produced by *Alex Marciniszyn* and I called **Nightspawn** (logo by Tom Orzechowski, who would later create Todd McFarlane's *Spawn* comic book logo and lettered a zillion issues of that comic book series as well as numerous titles for Marvel Comics).

George Romero spoke at the DTFF about the making of *Living Dead*, the *Crazies*, and filmmaking in general. I remember thinking how the filmmaker (a god to me at age 17) seemed like an everyday Joe who had the courage and imagination to do a film many told him couldn't be made. And on a budget of \$150,000 too. Looking back at it, George was another one of my early influences. Another shining example of how someone with imagination, heart and tenacity could turn his dreams into reality. Thank you, George. Regrettably, I lost his autograph years ago.

Tom "From Dusk Till Dawn" Savini shot my daughter

It was at a **Marcon** in the mid- or late-1980s, I think it was, when we had the pleasure of meeting the charismatic and playful special effects wizard and (then) new master of gore, *Tom Savini*. Somehow, my children, *Adam* and *Monica Donald*, made fast friends with Mr. Savini. Monica was a tall, personable

and mature 10 year old who impressed Savini with her knowledge of movies, special effects and ease around “fake” gore. Savini had a special effects seminar and he asked our permission to let Monica assist him. Monica was thrilled and Savini cooked up a scheme in which he’d hook a blood squib to her, she’d volunteer from the audience, he’d pick her, seemingly at random, shoot her with a blank prop pistol, and blood would gush from her neck and shoulder to shock and thrill the audience. It would be awesome. The two of them rehearsed the skit and all was in place.

When the time came, Monica volunteered, hit her mark on the floor and when the gun fired she unleashed a blood curdling scream that shook the building! She forgot to trigger the blood and kept on screaming!

Tom Savini made one mistake. It was one thing for Monica to *imagine* it all and rehearse the sequence of events, but they never rehearsed it with the “BANG” from the gun. According to Monica, even though she knew it was all fake, when it all happened, it seemed so real and the gunshot was so loud, it scared her and all she could do was scream.

I think poor Tom Savini was more traumatized by the incident than Monica. He must have apologized to us 10 times and checked to make sure Monica was okay over and over again. She was fine. No nightmares. No therapy bills because of it. She knew it was all make believe, she just got lost in the moment. Now it is a delightful, funny story to remember and make other people laugh.

Dead Reign™, the Zombie Apocalypse

As you read this, the **Dead Reign™** zombie role-playing game should be hitting store shelves. We think it’s everything you might ever want from a zombie apocalypse role-playing game. We are very excited about it and encourage everyone to look at it. **Dead Reign™** is just outrageous fun. Even people who are not into zombies have had a blast playing it. Look at it. Buy it. Love it. Spread the word. And play it to . . . um, *death*. Just remember it is all make believe, and don’t scream too loud when the zombie horde smashes against the walls of your domicile trying to get in and make you one of them. Unleash your imaginations and scream.

– Kevin Siembieda, Fall 2008

News

By Kevin Siembieda, the guy who should know

Our apologies for being so late with this issue of **The Rifter®**

Our apologies for this issue being so late. For those of you without access to the Internet and Palladium’s website, we know you were totally in the dark and worried that you had been forgotten or your issue lost in the mail.

Here’s what happened. With the time lost on Palladium’s move from Taylor to Westland (by the way, we LOVE our new office and warehouse), the death of Erick Wujcik and the six agonizing months that led up to his death, time spent on secret projects that have yet to launch (grrrr, frustrating) and general depression about Erick, we failed miserably at getting out new product the first half of the year. That hurt us and we started to feel the pinch. Add the economic crisis into the mix and Palladium started to feel the pinch big time.

To fix our cash flow problems we *needed* to get *new product* out and fast. We could only do so much (we’re a small outfit of 7 people these days), and that meant **Robotech®**, **The Macross Saga®**, **Sourcebook** and the **Dead Reign™** RPG had priority over **The Rifter®**. I hope you understand. This should only affect **The Rifter®** #44 – #45 will be out in January as usual.

The Rifter® will cost \$11.95 starting with issue #45 in January

We hate to do it, but paper prices went up 14% this year, tack on inflation, gas prices, etc. and we just couldn’t keep selling a 96 page sourcebook for \$10.95 retail.

A one dollar price increase isn’t too painful. Besides, those of you who have subscribed before the end of the year will still get **The Rifter®** at the old subscription price and will not feel the sting of the increased cost until your subscription ends. Take advantage of our February and March subscription drive and you’ll still escape the increased cost.

Palladium Has Your Back

Palladium Books tries to hold the line on price increases.

2008 saw virtually every major game company – except Palladium – raise the price of games by a *whopping* 20%. The reasons for the price increase are obvious and understandable.

However, while Palladium is also feeling the pain of increased paper, shipping, and other costs, we are trying to hold the line on price increases.

Palladium did NOT raise the price of our RPGs and sourcebooks in 2008 and we will try not to raise the prices much in 2009. We’ve already been informed by UPS and FedEx that shipping will increase another 6%, and our printer warns there could be more increases on paper (which went up 14% in 2008) in the coming year. As a result, we *may* need to raise our prices . . . *a little bit*.



If **Palladium** increases the retail price of its role-playing products, we will try to keep it to only one or two dollars – a 5-10% price increase compared to 20%. Yes, this cuts into Palladium's profits, but we are hoping that *sales volume* will offset those losses.

Why? Our hearts go out to the many Palladium fans *suffering* during this economic crisis. It seems like every time we blink we're hearing about someone who has lost their job, seen their hours slashed, are in jeopardy of losing their home, or suffering from some other economic crisis. I grew up poor and know the agony of such difficulties. Palladium had its own crisis a few years back and Palladium fans were there for us when we needed them most. Palladium has the most loyal and wonderful fans on the planet. Now it's time to return the favor. It's as simple as that.

The Christmas Surprise Package can save you money & brighten your Holidays

The *Palladium Christmas Surprise Package* has become an annual tradition going on 10 years now. \$70-\$80 worth of product for \$35 plus shipping and handling. Plus autographs and surprises.

Take advantage of this wonderful offer. We are happy to do it. See the complete details elsewhere in this issue of **The Rifter®** or go to the Palladium Books official website – www.palladiumbooks.com for more details. This is a limited time offer. Spread the word to your fellow gamers and friends, and order yours today.

A Zombie Christmas

It's starting to look a lot like a zombie Christmas for Palladium and its fans. Our new **Dead Reign™ Role-playing Game – The Zombie Apocalypse** – is generating a tremendous amount of buzz and pre-orders. So much that it is starting to look like **Dead Reign™** may be the big selling RPG of the holiday season. (**Robotech®** sales are up there too, so maybe it will be a zombie and giant robot Christmas.)

And with good reason; **Dead Reign™** is epic, fun, intense, exciting and a blast to play. Zombies are given the deluxe treatment in this RPG, the setting is explored in detail, player characters are compelling to play, and the game is fun, fun, fun. Check it out, you'll be glad you did.

2009 Palladium Open House

We have never had so many people preregistered so early – *three times* what we usually see at this point! With more coming in every week!

Preregistration suggests we may have a record number of Palladium fans from around the world attending the 2009 Palladium Open House. That's fantastic, because we plan on making the 2009 event bigger and better than ever! More days. More games. More fun. In fact, I'm planning to run as many as *10 gaming events* which means I should be able to game with 120 gamers (about one third of the people we expect to attend), plus panel talks.

In addition to myself, many of Palladium's other creators are running games: *Julius Rosenstein* (quickly becoming a legendary G.M. at the Open House), *Carmen Bellaire*, *Jason Marker*, *Carl Gleba*, *Jason Richards*, *Brandon Aten*, *Josh Sinsapaugh*, *John Philpott*, *James Brown*, and many others. Plus you get to meet many of Palladium's artists, staff and freelancers in a small, intimate environment, the Palladium offices and warehouse.

Start saving up your money now and join us, May 1, 2, & 3, 2009, here at the Palladium offices for nonstop gaming action. Best of all, it's 99% role-playing and it's all Palladium games.

2009 Palladium Open House – May 1, 2 & 3, 2008

Dates: May 1, 2 & 3, 2009.

Time: 9:30 A.M. till midnight (or later; all night gaming at hotel).

Attendance: Limited to around 320 or so gamers.

Cost: \$40 per person for the weekend (Friday, Saturday & Sunday), or \$16 per day for Friday and Saturday, \$12 for Sunday. Available on a first come, first served basis.

V.I.P. Tickets (April 30): Sold out in 13 hours. Sorry.

Open House Hotel – \$69.95 per night – Reserve your room as soon as possible. Space is limited and Palladium may need to book rooms in a second hotel, so book your room NOW to get this great price and location.

Hotel information:

- \$69.95 plus tax per Double or King room.
- Clean, comfortable rooms – Double beds or a single king-size bed.
- Free continental breakfast from 5:30 A.M. to 9:30 A.M.
- Exercise room open 24 hours.
- Executive meeting room for all-night gaming; provided a Palladium agent is present in the room.
- Large meeting room with tables and chairs for six additional games for all-night gaming; provided a Palladium agent is present in the room.
- Plenty of places to eat just down the road (Denny's, Wendy's, McDonald's, Bennigan's, and many others).
- **TO MAKE A RESERVATION** at the \$69.95 price you **MUST** tell them you want a room in the **Block Reserved for Palladium Books**. 734-455-8100 tel.

Comfort Inn Plymouth Clock Tower

40455 Ann Arbor Road (right off of I-275)

Plymouth, MI 48170

Call 734-455-8100 to make hotel reservations.

- **Palladium Open House Dates:** V.I.P. Thursday is April 30. Open House for all is May 1, 2 & 3, 2009.

The log-jam is broken, new product is coming

We have spent the last several months getting new product in the pipeline. These are just some of the books we have planned for 2009:

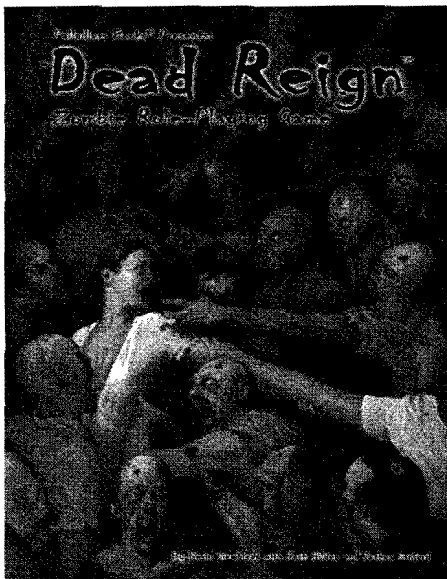
Mysteries of Magic™ (Palladium Fantasy), Rifts® Shemarrian Nation™, a Dead Reign™ sourcebook, Dimensional Outbreak™, Heroes of the Megaverse®, Armageddon Unlimited™, Megaverse® in Flames, Fleets of the Three Galaxies™, The Thundercloud Galaxy™, a Nightbane® sourcebook, Triax™ 2, Warpath™: Urban Jungle™ RPG (we hope, in time for the Palladium Open House!!), Robotech®: New Generation sourcebook, a Zentraedi Sourcebook, and a heck of a lot more. You ain't seen nothing yet.

If this economic downturn doesn't crush Palladium's sales (and so far, it has not), we have one amazing book after another planned for you. Best of all, 80% of the titles listed above are already written and awaiting final editing, rewrites and production.

We'll have more new product descriptions and schedules next issue.

Coming Attractions

By Kevin Siembieda, the guy who should know



Dead Reign™ Role-Playing Game

Zombie-mania hits a fever pitch as online pre-orders for **Dead Reign™** exceed 100 copies as of the day I'm writing this.

Oh my gosh, are we excited about the release of this new zombie role-playing game. It is so fun, exciting and intense, you are going to love it. In play tests, the odds are so stacked against the human characters that players instantly bond, work together as a team, and protect each other's backs. When the zombies come (and they inevitably do), the players are there for each other, shooting, bashing in skulls and saving each other from the Creeping Doom. It is awesome! The play tests have been some of the most intense and fun games I've ever run! We are confident you will NOT be disappointed.

Editor Alex Marciniszyn believes **Dead Reign™** could be Palladium's next big hit! We can hardly wait to see what gamers think of the game. Sourcebooks are already in the planning stage. If zombies are your thing, we think you will fall in love with this game.

Brave **human survivors** refuse to lie down and die! They battle the walking dead on all fronts, watch each other's backs, struggle to forge safe havens away from the cities, rescue other survivors and fight without respite.

- **Six Apocalyptic Character Classes (O.C.C.s), including the Reaper, Shepherd of the Damned, Hound Master, Apocalyptic Soldier, Scrounger and Ordinary People (40+ occupations to choose from).**
- **Seven types of zombies plus the *Half-Living*.**
- **Secrets of the Dead: Everything you need to know about zombies if you want to live!**
- **Tips on fighting zombies and point-blank zombie combat rules.**
- **Terror Cults: Survivor refugees or Hell on Earth?**
- **Death Cults, their Priests, power over zombies and goals.**
- **Retro-Savages and why they feed people to zombies.**
- **Resources, vehicles and equipment.**
- **101 Random Scenarios, Encounters and Settings.**
- **100 Random Corpse Searches and other tables.**
- **Quick Roll Character Creation tables.**
- **A powerful setting and many adventure ideas.**
- **Cover by E.M. Gist.**
- **Written by Josh Hilden, Joshua Sanford and Kevin Siembieda.**
- **224 pages – \$22.95 retail – Cat. No. 230.**
- **A complete role-playing game. Shipped on November 14, 2008.**

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

Dyval™ is another plane of Hell as dangerous as *Hades* and a whole lot stranger. It is the second book in the *Minion War™* series, and is every bit as fantastic as *Hades*. The Deevil Host, evil monsters and minions, Deevil society, monstrous War Steeds, magic, adventure settings and more will make this another welcomed addition to the Palladium Megaverse®. Suitable for use with **The Palladium Fantasy RPG®, HU2, Nightbane®, BTS-2, Phase World®** and **Rifts®**. In final production right now!

- **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.**
- **Magic weapons and horrific war beasts.**
- **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. Should be released before Christmas.**

Rifts® Dimension Book™ 12: Dimensional Outbreak™

– January 2009

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. January (tentative).**

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.

- **Minion War tie-in adventure sourcebook.**
- **Written by Kevin Siembieda.**
- **Illustrated by various Palladium heroes.**
- **96 pages – Cat. No. 877 – \$14.95 retail.**
- **Shooting for an April or May release.**

Rifts® Tales of the Chi-Town 'Burbs™

The Rifts® anthology book of short stories is getting rave reviews. Not only is it a fun read, but it provides ideas for game adventures.

Juicers, Cyber-Snatchers, Combat Cyborgs, Dead Boys, Dog Boys, Erin Tarn, Chi-Town, the 'Burbs, parents, siblings, bartenders, comedians, monsters, dark magic, tragic endings, happy endings, and new beginnings are *some* of the things you'll read about in this collection of new and original Rifts® short stories created special for this book. Each written by one of Palladium's premiere writers. Several by Kevin Siembieda or Siembieda and others.

- **Trade paperback size (6 x 9 inches).**
- **Erin Tarn's unique view of the 'Burbs and the good they serve.**
- **Stories written by Kevin Siembieda, Jason Marker, Braden Campbell, Carl Gleba, Josh Hilden, Mark Oberle, Jason Richards, Jeffry Scott Hansen, Josh Sinsapaugh, John Philpott, and Taylor White.**
- **\$12.95 retail – 224 pages – Cat. No. 304. Available now.**

Rifts® and the Megaverse®

The Art of John Zeleznik

– “Collector's Masterwork” Edition

A reminder about this truly unique collectible. To our knowledge, no publisher of any kind, anywhere in the world, has ever offered an original piece of art in a collector's edition.

- **Each original work of art is a concept drawing (pencil or ink, a few are in watercolor!) used in the actual creation of one of the works of art presented in the art book.**
- **Each drawing is different; all by John Zeleznik.**
- **Limited to 199 copies (only around 80 remain).**

- Color hardcover, different cover than the soft cover edition.
- Numbered and signed by John Zeleznik and Kevin Siembieda.
- 128 pages – quality reproduction and color.
- Cat. No. 2510-CML – available only from Palladium Books while supplies last (only about 75 copies left).
- \$125.00 each, plus \$15 for shipping in the USA, \$20 to Canada, and \$35 to all other countries for shipping. MUST be sent UPS, Priority Mail/Certified or some other way it can be tracked and is insured to arrive.

Wolfen Empire™ – back in print

Wolfen Empire™ is one of the most popular of the Palladium Fantasy RPG® sourcebooks and is back in print.

- Killer Winters.
- The Twelve Wolfen Tribes and Imperial States.
- The Coyle Hordes and Wolfen Government.
- 13 new monsters and animals.
- Random Encounter Tables and 101 Adventures by Erick Wujcik.
- 6 fully fleshed out adventures in the Great Northern Wilderness. Plus towns and adventure settings.
- Adventures are written by Kevin Siembieda, Erick Wujcik, Kevin Long, Alex Marciniszyn, and Thomas Bartold, with ideas from Bill Coffin.
- Written by Erick Wujcik, Kevin Siembieda and Bill Coffin.
- An epic adventure sourcebook set in the Northern Wilderness.
- \$18.95 – 160 pages – Cat. No. 471. Available as a special, limited run printing directly from Palladium Books. Available now.

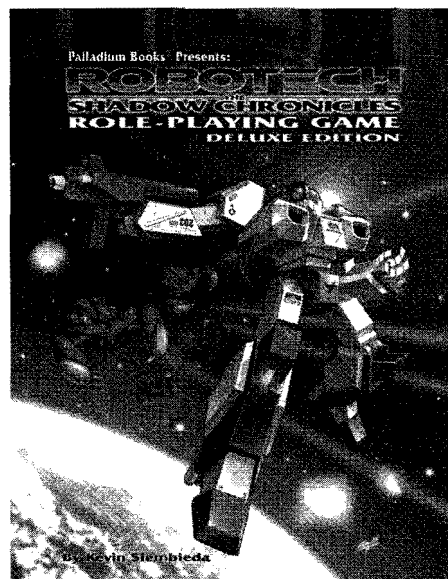
Robotech®:

The Shadow Chronicles® RPG

– “Core Rules” Manga Edition

The Manga Edition is the Robotech® The Shadow Chronicles® RPG “core rule book” as a 336 page, portable, manga-sized book. It has all the information a player needs to start a Robotech® game and it is necessary to play the Robotech® Macross Saga Sourcebook.

- Human mecha: Alphas, Betas, Cyclones & more.
- Quick roll character tables and M.O.S. skill sets.
- O.C.C.s include the Battloid Ace, Veritech Fighter Pilot, Military Specialist, and others.
- Key Robotech® mecha statted out and illustrated.
- Invid enemy statted out and illustrated.
- The Haydonites, their mecha and more.
- Adventure settings and ideas.
- Fast playing RPG rules. Mega-Damage setting.
- Manga size for easy portability (5x7½ inches).
- 336 pages – \$16.95 retail – Cat. No. 550. Available now.



Robotech®:

The Shadow Chronicles® RPG

– 8½ x 11 Deluxe Hardcover Edition

An expanded hardcover “core rule book,” and it or the Manga-Size Edition is needed to play the Robotech® Macross Saga Sourcebook.

The Deluxe Hardcover Edition has been completely redone and laid out as if it were a new title. It is filled with additional artwork throughout, offers superior reproduction of toned artwork, better paper stock, larger type-face, and some additional text, including two Haydonite spaceships, three UEEF ships, space combat rules and a handful of additional vehicles.

- Larger illustrations throughout.
- Some additional art and text for a few new weapons and vehicles.
- New Haydonite and UEEF spacecraft & spaceship combat rules.
- Veritech Fighters, Cyclones, Bioroid Interceptor and more.
- Invid mecha and adventure ideas.
- Haydonites, the Wraith, Infiltrator and spaceships.
- Fast character creation, skills and options.
- A complete role-playing game.
- 8½ x 11 full book size, hardcover, core rules.
- 224 pages – \$30.95 retail – Cat. No. 550HC – Available now.

Robotech®:

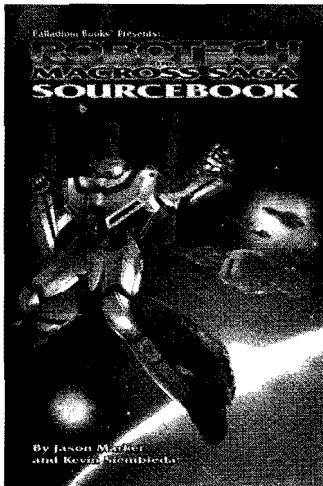
The Shadow Chronicles® RPG

– Signed & Numbered, “Gold” Hardcover Edition

Undoubtedly destined to be a collector’s item, the 8½ x 11, Collector’s “Gold” Hardcover Edition of Robotech® looks fantastic! Kevin Siembieda has personally glued in all of the signed and numbered, color signature sheets himself. The cover

is rich, classy and impressive. Everyone who has seen it, wants one!

- Only 500 signed and numbered copies. Sold on a first come, first served basis.
- Black leatherette and embossed gold foil cover.
- Color signature sheet signed by Tommy Yune, Kevin Siembieda, Jason Marker, Brian Manning, Allen Manning, Wayne Smith, Julius Rosenstein and Alex Marciniszyn. Eight signatures, total.
- 8½ x 11 full book size, hardcover, core rules.
- 224 pages – \$70.00 retail – Cat. No. 5500HC – available ONLY from Palladium Books. Available now!
- A complete role-playing game. Everything you need to play. Makes a great gift.



Robotech®:

The Macross® Saga Sourcebook

If you love Robotech®, the Macross® Saga, and/or Palladium's Robotech® RPGs, you want to get this book. It is gorgeous, packed with information and provides endless hours of gaming fun. At least put it on your Christmas list.

The Macross® sourcebook is a toy chest packed with the mecha, vehicles, weapons and characters that made Robotech® famous. Valkyries, Destroids, ground vehicles, aircraft, spacecraft, weapons, Zentraedi soldiers, Zentraedi mecha, alien invaders, heroes, villains and more. There are no plans to reprint this title in a larger format.

- Veritech Fighters & Destroids.
- 14 aircraft and aerospace vehicles.
- 13 ground vehicles, plus weapons and equipment.
- Zentraedi mecha & select spacecraft.
- Zentraedi warriors and their culture.
- Quick Roll Tables for Macross characters.
- Ordinary People O.C.C., new skills and more.
- Notable anime characters started out as NPCs.
- Detailed illustrations, comprehensive stats and information.
- Manga size for easy portability (5x7½ inches).
- Written by Jason Marker & Kevin Siembieda.
- Cover by Apollo Okamura.

- Interior art by Brian & Allen Manning, Mike Majestic and others.
- 256 pages (64 more pages than originally advertised!).
- \$15.95 retail – Cat. No. 551. Available now.

Robotech®:

The Masters Saga™ Sourcebook

This book is going to wow a lot of people. All new artwork and a lot of new information, weapons, equipment and mecha that are going to floor the fans!

Never before revealed mecha designs, weapons and equipment, stats and information about Earth's fighting forces and the invading Robotech Masters. In final production.

- The Armies of the Southern Cross™ – Earth's defenders.
- Hover Tanks, AJAX, Logan and other human mecha.
- Never before seen mecha and power armor for the Armies of the Southern Cross.
- The Robotech Masters, Bioroids, spaceships and weapons.
- Other vehicles and weapons.
- Manga size for easy portability (5x7½ inches).
- Written by Jason Marker.
- Cover by Apollo Okamura.
- Interior art by Brian & Allen Manning and Mike Majestic.
- 192 pages – \$15.95 retail – Cat. No. 552.
- Ships January 2009. In final production.

Palladium T-Shirts

- Property of the Coalition States™ T-Shirt – Cat. No. 2528. Black on grey T-shirt, this shirt could be a real world undergarment of a CS soldier. 50/50 cotton blend, quality shirt. Make sure you give us your SIZE.
- Triax™ Logo T-Shirt – Cat. No. 2529. Yellow/gold triangle with the word Triax in red on a black T-shirt. 50/50 blend, quality shirt. Make sure you give us your SIZE.
- NEW! Naruni Enterprises™ Logo T-Shirt – Cat. No. 2530. Silver on a black T-shirt. 50/50 blend, quality shirt. Make sure you give us your SIZE.
- NEW! Dead Reign™ T-Shirt – Cat. No. 2531. White printing on a black T-shirt; Dead Reign™ logo and zombie artwork. 50/50 blend, quality shirt. Make sure you give us your SIZE.

Sizes & prices for all shirts:

Small & Medium – \$18.95

Large & X-Large – \$18.95

2XL – \$20.95

3XL – \$22.95

4XL – \$24.95

5XL – \$26.95

Plus shipping and handling: +\$6.00 USA; +\$11 Canada, +18 overseas. Or go to the Palladium website for exact costs and specified shipping.

2008 Christmas Surprise Package

For the past 10 or 11 years now, Palladium has offered a **Christmas Surprise Package** – our way of saying thank you to our fans and making their Christmas a little bit more special. In this tough economy, this deal becomes even more special. Take advantage of it.

What is a Palladium Christmas Surprise Package?

It's \$70-\$80 worth of Palladium Books goods for \$35 plus shipping. Plus Kevin Siembieda hand picks every Surprise Package and he and available Palladium staff members and freelancers are happy to sign EVERY item in your Christmas Surprise Package!

It's a surprise package because we request you send us "your list" of 8+ items you'd like to get from Santa Kevin. Then he selects items from your "wish list" and may toss in some extra things, so you never know what you are getting until the Surprise Package arrives. All you know for sure is that you'll get some of the items on your list, and \$70-\$80 worth of items for *only \$35 plus shipping*.

Indicate if you want autographs and Kevin and available staff members and freelancers will sign *each* book in your Surprise Package.

The Christmas Surprise Package is only being publicized to readers of **The Rifter®** and on **Palladium's Web Site – www.palladiumbooks.com** – so tell your friends, buy one for everyone you know, and have a very Merry Christmas.

Multiple orders *will* result in some duplication.

If you ask for signatures, *every book* will be signed by *Kevin Siembieda* and available staff members and freelancers.

Note: If you do *NOT* want autographs, please state as much.

The Cost

\$35.00 plus \$10.00 for shipping and handling in the USA and Canada – that's **\$45 total**. The ten dollars goes toward shipping and handling per *each* individual X-Mas Surprise Package/Grab Bag (i.e. one Grab Bag is \$45, two are \$90, and so on). Those ordering *online* can select their method of shipping, but you will pay for the *additional* shipping costs as well as a handling fee.

Overseas Orders require additional postage of \$34.00. Sorry, we are only passing along the increased postal rates of Priority International (typically 2-5 weeks delivery; Parcel Post no longer exists). Such orders may take extra time to arrive. If you want faster or special delivery you will need to *call* us or order *online* where you can select different methods of shipping. YOU, the customers, pay ALL special or rush shipping costs.

All North American orders are shipped *U.S.P.S., Media Mail* (the "slow" Book Rate), *UPS*, or the way *Palladium* decides is best. Those ordering online can select the desired method of shipping but will pay accordingly. We strongly suggest UPS be-

cause it is fast, reliable and can be tracked. Media Mail cannot be tracked, and one-of-a-kind items, like art or a gold edition, can NOT be replaced.

Credit card orders are welcomed. Visa and MasterCard are preferred. Order by mail, telephone or online.

No C.O.D. orders, and we must have a *street address* (no P.O. Box) to ship via *UPS*.

Send Mail Orders to: *Palladium Books – Dept. X – 39074 Webb Court – Westland, MI 48185-7606.* Or e-mail using the ordering info on our web page at *www.palladiumbooks.com* – or call our order line at (734) 721-2903 to place an order by telephone using a credit card.

Multiple orders *will* result in some duplication.

When you can order: *Now* till December 31, 2008. **Note:** Orders received by Palladium after December 14th can *NOT* be *guaranteed* to arrive *before Christmas*. Likewise, Palladium makes no promise that foreign or military base orders will be received before December 25th regardless of when they are placed.

Ideas for "Special Wants"

To insure your X-Mas Surprise Package is everything you want it to be, send us a *wish list* of your "wants." **The more items listed,** the more likely you are to get items you want. List them in order of preference (at least 7 items, but 10 or more is better). That way, you don't know what you're getting and we have a large selection to choose from, making it fun for you and easier on us. Thanks.

PLEASE do *not* ask for books you *know* are not yet available or out of print like *Vampire Kingdoms, Tome Grotesque, Dimensional Outbreak, or Mechanoid Space®*.

Note: Santa Kev and his elves are NOT mind readers. If you do not give us a clear idea of your wants, you *may* be disappointed by what comes in your Surprise Package. You do NOT make our job easier when you say something like "I own everything, surprise me." Provide a list of 7-10 books!

- **Rifts® Ultimate Edition** and core books like **Rifts® G.M. Guide, Rifts® Book of Magic, and Rifts® Adventure Guide.**

- For **Rifts®: Tales of the Chi-Town 'Burbs™** (short stories; new), **Rifts® Machinations of Doom™** (graphic novel and awesome sourcebook), **Rifts® & the Megaverse® – the Art of John Zeleznik** (soft cover art book, color throughout), **the Zeleznik Coloring Book, Rifts® Sourcebook One Revised, Naruni Wave 2™** (back in print), **World Book 10: Juicer Uprising™** (back in print), **WB 11: Coalition War Campaign™** (back in print), **WB 12: Pyscape™, WB 14: Rifts® New West™** (back in print), **WB 15: Rifts® Spirit West™** (back in print), **WB 26: Rifts® Dinosaur Swamp™** and/or **WB 27: Rifts® Adventures in Dinosaur Swamp™, Rifts® Atlantis, Rifts® Australia, Rifts® South America, Rifts® Mercenaries, Rifts® MercTown™, Rifts® Merc Ops™, Rifts® Merc Adventures, Rifts® WB 28: Arzno™, Rifts® WB 29: Madhaven™, Rifts® WB 30: D-Bees™ of North America** (86 D-Bees!), **Rifts® Conversion Book One, Rifts® Conversion Book 2: Pantheons of the Megaverse®** and **Rifts® Chaos Earth™ RPG** (and sourcebooks), etc.

- **Dimension Books** like **Hades** (Minion War™), **Naruni Wave 2™**, **Wormwood™** (more demonic horror), **Phase World®**, **Phase World® Sourcebook**, and others. **Dyval™** (Minion War™) will not be available till after Christmas.

- **Rifts® Ultimate Gold (limited and signed)**. We have approximately 30 copies put aside special for the 2008 Grab Bags; \$100+ value as a collector's item – request it, and it is the *ONLY* item you get in your X-Mas Surprise Package.

- **Robotech RPG™ – Manga Edition and Hardcover Edition**. This is Palladium's hot return of the **Robotech®** role-playing game series. As a "licensed" property, the number of Robotech® books we can include in our X-Mas Surprise Packages is limited. You can ask, but we can't promise you'll get one.

- **Heroes Unlimited™ and sourcebooks**: Any of the following make for great superhero gaming! **Heroes Unlimited™ G.M.'s Guide**, **Powers Unlimited™ One** (back in print), **Powers Unlimited™ Two**, **Powers Unlimited™ Three**, **Villains Unlimited™ Revised**, **Century Station™**, **Gramercy Island™**, **Aliens Unlimited Galaxy Guide™**, **Compendium of Contemporary Weapons**, **Ninjas & Superspies™ RPG**, and **Mystic China™**, among others.

- **Palladium Fantasy RPG® and sourcebooks**. A unique fantasy world with human and non-human races that go well beyond the Elf, Dwarf, and Gnome of other games. There is the **Palladium Fantasy RPG®** itself, plus sourcebooks like **Western Empire™**, **Eastern Territory™**, **Mount Nimro™**, **Northern Hinterlands™**, **Land of the Damned™ One** and **Two**, and others. *Mysteries of Magic*, coming in 2009.

- **Dead Reign™ – The Zombie Apocalypse RPG**. Palladium's newest, hottest horror game. Zombies done Palladium style. Can be used with *Beyond the Supernatural™* and *Nightbane®*.

- **Beyond the Supernatural™ RPG Soft Cover Edition**. Modern Day horror and weirdness reminiscent of the new, hit TV show, **Fringe**. Can be used with *Dead Reign™* and *Nightbane®*.

- **Nightbane® RPG and sourcebooks**. All titles are in stock except the discontinued *Shadows of Light*. Did you know *Nightbane* characters can be used in *Heroes Unlimited™*, *Ninjas & Superspies™*, & *BTS-2™*?

- **Back stock**: RPGs, sourcebooks, world books, and supplements you've been meaning to get, but haven't gotten around to. This is a great way to *fill those holes* in your collection, get hard to find back stock items or try a new game like the **Dead Reign™**, **Rifts® RPG**, **Palladium Fantasy®**, **Nightbane®**, **Heroes Unlimited™**, **Ninjas & Superspies™**, **Mystic China™**, **After the Bomb®**, **After the Bomb® Sourcebooks**, **Beyond the Supernatural™**, **Chaos Earth™**, **Deluxe RECON®** or **Splicers®**.

- **Rifter® Back Issues**. Palladium has stopped reprinting back issues of **The Rifter®** and issues *1-13* are no longer available – *except* for the X-Mas Surprise Package and conventions attended by Palladium. (issues #4, #8, #22-26, #28-35 are NOT available).

- **After the Bomb® RPG**, **Road Hogs™**, **Mutants Down Under™**, **Mutants in Avalon™**, **Mutants of the Yucatan™** and **Mutants in Orbit™**.

Other titles you might want to try include **RECON®**, **Splicers®**, **Beyond the Supernatural™**, **Nightbane®**, **Heroes Unlimited™**, **Ninjas & Superspies™**, and **Rifts® Chaos Earth™**.

- **Palladium Greeting Cards** – Mixed set of six different cards, or six of the same. Value: \$12 per set of six.

- **Palladium T-Shirts** available while supplies last; some sizes are already gone; first come, first served. All have a \$20+ value.

Going through Hell (Minion War) – All sizes Medium to 5XL.

F__in' Brilliant – All sizes Medium to 5XL (\$25 value).

25th Anniversary (2006; gold on black) – XL and XXL only.

Lazlo Society – XL only.

Rifts® Logo – XL only.

Rifts® Dog Pack – XL only.

Rifts® Cyborg (Color) – "Small" size only.

- **Going online to order** gives you more Wish List suggestions; www.palladiumbooks.com.

Ordering the 2008 X-Mas Surprise Package

Include *ALL* of the following information . . .

- **Special Wants** – list *several* specific books, new and old, or other items like Dead Reign, Hades, T-shirts, Rifts® miniatures, a Gold Edition Hardcover, Compendium of Contemporary Weapons, etc. (at least 7-10 items please).
- Indicate "No T-shirt" if you don't want to be considered for one. If you *DO WANT* a T-shirt include *your size* (many shirts are limited to only XL & XXL; see above).
- Your favorite Palladium games.
- Palladium games you have *not* played but you might want to try.
- Indicate if you want autographs.
- Comments and suggestions.
- Accurate & complete mailing address! UPS cannot ship to a P.O. Box; provide a *street* address. Include your apartment number!

Cost: \$45 (\$35.00 + \$10 for shipping & handling) in USA & Canada for *each* 2008 X-Mas Surprise Package. Multiple orders *will* result in some duplication. \$69 overseas due to the high cost of postage (\$35.00 + \$34 for shipping & handling).

Credit cards are welcomed: Visa and MasterCard preferred (but most major credit cards are accepted). Go to the Palladium website (www.palladiumbooks.com) and fill out the **2008 Christmas Surprise Package Order Form** and pay with a credit card. **Or order by telephone** (734-721-2903); this is an *order line* only.

Place orders by mail by enclosing a check or money order along with your wish list, info above *and* address, and send to:

Palladium Books – Dept. X – 39074 Webb Court – Westland, MI 48185 USA



The Wormwood™ Addenda

Part Two

Optional Material for Rifts® Wormwood™

By Braden Campbell

Ezud – The Eastern Dominion

“Men of sense often learn from their enemies. It is from their foes, not their friends, that cities learn the lesson of building high walls...”

- Aristophanes

Historic Overview

In the days of the Unified Realm, there was an immense expanse of land to the east of Charun called “Ezud.” It was a flat plain nearly 64,000 square miles (163,840 square km) in size, characterized by cool temperatures and stronger than normal winds. This was the land given over to Avylos during the Sundering of the Realm. Under their new King, the people of Ezud built several huge cities. Each one contained numerous temples and palaces, museums and monuments. King Avylos was a man of quiet understanding, and the first thirty years of his reign were ones of peace and scientific advancement.

When the Congregation made the decision to liberate Charun by means of force, the soldiers of Ezud went to fight by order of the King. It was not the King however that led them to war, but rather his two eldest sons, Chaulron and Khadis. Avylos was by then too sick and weak to leave his palace. The two princes took with them the *Mayvoc*, the Orb of Wormwood, Ezud’s most sacred Holy Relic. Nearly 25,000 knights marched with them onto the Plains of Khulam. Only 9000 returned.

The number of casualties was staggering: sixteen thousand dead and mutilated. Two out of every three men who had gone to war did not return. There was not a single household in all of Ezud that hadn’t lost a father or a son. Even the royal family was affected, for Prince Chaulron brought back with him the broken body of his younger brother, Khadis. When King Avylos was presented with this sorrowful sight, it is said that he rose up from his sickbed and walked to a balcony where he looked out upon the great city of Cenyaw. From the rooftops he could see black flags being raised, each one marking a house that suffered a loss. He swore then and there that the dark forces that had taken over Charun would never enter his Dominion. Never.

Ezud then adopted a new national strategy, one born from grief and fear; a policy of protection and defense that continues to this day. King Avylos ordered the construction of a massive

wall that would stop the Unholy from spreading eastward. Enormous border forts were erected along the Drop and in the Zaeradi Pass. The resin towns of Izrui and Alhir were also heavily garrisoned. In short, Ezud closed itself off from the rest of Wormwood, and tried as best they could to pretend that the Golden Age still went on.

That the Unholy had also suffered massive losses was a boon to Ezud (and the rest of the world). The demonic forces could not immediately press their advantage by spilling further into the Dominions of Man. They had to regroup and rearm. This gave the human kingdoms the time they needed to fortify themselves. King Avylos knew that the Unholy was coming to invade Ezud. It was just a matter of time. Eleven years after the defeat of the Congregation, a demon army under the command of three Hosts marched eastward with the intent to burn Cenyaw to the ground and capture the *Mayvoc*. King Avylos died the previous year, never living long enough to see that day. However, his excessive defenses proved their worth. The formidable Great Wall that now stretched from Ounka to Zolm stopped the demon army dead in its tracks.

Chaulron was now King of Ezud. His shame at having run from the field of battle gnawed at him, making him more paranoid with each passing day. Like his father, he too ordered that the Dominion should barricade itself in elaborate obstructions. Thus a second Great Wall was built, dwarfing the first one by nearly three times. It was as much a wonder of magical engineering as it was a defensive fortification.

Today, Ezud is a land steeped in a tradition of defense and denial. Its people are adamant practitioners of Vram Yufovya. It is the last bastion of the Alchemy Guild, and its knowledge of the worldly sciences is unsurpassed. To the rest of Wormwood, it is the exotic Far East; a land of light and beauty, filled with strange ways and great wonders.

Government

Ezud is a monarchy in every sense of the word. Unlike the Cathedral, the people of this land believe in a stark division between church and state. The King (or Queen) is an absolute ruler, and everyone, including High Priests of Light, is answerable to the Throne. The King keeps a royal court filled with advisors, each of whom is a specialist in a particular field: Archivists to maintain the meticulous records of the Dominion, High Priests to speak on behalf of the Church, Grand Masters of the Knightly Orders, and several representatives of the Resiner and Alchemy Guilds.

The King appoints a “mayor for life” for each of the cities. This office is called a “*Mekou*,” and each one rules as monarch within the confines of his or her own city. The powers of a *Mekou* may be revoked at any time should the King so wish. Furthermore, the title of *Mekou* is non-inheritable, meaning that if a reigning *Mekou* dies, a new one must be appointed by the King. The replacement may indeed end up being a relation of the previous *Mekou*, but this does not happen by default. The *Mekou* of each city will have a council similar to the royal court, but comprised of local representatives. Again, the Alchemy, Archivist, and Resiner Guilds will have a strong presence in this group, as well as military figures, and High Priests. Each *Mekou* also appoints a “*Sanaver*.” This person is best

thought of as an intermediary who represents the citizens of a given city. If a peasant has an issue that needs to be taken before the Mekou, it is brought to the local Sanaver, who in turn presents it to the Mekou. This is as close to democracy as one will find in the Eastern Dominion. The division between those of noble descent and those who are vassals is kept very distinct.

The current ruler of Ezud is Queen Notari, a 37-year-old woman of average appearance, and selfish demeanor. Her husband, Prince Baldael, is a little more conscientious (Scrupulous alignment) but is equally uncharismatic (M.A. of 8). They have only one son, fifteen-year-old Prince Ranen, whose single outstanding characteristic is his skill in combat (P.P. of 19).

The anarchistic behavior of the Queen is leading the Dominion further into decay. In the four years since her coronation, she has done little to improve the army, and has let relations with the other human kingdoms sour. She observes only the public trappings of religion, and in her private life does not concern herself a bit with matters of the soul. The common people know nothing of this, but behind closed doors, it is of great concern. The truth is, if the royal court had its way, Notari would not be Queen at all. It was never intended that she take the Throne; her older sister, Calavi, was supposed to rule instead. But fate, it seems had different plans. Calavi died before her coronation, and Notari, who had never been trained to be a monarch, was crowned instead.

The Court is now privately weighing its options. While no one has dared to suggest that the Queen be "removed" (i.e. killed), everyone has thought about it at least once. This in itself could prove a very difficult matter. Firstly, whether good for the Dominion or not, Notari is the Queen. To remove her before her time would be to court disaster by upsetting the Natural Order. Secondly, there is some question as to who would be best to plant upon the Throne. Her son is not the favored choice, and that leaves only a few of her nieces and nephews. With different members of the Court each backing different replacements, this situation could very easily degenerate into civil war.

Lastly, anyone attempting to assassinate the royal family will have only one chance to get it right, and will have to kill all three of them simultaneously. The royal family directly controls the actions of an elite cadre of assassins called the *Dakiva*. These killers are unsurpassed in their art, and have sworn absolute loyalty to the Throne. The *Dakiva* have spies and informants everywhere, so should any effort to kill the royal family fail, those who sanctioned the attempt will quickly find themselves on the wrong end of a poisoned knife.

Society, Technology, and the Guilds

At its heart, Ezud is a land of religious fundamentalists. Its basic way of life has changed little over the past 1000 years, and its rulers have worked very hard to keep it that way. For outsiders, traveling to Ezud is like stepping back in time. Its cities are few in number compared to the Cathedral, but each one is unmatched in architectural beauty. The buildings are tall and graceful, with sweeping bridges and walkways interconnecting them. There are large parks and retreats everywhere, and open courtyards where the faithful gather to pray.

Ezud's regimented devotion is what most differentiates it from the Cathedral. The main religion of Ezud is a derivative of

Vram Yufovya called Eastern Yufovya. Three times daily, the whole country stops for thirty minutes of prayer. Diet is rigorously controlled and observed, and consists almost entirely of Wormwood-generated foodstuffs. There are only six holidays in the year, and each one involves fasting. Overall, the people of Ezud are lean in body and tough of mind. Were it not for the fact that they are trapped in a tradition of non-aggressiveness, they might very well have become the rulers of Wormwood.

This is one of the primary reasons that the leaders of the Cathedral are both fearful and resentful of Ezud. In their highest echelons, they know that they have become power hungry and spiritually weak. There are some, including High Priest Matthew Pentecost, who would like nothing more than to absorb Ezud and convert its populace to Cathedralism. These people dream of a new Unified Realm, with themselves at the head of it. But an armed attack against the Eastern Dominion carries enormous risks. The Cathedral is not confident it has sufficient manpower or resources to fight both the Unholy's minions and one (or more) of the human lands. Thus it is not so much goodwill, but logistics that have so far kept Wormwood from total internecine war. Secondly, while Ezud's military has not even half the numbers of the Cathedral, it is very powerful in terms of its technology. Magic is the machinery of the Living Planet, and the Alchemists of Ezud have forgotten more arcane knowledge than any living in the Kingdom of Light. And because the Three Major Guilds often work in conjunction, Ezud holds a tradition as being a place where learning and scientific discovery are literally centuries ahead.

The backbone of Ezud's advanced culture is the predominance of the Three Major Guilds. The old guilds of the Unified Realm were, during their time, exceptionally powerful. However, like most everything else, they were destroyed following the Battle of Khulam Plains when the Unholy tightened his grip on Charun, and the Cathedral brought its craftsmen under the rule of the church. Only in the distant east did the guilds continue unabated. Several of the smaller unions eventually merged together until there remained three massive organizations: The Resiners, The Archivists, and the Alchemists.

The Archivists are scholars and scientists who maintain the record halls and libraries. Their field of expertise is in the area of the "physical sciences": astronomy, chemistry, cartography, mechanical engineering. While their knowledge is Medieval at best, it is still quite radical in comparison to the other human realms. For example, the Archivists were the first to prove that Wormwood was round, not flat (the Cathedral denies this fact). They established a measurement of the planet's diameter by observing the transit of the twin moons. Thanks to them, Ezud has figured out how to produce glass from ground resin, which in turn allows the manufacture of items such as mirrors, spectacles and telescopes. Their invention of both the horizontal loom and the spinning wheel means that clothing produced in Ezud is of a much finer quality than the rough garments worn elsewhere. The Dominion's most popular trading item is hard soap; only the Archivists possess the chemistry needed to produce non-magical cleaning agents.

The Resiners are a craft guild, pure and simple. There are actually many smaller sub-groups within the Resiners, but all fall under this umbrella organization, for every one of them works with resin in one way or another. The Resiners include

the miners who actually go dig the soft material out from under the mountains, those who make weapons and armor out of it, those who craft furniture and sculptures out of it, and those who have found ways to refine it into other substances.

Finally, there are **the Alchemists**. Like the Resiners, this guild is made up of many smaller disciplines. Any profession that deals with magic is represented here: Wizards, Diabolists, Temporal Magi, and healers. The guild is presided over by a very small council of true Alchemists – those who have mastered all of the aforementioned areas and more. These masters are all quite old, most extending or preserving their lives through magical means that few have even dreamed of.

Military

As has been said before, those who defend Ezud are steeped (some would say trapped) in a tradition of defense. Their religion dictates that one must only go to war or adopt an offensive posture as an absolute last resort. It is wiser to fall back and build a better defense than it is to charge forward and open oneself to defeat. Over the millennia this has become the central point in what is called “the Ezud Theory of Battle.” It is very different from the fighting styles found throughout the rest of Wormwood, most of which favor taking the fight directly to the enemy. The Ezud general would rather retreat from combat and live to fight another day than risk losing all his men in a death-or-glory assault. Unlike the Cathedral, there is no such thing as “acceptable losses” or “disposable troops.” Every man is precious, and in war, is not to be expended lightly.

This line of thinking has done two things. First and foremost, it has had a great impact on weapons development. The Templars of Ezud do not carry swords as their Cathedral cousins do. Instead, they are trained primarily in the use of pole arms. Pikes, staves, and halberds are all used, with the traditional weapon being the *hadaras*. Each of these weapons gives the Knight a long reach in melee combat. The idea is to never get closer than seven feet from one’s enemy, and to keep them at bay outside a large defensive circle.

Range is also a key concept for the Ezud military, and nowhere is this best exemplified than in their missile weapons. From the longbow to the compound ballista, the armies of Ezud can outrange any force on Wormwood hands down. The Demon Hound Riders in Lost Ezud learned at great cost that coming within 800 feet (244 m) of their enemy put them in harm’s way. There are even a select few archers in the army who can strike a target at a range of over 1200 feet (366 m)! While the rest of Wormwood has opted to increase their fighting range by importing black powder flintlocks from the City of Worldgate, Ezud has honed its missile weapons to such a degree that they have become the machine-guns of Wormwood; a mid-level Long Bowman can fire anywhere from sixteen to twenty arrows per minute. As well, resin arrows are far easier to produce in large numbers than the magical wad used in pistols and rifles. Its superior range, coupled with an abundance of ammunition, makes the Ezud Long Bow a weapon to be admired and feared.

In a more negative light, the Theory of Battle has made the Ezud commanders give up a lot of territory with no real plan of how to retake it. After so many generations of falling back and consolidating, there is no one now left alive who has any idea of

how to put together a large offense. Unless something changes soon, Ezud will be doomed to slowly lose its possessions with no hope of ever getting them back. It will simply dwindle away into nothing, and be swallowed up by the Unholy.

However, that day is not here yet, and there are many who continue to defend Ezud from assimilation. Most of the O.C.C.s in the **Wormwood™** main book can be found in Ezud. Priests of Light, Wormspeakers, and Symbiotic Warriors can all be found here and may be played without any changes. Members of the three monastic orders are also accepted in Ezud. Even the Apok are treated without distain, for Eastern Yufovya teaches that once a man has been forgiven by Wormwood for his past deeds, no matter how vile, then that man is born again. Freelancers, on the other hand, are viewed with suspicion because they are all commoners; the nobles of the land have a strong aversion to armed peasants.

Foreign Policy

Ezud is generally introverted, preferring to deal with its own slow erosion by ignoring it. It also wants the rest of Wormwood to see it as it sees itself: as the world’s last bastion of civility. This is the great paradox of the Eastern Dominion; it wants to both lead and follow, be closed off and open. Its dealings with the other factions on Wormwood can be somewhat complicated as a result.

Lost Ezud

While still technically a part of Ezud, the land west of the Second Great Wall has been an abandoned no-man’s land for seven centuries. When the First Great Wall finally fell in 322 of the GT (Great Tribulation), the forces of Ezud fell back six hundred miles (960 km) to the gates at Cemko. The three Hosts in charge of the invasion, when presented with the Second Wall, decided that three hundred years of siege warfare was enough for them. They returned to Charun, and let the captured areas fall into disrepair and ruin. However, in order to ensure that the Ezudites would not just reclaim the land once they had left, the Hosts opened a permanent dimensional Rift in Ounka. This portal leads directly to Br’talb, the home world of the Demon Hound Riders. The riders have since taken over the entire area. The Archivists have never been able to accurately determine their numbers, but think it in the hundreds of thousands.

Officially, Ezud is actively planning to reclaim this land. In reality their efforts are half-hearted at best. The Grand Masters of the Ezud Templars know that the Hound Riders could be wiped out, but cringe at the probable cost in human lives. So they do very little. The last “big push” occurred about four hundred years ago, when Lord Pasrael of the Templars led 1500 men (most of them Long Bowmen) on what was dubbed the “scorched Wormwood” campaign. Lord Pasrael killed every Hound and Hound Rider he encountered. He then burned everything of the enemy: their clothing, their gear, their bodies. By the time he had traveled halfway to Ounka, he had generated a great fear in the Br’talb, who had never developed bow weapons. To them, the ability to kill a man from so far away seemed god-like.

Lord Pasrael and all of his men were slaughtered when the Br’talb trapped his expedition in the city of Desgrind. Only one

magic pigeon ever returned to Cenyaw, and its bleak message, "Pray for us. Their number is legion," was enough to end any further serious undertakings. Now, every forty years or so, it seems that some young, know-nothing hotshot decides to gather a force and charge out into Lost Ezud. Their goal is always to "destroy the Br'talb savages and put Lord Pasrael's soul to rest." It has yet to work, but those who go out are always lauded as heroes.

The Cathedral

In the days of the Congregation, when all the lands of Wormwood were united in purpose, Ezud and the Cathedral put aside their differences. But with the defeat on Khulam Plains, and the death of Lord Reorith, that alliance ended. Ezud's relationship with the Cathedral cooled with every passing year. Now it borders on becoming openly hostile.

What one must understand is that, although related by bloodlines and religion, the two lands have drifted very far apart over the past millennium. Ezud used to see the Cathedralists as lost or misguided children, but as the distinction between church and state vanished in Stronghold, that view changed. Eastern Yufovyists see Cathedralism as nothing more than military dictatorship. They support the use of Freelancers, which is something that the nobility of Ezud cannot condone (why would anyone arm the peasants when the Templars are supposed to protect them?). Ezud's leaders can clearly see the corruption that has taken hold in the Kingdom of Light. Many in the Royal Court genuinely fear the ambitions of Matthew Pentecost, who, it has been learned, is the man behind the Cathedral Missions.

For the past twenty-one years, ever since Matthew Pentecost became a Cardinal, the Cathedral has been sending missionaries into the Eastern Dominion. These priests and Templars seem to have one ultimate goal: to convert the people of Ezud over to Orthodox Cathedralism. There is now a Mission in every city of Ezud; Churches of Light built in the Cathedral architectural style. The priests there give sermons that encourage their listeners to arm themselves and join the fight against the Unholy. The Templars there are willing to teach any who wish to learn the basics of sword fighting and hand to hand combat. Already, more than 20,000 Ezud commoners (about 1% of the total population) have become Cathedralist Neophytes; the equivalent of Freelancers, all trained and armed by the Templars.

The Cathedral claims that it is simply following the tenet of their faith that drives them to bring civilization to those who have none. The Ezud Royal Court thinks differently. While the common man has never been out and out forbidden to carry weapons, it has always been the tradition that only the Eastern Templars are armed. Of course, the Eastern Templars are all of noble background, and so this is really a tradition of keeping the peasants in check, though it has never been oppressive. The Eastern Templars are charged with the protection of the people above that of their own lives. In short, the Royal Court sees the Cathedral Missions as survivalist or militia compounds. They are dangerous and only getting more so.

What this all adds up to is trouble. A real split is beginning to form in the Ezud populace. The Neophytes are now going out and trying to convert their families and friends, and the Missions are welcoming it. The Neophyte movement is calling for Queen

Notari to proclaim a Crusade to retake Lost Ezud. Even those who are loyal to the Throne are beginning to think that the time for Ezud's "head-in-the-sand" national policy should be reevaluated. Meantime, the hardliners want the Eastern Templars to send the Cathedral Missionaries packing and burn their Missions back into Wormwood. The Grand Masters of the Eastern Templars are themselves split; some agree with the hardliners, but cannot condone a course of violent action on their fellow Templars. And if there is fighting in the streets between the Neophytes and the Ezud peasants, do the Eastern Templars have the right to arrest or even kill the citizens of the Dominion?

All in all, Ezud's honeymoon is about to end. It can either try to kick the Missionaries out, which will more than likely lead to fighting, or it can continue to do nothing, and let itself become an extension of the Cathedral (which is exactly what Matthew Pentecost is going for). Again, having Notari sitting as Queen does not help the situation. She was never educated in the finer-ies of politics, and is completely incapable of finding a way out of this mess. Which leads the Royal Court back to the question of replacing her with someone else who might be able to.

Reorith Province

Ezud has been a less than equal partner in the defense of Reorith. Eastern Templars are almost never stationed farther way than Sondassi because the Grand Masters want to keep them as close to home as possible. However, new units, many of them from Worldgate, are constantly being brought into Reorith to replace the slaughtered and strengthen the front line. Eventually, the ways and customs of these new people rub off on the Ezudites. Anyone who spends time in Reorith often becomes quite open-minded; they accept Freelancers and find camaraderie with alien beings such as the Holy Terrors. When (and if) these soldiers are rotated back home, they tend to spread their new attitudes to their loved ones, further deteriorating Ezud's ancient cultural preconceptions.

Worldgate

The Royal Court and High Eastern Priests would prefer to have nothing to do with the last of Free Cities, but that's just not economically viable. Ezud does a fair amount of trading with Worldgate, exporting talom, cloth, resin sculptures, and hard soap. As with most other Wormwood nations, they also trade water, stones, crystals, and foodstuffs. In return, they receive mechanical clocks, Temporal Magic scrolls, and blank spell gems loaded with Temporal abilities. Try as they might, the Alchemists of Ezud have never been able to learn more than two or three Temporal spells, so closely guarded are they by the Lords of the Exchequer. They would pay very handsomely for the rumored "Annihilate" spell, especially if it could somehow be fitted into a ballista weapon.

Unlike the Cathedral, Ezud has no problem with the number of non-humans living in the city. That's a secondary concern. Their beef is with Worldgate's military. Ezud knows full well that the Free City supports itself only by kidnaping people from other dimensions and then renting out its army. The impressment of non-Wormwoodians aside, Ezud dislikes the fact that, technically, Worldgate is a neutral party. The fear is that if they were so inclined, they might very well hire their mercenary

army out to the Unholy, or to whomever could offer them a better deal. Such an action would mean the end of the Reorith Province, and that in turn would mark the beginning of the end for the nations of Men.

The Skelosian Retreats

Ezud knows that there is a large forest of pillars to the west of Kriktonspire, as it appears on the ancient maps of the Archivists. However, they have only ever heard unconfirmed rumors that the descendants of King Emeron's daughters continue to live there. Even should they learn of Lord Krikton's plan to raze the forest to the ground, there is little that they could do. Skelosia is simply too far away.

Ezud will not plan any course of action based on mere hearsay. They like their facts checked, checked, and checked again. The most that may happen is for the Royal Court to appoint a small investigative team to travel there and get the lay of the land. Such a group is not likely to have the approval of Queen Notari – she simply doesn't care about trying to reunify the Realm.

Notes on the Cities and Places of Ezud

The First Great Wall

In its time, this massive fortification was the largest single structure on Wormwood. Now, it lies in ruins. Large holes are blasted through it, and chunks of petrified Wormwood lie scattered everywhere (because it was made permanent, it will not sink back into the Living Planet). These lands are under the control of the Unholy's demonic minions, and the rubble provides shelter for Demon Hound Riders and all manner of flesh-eating parasites.

Ounka

Once this city served as the northern anchor for the First Great Wall. Long abandoned by the Humans, it is now a haven for the Hound Riders and a gathering point for demonic armies. At any time there might be as many as 4000 + 3D4x100 Br'talb found living amidst the decaying buildings and sinking streets. With no knowledge of Communion, the Hound Riders can only sit back and watch as, year by year, Wormwood absorbs this city back into the dust from whence it came.

Zolm

Nestled against the demon mountains, Zolm is a wolf-in-sheep's clothing city. It boasts a population of 3000 Humans, but is held by 300 demon troops, 40 Worm Zombies, and 20 Parasites. Most of the occupiers are Skyriders who have made it their mission to ensure that their hated cousins, the Hound Riders, do not occupy another city in Lost Ezud.

Unknown to most, Zolm has an active resistance; rebels who operate from a network of tunnels and caves carved into the mountains. Their greatest asset is a "nexus cave" which contains a dimensional portal. This cave links directly to the city of Center, on Phase World, and means that modern amenities such as energy weapons and explosives are actually somewhat common here. Zolm has been under demon control for nearly 700 years, its people waiting for a liberation that never comes. Conse-

quently, the freedom fighters no longer feel any allegiance to Ezud, and should it ever throw off the shackles of the Unholy, the resistance will form its own civilian government. Zolm will then become a Free City akin to Worldgate.

Desgrind

This city was once a rest stop for travelers heading towards Cenyaw on their way from Charun. Now it is a ghost town in the middle of Lost Ezud, its populations either long since killed, or long since fled. The only travelers the city sees now are Hound Riders, and the young, foolish Templars who try to sanctify the ground where Lord Pasreal died.

Izrui

A resin-mining town north of the ruined Great Wall, most famous for *the Battle of Seven*. Since the city is not connected to the Second Great Wall, it is conceivable that demonic troops could simply cut around to the north and enter Ezud in a large flanking maneuver. Indeed, this was once tried. Over two hundred years ago, an army of demons numbering into the thousands attempted to circumvent the Second Great Wall by marching far to the north, passing unseen through the resin mountains, and then driving southward straight towards Izrui. Beyond that lay open, undefended plains and the city of Cenyaw. Fortunately for the Ezudites, a group of seven Apoks had gathered outside the mining town, each of them driven there by the Spirits of Wormwood. Although they had been shunned by the townsfolk, the Apoks took the fight to the foe, and in a tight mountain pass, fought the demonic horde for three full days. All the while, Eastern Templars rushed to erect defensive positions around the town. In the end, this proved unnecessary for the demon army turned back and fled for the Dark Domain. The seven were never seen again. Many Ezudites credited the victory to the Apoks, and from that day forward, their kind were made welcome everywhere in the Eastern Dominion.

Today Izrui's population of workers is small (only about 1500) compared to its armed force, which is twice that number. It is still surrounded by trenches, man traps, and watchtowers. In the center of the town is a large monument depicting the seven Apoks standing triumphant atop a pile of demon skulls.

The Second Great Wall

While the first wall held the Unholy's minions at bay, King Chaulron ordered the construction of a second, even greater, wall. Measuring 30 feet (9 m) thick at the base, 12 feet (3.6 m) wide at the top, and averaging 150 feet (45 m) high, the Second Great Wall runs a total length of 900 miles (1440 km) from Coyzu to Prave. It can actually be seen from space! Its construction was only possible with the help of the *Mayvoc*, which gifted the builders with the incredible amount of P.P.E. needed for a project of this size. In order to breach the base of the wall one would have to inflict over 3000 points of damage, a feat which has deterred most enemies for the time being.

Small watchtowers have been built into the top of the wall. There are roughly four hundred of them in total, spread out about two miles (3.2 km) apart. Each watchtower is manned by four Eastern Templars and two Long Bowmen.



Prave

The southern end of the Second Wall is this large fortress town. Prave not only has to defend the Wall, but the Zaeradi Pass as well. It therefore boasts a population of nearly 3000 civilians with an equal number of armed forces. There are a fair number of Freelancers here, mostly soldiers from neighboring Reorith. There is also a mountain monastery in which 12 monks of Inner Spirit reside, as well as some Knights of the Cathedral who will defend their missionary church first, and the city second. One of the Prave's greatest defenses is a slumbering Battle Saint, located in the southwest corner of the city. The Knights Templar have pestered Mekou Civith for decades, demanding that the saint be taken into Reorith Province and used at the Front (the Cathedral considers all Battle Saints and Orbs to be its sole property). The mayor-for-life has so far flatly refused, but as the number of Orthodox Cathedralists in Prave increases, can he continue to hold on to his hard line?

Cai

This city is just one of dozens of small communities that surround the capital. Like them, it seldom has a population greater than 4000. However, Cai is notable for lying at a crossroads of sorts; from here it's only 250 miles (400 km) to Prave and the Zaeradi Pass, 300 miles (480 km) to Cenyaw, and 800 miles (1280 km) to Alhir. As a result, Cai is a bit of a trading town, filled with Resiners, Templars, and merchant caravans.

Cenyaw

Cenyaw, the capital of Ezud, was founded over 1000 years ago by King Avalos, and is the largest on Wormwood in terms of physical area. At twice the size of Cathedral Stronghold, it is a massive, sprawling place filled with hundreds of temples, parks, and museums. Its population, though, is only 400,000.

Cenyaw is one of the most heavily defended places in the world. It is surrounded by a high wall, with gunnery towers built into it at regular intervals. 10,000 Templars are stationed here, along with 3000 Long Bowmen and siege operators. In the center of the city is the Royal Palace, also called the House of Avalos. It consists of a castle and keep, surrounded by a both a wall and moat, sitting in the middle of four square miles (10.24 square km) of courtyards, fountains, and monuments.

Alhir

This city marks the site of the largest and most productive resin mine in all the Living Planet. It is also the biggest hole ever made; a gigantic open pit mine, 4000 feet across (1219 m), and 1750 feet deep (533 m) at its lowest point! In other resin mines such as Hammer, Chisel, or even Izrui, workers wait patiently for the goo to bubble up from deep below the surface. Here, they have teamed up with Wormspeakers and Priests of Light, and have slowly but surely created an ever-deepening crater from which to extract the liquid resin one bucketful at a time. The sides of the pit are covered in ramps and ladders. A nexus point formed at the bottom of the mine several centuries ago, and occasionally something horrible slithers out. Otherwise, the Priests channel the extra P.P.E. through their prayers to drive the mine still deeper. At peak production, 8000 men can be found working within it. The city is protected by an army of 1500 Eastern Templars and 600 Long Bowmen.

The Drop

If the Grand Barrens are an ocean without water, then the Drop is its seashore. This vertical cliff runs north-south for over 700 miles (1120 km), and maintains a constant height of 350 feet (106 m). Viewed from the Barrens, the Drop is smooth and white, and looks like a wall of solid bone (or for those familiar with Earth geography, the chalk cliffs of Dover, England). It is a lonely and abandoned place overall, with only a few outposts built along it. Rumors and stories have persisted for centuries that somewhere along the base of the Drop are tunnels that lead deep into the heart of Wormwood, perhaps even to the Plexus. If such caverns exist, they have either never been discovered or have never been made public knowledge.

Isoete, Gyvovral, and Gudj

These three "port towns" are really not much more than glorified forts sitting along the edge of the Drop. They are meant to provide a first line of defense against any demonic invasion coming from the east. This has never yet happened, since any such attack would have to come across the Grand Barrens, a distance of at least 1000 miles (1600 km). Each of these three towns is surrounded by a high wall lined with heavy ballista. Each one also has an elaborate system of pulleys and cauldrons

built into the eastern wall, which would allow gallons of steaming liquids to be poured over the Drop and onto an attacking army. At any one time the population will number 1D4x100 soldiers, half of whom will be civilians acting as Long Bowmen and siege operators. 4D6x10 civilians will also be found here, most often running businesses that cater to the needs of the soldiers.

New Wormwood O.C.C.s

Eastern Templar O.C.C.

There have always been Knights of the Order of the Temple. In the days of the Unified Realm, they were members of the nobility who served the church of Vram Yufovya gladly. But in the aftermath of the Sundering of the Realm, the various Templars began to reflect whatever denomination they were aligned with. By the time of the Battle of Khulam Plains, those in Ezud had a very different outlook from their cousins in Stronghold. Now, a thousand years later, the differences have continued to widen until the Templars of Ezud bear little resemblance to the Knights of the Cathedral.

The Ezud Knights of the Order of the Temple are more commonly called "Eastern Templars." In terms of physical training and skills learned, they are nearly identical to the Cathedral Knights. However, Eastern Templars tend to be a little more physically fit owing to the dietary restrictions of their religion. In accordance to the Theory of Battle, they are trained almost exclusively in *Raschomla*, the art of the long melee, and carry pole arms rather than swords. As well, their attitude towards the common man is quite different from the Cathedralist Templars. Instead of disdaining the peasant class, Eastern Templars have a sworn duty to protect and defend those who cannot defend themselves, and to do so without prejudice.

Alignments: Any, but the majority are either Principled or Scrupulous.

Attribute Requirements: A P.P. and P.E. of 12 or higher are recommended but not required. What is absolutely necessary though is that the character be of noble birth. Commoners must serve either as Long Bowmen, or as squires to the Templars.

O.C.C. Bonuses: +40 M.D.C. (S.D.C. in other environments), +3 to save vs Horror Factor, +1 to save vs magic, +1 on initiative and one additional attack per melee! Meditation helps the knight to focus and heal twice as fast as normal.

Defenders of Eastern Yufovya: As the one and only knightly order attached to the churches of Ezud, the Eastern Templars are die-hard followers of their faith. Their strict dietary code gives them the following: +1D4 Hit Points, +1 to P.E., +1 to P.B., and +1 to save vs ingested poisons (one time only bonuses). As well, the Eastern Templars can go two weeks without food, provided they have adequate supplies of water. After that, they must roll under their Fasting skill (below) to avoid becoming weakened or sick. These characters can also go for three days without water and not show any ill effects from dehydration. **Base Skill:** 40% +3% per level.

Raschomla, The Art of the Long Melee: The art of fighting with long pole arms has been developed over the past 1000

years to the point where it is as much a philosophy as a martial art. *Raschomla* teaches the Templars to maintain a "sphere of defense" all around them, out to a distance of seven feet. Even when forced to form a phalanx, Eastern Templars will space themselves out accordingly with an average of fourteen feet between each man. *Raschomla* is characterized by large, sweeping parries and cuts. It gives the Eastern Templars the following bonuses: +1 to parry at levels 4, 8, and 12 with all kinds of pole arms and spears. These are in addition to the bonuses from W.P. Staff, Spear, or Pole Arm.

Raschomla also teaches the Power Strike: This can be a powerful thrust with either end of the pole arm, or a huge sweeping chop with the blade. Either move has the Templar lunging and putting all his weight behind the blow. Inflicts a Critical Strike (double damage), but is the first and only *offensive* attack the character may make for that melee round. The Templar must have won the initiative in order to Power Strike. The character may parry and dodge as normal that round.

O.C.C. Skills:

Language: Ezudesh at 98%.

Literacy: Ezudesh at 90%.

Language: Demongogian at 90%.

Lore: Wormwood (+15%)

Athletics (general)

Land Navigation (+10%)



Wilderness Survival (+15%)
Horsemanship: General (+10%)
Math: Basic (+25%)
W.P. Pole Arm
W.P. Knife

Hand to Hand: Martial Arts (or Assassin if evil)

O.C.C. Related Skills: Select six other skills, plus two additional skills at level three, and one at levels six, nine and twelve.

Communication: Any (+5%).

Cowboy: None.

Domestic: Any (+10%).

Electrical: None.

Espionage: Any (+5%).

Mechanical: None.

Medical: First Aid only.

Military: None.

Physical: Any except Acrobatics (+5% where applicable).

Pilot: Any except robots, power armor, tanks, or spacecraft (+5%).

Pilot Related: None.

Rogue: None.

Science: Any (+10%).

Technical: Any (+20%).

W.P.: Any.

Wilderness: Any (+5%).

Secondary Skills: The character gets to select four Secondary Skills as found on page 300 of *Rifts® Ultimate Edition*.

Standard Equipment: Traveling clothes, a set of dress clothes or dress body armor, a pair of boots, a pair of gloves, a hat, sleeping bag, blanket, 1D6 small pouches, backpack or saddlebag, 1D4 utility belts, 100 feet of rope (30.5 m; made from angel hair), a grappling hook, 2D4 resin spikes, and 2D4 weeks of food rations.

Weapons: The *hadaras* is the standard issue pole arm for the Eastern Templars. This is a two-handed weapon almost identical to a halberd, and can be used to stab, chop, or trip/entangle. It measures seven and a quarter feet (2.2 m) long, and inflicts 3D6+3 damage. Crafted by the Resiners and finished by the Alchemy Guild, the weapon is magical in nature; its blade is eternally sharp and will never dull or chip. Its superior craftsmanship gives it +1 to strike and parry, in addition to any other bonuses.

Eastern Templars may also carry four or five additional ancient-style weapons, the exact type of which can vary dramatically from character to character.

Knight Armor: The exact type of armor can vary greatly. Most knights of the Temple prefer to wear medium to heavy plate armor. The average knight will own two different suits of armor. Common types include:

Light Plate or Scale Mail: 60 M.D.C., but -10% to Prowl.

Medium Plate, Banded or Splint Armor: 75 M.D.C., but -15% to Prowl.

Full Plate: 100 M.D.C, but has a -20% Prowl penalty.

There are hundreds of different styles of armor, ornamentation and accessories. The official colors of Eastern Yufovya are gold and deep purple. The pictogram for Ezud (a small t-shaped cross atop a large circle) represents the shape of the Mayvoc, and will appear on all capes, cloaks, surcoats, and heraldry.

Transportation: The Eastern Templars rarely travel outside of Ezud anymore, but when they do only 20% will ride a horse, Pegasus, Unicorn, Gryphon or other attractive, “noble” creature from Earth or another dimension. The rest walk.

Money: Not applicable.

Cybernetics and Bionics: Virtually non-existent.

Symbiotes: While Eastern Yufovya does not disdain the use of Symbiotes, the Ezud Templars have sworn to remain pure in body. Therefore, they will not use symbiotic organisms or Slime Magic, but can pilot the Battle Saint and Battle Saint Orbs. They can also link with the Spirits of Wormwood (a great blessing), and use crystals and stones.

Long Bowman O.C.C.

Taken from the Palladium Fantasy RPG® with adaptations for the Wormwood setting

The Long Bowmen of Ezud are commoners who have volunteered to serve in the army for a set term. Many are the sons and daughters of Long Bowmen, and the weapons they use handed down over the generations. These master archers have become the backbone of the Ezud military machine, and to serve as one is the greatest honor that a commoner can achieve.

The development and art of firing these unique weapons goes back thirty generations to the Battle of Khulam Plains. The bow is generally five and a half to six feet (1.66-1.83 m) in length. It is made of layered resin and the core material of Wormwood pillars. It is then left to cure for two years. After the bow is fully set, a string of entwined angel hair sealed with talom is added. The total pull of these bows is nearly 100 pounds (45 kg).

The traditional long arrow is also made of resin. It measures three feet (0.9 m) in length and is tipped with small barbs. This design is made specifically to pierce through plate and chain mail armors, as well as prove difficult to remove from flesh. The wound left by a single arrow can be three inches long by two inches wide and six inches deep (7.6x5.1x15.2 cm).

Long Bowmen who have left the Ezud service are much sought-after mercenaries. Exceptional marksmen (and high level characters) can usually dictate the terms of their enlistment, special bonuses and/or a percentage of booty.

Special Ability - Superior Bowmanship: The dedication to the use of the long bow and extensive training involved is reminiscent of the Earth martial arts known as kyudo. This training makes the Long Bowman think of the weapon as an extension of own body and provides him with astonishing precision, speed and ability when using this weapon. Abilities include using a long bow without penalty from horseback, a moving vehicle, or an awkward position - swaying on a rope bridge, hanging upside down, leaping and shooting, etc. **Note:** Skilled archers who are not Long Bowmen will lose all bonuses to strike and half their

normal rate of fire when off balance or when shooting from horseback or an awkward position.

Rate of Fire with a Long Bow: Two shots at level one, +1 at levels two, three, four, five, six, eight, ten, twelve and fourteen. Use these in place of the W.P. Archery numbers when using a long bow; don't combine them. The W.P. Archery rate of fire applies to the use of all other types of bows.

Superior Range with a Long Bow (special): 700 feet (213 m) +25 feet (7.6 m) per level of experience!

Special Aimed Shot: A slow and carefully aimed shot gives the bowman +3 to strike, but uses up two melee attacks or two shots from a bow (reduce rate of fire that melee round by two). The player must make a "Called Shot" to strike a specific part of the target, such as the bull's-eye, a candle, rope, hand, finger, etc.

Penalties: Any W.P. bonuses to strike are half when using a short bow, crossbow, or bow of terrible quality; the long bow is this character's specialty.

Long Bowman O.C.C.

Alignments: Any.

Attribute Requirements: P.S. 10 and P.P. 12 or higher.

O.C.C. Skills:

Athletics (General)

Languages: Native Tongue at 98%, plus two of choice (+10% each).

Sniper

Wilderness Survival (+10%)

W.P. Archery (all bows)

W.P.: One of choice.

Hand to Hand: Basic

Hand to Hand: Basic can be changed to Hand to Hand: Expert for the cost of one O.C.C. Related Skill, or to Martial Arts or Assassin (if evil) for the cost of two O.C.C. Related Skills.

O.C.C. Related Skills: Select eight other skills at level one, plus select two additional skills at levels three, seven, ten and thirteen. All new skills start at level one proficiency.

Communications: None.

Cowboy: None.

Domestic: Any (+5%).

Espionage: Escape Artist only (+5%).

Horsemanship: General or Exotic only (+5%).

Medical: First Aid only.

Military: Any (+5%), except Camouflage, Falconry, and Interrogation.

Physical: Any, except Acrobatics, Gymnastics and Wrestling.

Rogue: Any.

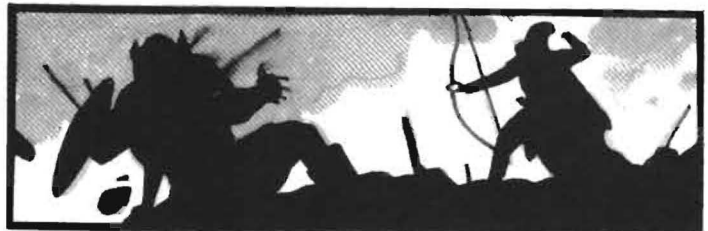
Science: Mathematics only.

Scholar/Technical: Any (+10% on Language, Literacy & Lore only).

Weapon Proficiencies: Any.

Wilderness: Any (+5%).

Secondary Skills: The character also gets to select four Secondary Skills as found on page 300 of **Rifts® Ultimate Edition**.



Starting Equipment: Two sets of clothing, hooded cape or cloak, boots, a pair of gloves, belt, bedroll, backpack, one large sack, two small sacks, a quiver for arrows, and a water skin.

Armor & Long Bowmen: Can use any type of armor, but prefer studded leather (40 M.D.C.) or light plate (60 M.D.C., -10% to Prowl). Reduce the character's rate of fire by two, and bonus to strike by half whenever a suit of full plate armor is worn. The usual Prowl and movement penalties also apply.

Transportation: Most walk.

Money: Not applicable.

Cybernetics and Bionics: Virtually unheard of.

Symbiotes: None to start, and not likely to get any while in the service of the Ezud armed forces. Long Bowmen who become mercenaries may get symbiotic organisms if they can find them.

New Weapons and Equipment

The Eastern Dominion has access to several technologies that the other human kingdoms do not, including missile weapons, talom, and the science of building siege engines. Although such machines were readily available in the days of the Unified Realm, the knowledge of their creation has been lost over a thousand years of warfare. Only in Ezud, where the Archivist Guild is still strong, can such machines still be built. Unlike their historic Earth counterparts, Ezud siege weapons employ several magic spells and components, making them, in effect, Medieval-era Techno-Wizard weapons.

Ezud Compound Ballista

The size of a wagon, this oversized crossbow can fire a projectile the size of a small tree. They are crafted from a resin frame, layered with Wormwood pillar, and often fitted with a Battle Stone. It is crewed by a three-man team. Although they are reasonably portable, Ezud deploys these siege engines as defensive emplacements. They are found all along the Second Great Wall, and in elevated towers in all cities.

A ballista is at a penalty of -6 to strike small (man-sized or smaller), moving targets. Giant-sized targets (dragons, Rathos, Hosts, and the like) require a strike roll at -4. The maximum rate of fire for ballistas is once every five minutes (20 melee rounds). Note that the damage listed below is for standard resin bolts. Flaming bolts will inflict an extra 4D6 points of damage every melee round until extinguished, and will have a 12% chance of igniting whatever they hit (if it is combustible). Because they are coated with talom, the fire is magical and will harm Mega-Damage beings. Units fitted with a Battle Stone will inflict twice as much damage.

Light Ballista: Base damage is 1D4x10 per bolt, 1155 foot (352 m) range. The machine has 100 M.D.C.

Heavy Ballista: Base damage is 1D6x10 per bolt, 1320 foot (402 m) range. The machine has 150 M.D.C.

Ezud Trebuchet

This is the grand-daddy of all siege weapons. Standing over 50 feet tall (15 m), a trebuchet has a long arm attached to a counterweight (which itself can weigh over ten tons). At the end of the arm is a payload of some kind; historically, this was rocks, but on the Living Planet of Wormwood it is often a ball of magically-created ice. When the machine is fired, the counterweight rotates downward, flinging the arm high in the air, which in turn releases the payload. One hit from a trebuchet will shake all but the stoutest of fortresses, and a sustained bombardment will eventually destroy whatever it is shooting at.

Ezud's trebuchets are most often stationary, meaning that they have been built into the walls of cities and fortresses. Each one requires a crew of twenty men. The P.P.E. needed to create the payload can be provided by Wizards, Priests of Light, Wormwood energy crystals, or any combination thereof. The trebuchet cannot be aimed in any meaningful way, and its maximum rate of fire is once every 15 minutes (60 melee rounds). A few good hits from one of these things can cripple a Crawling Tower. (**G.M.s:** Note that the average Tower has 8 to 12 levels. With each trebuchet strike, roll randomly to see which floor of it is hit. If the M.D.C. of a Tower level is destroyed, then all the levels above it will collapse downwards. Most beings still inside when this happens will be killed.) Should any singular person be hit by the shot from a trebuchet, the Game Master should declare them dead. Spectacularly dead. As always, if the machine is fitted with a Wormwood Battle Stone, it will inflict double damage!

Trebuchet: Each time the machine is primed, its built-in enchantments create a ten-ton ball of ice. This requires 300 P.P.E. per shot! Base damage is 1D8x100 per shot. The target must be between 200 to 1000 feet away (61 to 305 m). The machine itself has 500 M.D.C.

Talom

This oily residue is created when resin is boiled, distilled, and refined. It smells like kerosene, and burns just as well. Talom is one of the few flammable resources produced by Wormwood. It can be used to cover materials to make them waterproof, used for lamp oil, or coated on arrows to make flaming missiles. (A flaming arrow adds 1D6 points of damage, and has a 15% of setting combustible materials on fire.) Interestingly enough, once lit, talom's fire is magical and will harm Mega-Damage creatures.

Ezud Long Bow

Hand crafted over two years, this is the pinnacle of man-portable, Wormwood-native missile technology. **Range:** 700 feet/213 m. **Weight:** 2 lbs (0.9 kg). **Length:** 6 feet (1.8 m). **Draw Weight:** About 100 lbs (45 kg). **Damage:** 2D6 from regular arrows. Can also fire flaming and other enchanted arrows.

Mayvoc,

The Orb of Wormwood

The origin of the *Mayvoc*, like its two companion pieces, is lost for all time. Certainly the three Symbols of Office date back to the founding of the Unified Realm, possibly back to the first arrival of humans on Wormwood. No one is certain who created them, as none of them have any kind of inscriptions or signatures. The Orb is perhaps the strangest looking item of the three. It is a perfect sphere made of Wormwood crystal, and is about the size of a basketball. A single metal band runs around its middle, joined to another band rounding its top half. A small t-shaped cross extends from the apex of the second band. The metal pieces of the *Mayvoc* have a flat, dull look, like steel, but are, in fact, composed of Soulstuff. The crystal portion continually glows from within with a warm, magical light. Like the *Kidoc* and *Abendzul*, it is apparently indestructible.

The *Mayvoc* has only a few abilities, but they are quite powerful. Firstly, the Orb is a P.P.E. battery, much like a Wormwood Energy cell. When full, it contains 1000 P.P.E. This power can be tapped by Wizards, Priests, and other magic users, and was instrumental in the construction of the two Great Walls. The Orb will recover its P.P.E. at a rate of about 40 per hour (goes from empty to full in 25 hours).

Secondly, the *Mayvoc* can repel evil. Except when completely depleted of this P.P.E. reserve, the Orb shines from within as if lit by an internal star. This light is actually true daylight, and will harm vampires, shades, and other beings affected by the sun/light. It will repel such beings out to a radius equal to the number of P.P.E. left within it, in feet. For example, if fully charged, vampires could not come within 1000 feet (305 m) of someone holding the *Mayvoc*. If some of the P.P.E. reserve was used, the circle of protection would shrink, and the light would dim a little. Should such beings become caught within the affected area, they will suffer 1D6x10 points of damage for every melee round they remain too close.

Though it has never been used in recorded history, those who have studied it insist that the *Mayvoc* does possess a third power: It can completely discharge its P.P.E. reserve in a single, enormous, destructive blast. No one is certain what this would look like, or what exactly it would do. The Alchemists' leading theory is that the *Mayvoc* would send out a wave of pure Light. The radius effect for this "nova" is thought to be 1000 feet (305 m), but, again, no one has tested this assumption. The fear is that causing the Orb to forcibly eject all its power could cause it to break, or go out forever. The power to nova may be a one-shot deal. Despite past efforts, no one has found a way to build a second Orb, so the *Mayvoc* is simply too much of a cultural icon to risk it in such a way.

Nightbane®

Your Morphus and You

Optional Rules and Source Material for Nightbane®

By Edward Sauerland

Ever get the feeling that your character is just a collection of numbers? It can happen even in an RPG as imaginative as **Nightbane®**. There are plenty of excellent articles in **The Rifter®** about crafting 3-dimensional characters, but I wanted to add my two cents by deconstructing that most special aspect of the Nightbane: the Morphus. What follows are a few ideas to help you explore the background your character didn't even know he had in the hopes of explaining why the heck he or she looks so weird. After that follows some new Morphus tables based more on motives, fears, dreams, and desires. Enjoy.

Psychology in the Shadows

So, why exactly does your Morphus look like a humanoid puma with large chunks of missing flesh exposing the bone beneath? And why the heck is it dressed in Roman Legionnaire armor? No doubt you've asked similar questions in the past about your character. Let's start with the obvious.

What You See Is What You Get: This is the most basic idea regarding the Morphus. This is the "I like birds, so it turns into a bird" philosophy. Simple, very straightforward. If this is your stance, than I'd assume that your character is a very honest person. Thus, a twisted, frightening Morphus form would indicate an evil Nightbane with a soul that matches its monstrous appearance.

Opposites: Now we're digging deeper. Often, the Morphus may be seen as a true window into the soul. Someone plain and ordinary might become incredibly beautiful. Someone weak, sickly, or disabled transforms into a powerhouse of muscle, and so on. On the flip side, someone obsessed with their good looks could be robbed of them every time they undergo the Becoming. There is definitely an element of karma at play here, as people get what's coming to them, for better *or* worse. This opens up whole avenues to explore. Consider the shy bookworm who transforms into a beautiful, chiseled, godlike Adonis that exudes charisma. Suddenly, he's the center of attention. Does he remain a bundle of nerves around the ladies, or does he abuse his power and start taking advantage of them?

Obsessions, Fears, Love and Hate: Scared of heights when you were a kid? Yeah, you're going to end up with wings. Love

chocolate a little too much? Your Morphus might end up looking morbidly obese. Biomechanicals might be obsessed with order and timeliness (everything moving like clockwork). Thus, their Morphus has gears and gyros to keep everything running smoothly. Anything that conjures up powerful emotions is likely to manifest itself during the Becoming. Makes it tricky to keep some things secret.

Extremes and Irony: Many aspects of the Morphus symbolically magnify some personality flaw or quirk to almost comical levels. Obsessed with being thin? Behold! Your Morphus is nothing more than a skeleton dressed in rags. Painfully shy? You have the No Face characteristic. Accident prone? Roll for multiple Stigmata. You get the idea. But extreme characteristics might not be that obvious. That's where irony comes in, like the entry above where someone shy or plain becomes super beautiful. The Morphus can be an outlet for emotions. Someone with seething emotions can maintain control wearing his Façade, but perhaps turns into a rabid mutant badger in Morphus form.

Symbolism: In one culture, cats may be revered. In another, they might be feared as harbingers of doom. There are always multiple ways of looking at something. This ties in nicely with Obsessions, Fears, Love, and Hate, above. One person may think that they are on the cutting edge of technology, and that's expressed in their Morphus with multiple Biomechanical traits. Another person might see technology as the downfall of civilization, isolating individuals from society or feeding them a constant supply of sex and violence. Those differing viewpoints might bring two such individuals into conflict.

Motivation: The Morphus becomes a tool or a weapon for carrying out the character's mission in life, be it theft, revenge, self-discovery or finding true love. Their Morphus could be a mishmash of odds and ends; equipment, basically, that separately serves no purpose but makes a strange sort of sense when brought together as a whole.

The first Nightbane I rolled up was like that. He started out with a full bear form, enhanced with both Physical Perfection and Animal Magnetism. A few more rolls resulted in Articulated Spikes, a Metal Endoskeleton (counts as Stigmata in this case), topped off with a Metal Head and Camera Eyes. Yeah, explain all *that* to me. I decided that some tragedy in his background had turned him into an anti-hero type or vigilante. A bit aloof and a loner by choice, he would need to be really tough in order to fight and survive alone. Being freaky looking was just an added bonus.

It Is What It Is: Well, sometimes there is no logical explanation, and that's great news. Why? Because the character is free to walk his or her own path. Unanswered questions can be frustrating, but they can also be great motivators or hooks for future adventures. An oddball Morphus is a great starting point. After all, your brand new first level Nightbane probably knows very little about his or her true nature and the limits of their abilities. After they get over the initial shock, the first thing they're likely to do is go out and take their Morphus on a test run to see what they are capable of.

Beyond the Obvious

Maybe you have a concept for your character and you want to build the Morphus around it. Let's take the soldier archetype

as an example. A uniform is the most direct, obvious way to express that concept. But what else could we use that might be more creative or better define the character as an individual? Animal attributes are a great way to symbolize ideas like strength or patriotism. An American could obviously choose an eagle to show his pride, whereas a Russian might choose a bear or a Chinese person might have dragon-like traits.

Consider the person's service branch and specialty. Airmen and pilots would probably take on shapes derived from birds of prey. A cavalry officer could turn into a horse and sailors take on fish attributes like gills or shark teeth. One of the many nicknames given to U.S. Marines is 'Devil Dogs,' so how about a canine Morphus with little devil horns?

Other soldier ideas include Biomechanical traits (see Military Hardware below) or even the selection and manifestation of Talents. How about Stigmata resulting from battlefield wounds? Or give the character's skin a camouflage pattern like an all over body tattoo, or camo that shifts to match the surroundings, like a chameleon. Now, that's quite a few different ways to express the 'soldier' aspect of your Nightbane, and all that's just if we keep the character set in modern times. What about Native American warriors? Roman gladiators, or a knight of the Crusades? Lots of possibilities.

Specific Characteristics

Okay, so some of the stranger Nightbane characteristics are harder to explain. Take the Plasmoid body shape. Why would someone become a large tub of goo? Well, maybe they can't make decisions or they lack courage. In essence, they are *spineless*. Plasmoid would also fit a slippery individual who always manages to get out of trouble somehow.

Unnatural Limbs often arise from some need in everyday life. What single parent couldn't use an extra set of arms? Or, uh, tentacles. Hey, every little bit helps. Likewise, intelligent, observant, or paranoid people might manifest extra sensory organs like antennae or multiple eyes. Giant mouths and fangs might symbolize greed or gluttony.

Clothing Optional

Falling under the obvious category are those people who say "My guy always wanted to be a cop, so his Morphus is dressed in a police uniform," etc. I'm not arguing against that. Indeed, many entries on the following Morphus tables are like that. But for me, any clothing on your Nightbane should be more about defining his or her personality than just stating the obvious. I opted to dress one of my Nightbane in a Western style duster and hat not because he wanted to be a cowboy, but because it fit his personality well. He saw himself as a modern day gunslinger, wandering around righting wrongs and dispensing justice from the barrel of a gun.

So I'm not saying don't do it, I'm just saying try to find something other than an outfit to describe your character. Think about other things related to that job. A firefighter could be dressed in full gear, or better still, he takes on some features from a Dalmatian. Something *related* to what you're trying to convey without hammering someone upside the head with it.

You can use the types of clothes and their condition to reinforce your ideas. High fashion could indicate a prissy attitude or

arrogance. Shredded clothes might indicate a survivor or someone who is always getting into fights.

One final note is that clothes can be worn regardless of size or shape. So your giant spider-humanoid with four arms can still be dressed like a cheerleader, it's just that the outfit will have four sleeves instead of two. In general, adding clothes to the Morphus does not really add to the Horror Factor that much: just a +1 bonus unless it's something really specific that's meant to instill fear (an SS officer's uniform, a medieval executioner's hood, etc.). Mostly, the extra Horror Factor bonus conveys that "What the [blank]" reaction you get from seeing something that just doesn't make much sense (like the aforementioned giant humanoid spider that just happens to be dressed as a cheerleader).

Weird Is as Weird Does

Okay, so after *all* that, are you still not sure what to say about your character? Is it just too crazy, too strange, too ugly, scary, etc.? Consider the multitude of oddities in human myth and lore. The sphinx, the gryphon, the minotaur, dragons, faeries, shape changing gods and other legends have been a part of human cultures since the beginning. And most if not all of them are at least a little bit strange. Check out some of Palladium's other titles, or stop by the local library, or, you know, do that Internet thing to learn more.

Optional Rule: Horror Factor

The upper limit on a Nightbane's Horror Factor? Simply put: forget about it. Well, to be fair, keep it at a max of 18 for humans and the like, but don't cap it when dealing with supernatural threats like Hounds or other Nightbane. In this case, the Horror Factor is less about getting them to wet their pants. It's about first impressions, more of an Awe Factor. I mean, it's going to be hard to spook a fellow freak show or evil minion, most of whom have substantial bonuses to save vs Horror Factor anyway. But a Nightbane can convey power and majesty, exuding that air of "You don't want to mess with this!"

So when your Nightbane comes face to face with a Night Lord, he can use the full weight of his Horror Factor to stare down that villain, if only for a second. The Night Lord is taken aback for a moment (an opening to attack, flee, or talk). Then he gives a condescending smile. "You are indeed impressive, my friend. [Pause.] For a lesser being..."

Optional Rule: Armor Rating

Many minions of the Dark have an Armor Rating, but Nightbane don't. An oversight? Game balance issues? I feel that an Armor Rating is appropriate in many cases. Sure, a Nightbane with tons of S.D.C. can ignore small amounts of damage or just heal away some minor injuries. But some traits lend themselves to creating tougher Nightbane. Bullets should ping off of metal plates and blades should be useless against bare bone. Even a Nightbane with a mostly human Morphus is still a powerful supernatural being, despite appearances.

All Nightbane have a base A.R. of 6 unless otherwise stated. Certain Nightbane Characteristics can add significantly to this number. The chart below will walk you through generating your A.R. The first number is the base number that represents your primary body type. So, if you have a full animal form, your base

A.R. starts at 7 instead of 6. The second number represents modifications due to other Characteristics. So, for example, if you have a full animal form and any number of Stigmata, add 1 to your base A.R. for a result of 8, and so on.

Primary Body Type (Base Number) Modifier (Adds to Base A.R. Number)

Mostly humanoid	6N/A
Full Animal Form	7N/A
Centauroid	7N/A
Other Human/Animal hybrid	6N/A
Reptile	7+2
Armored animals*	8+3
Armorgraft	10+3
Metal Exoskeleton	10+4
Biomechanical (other)	9+3
Physical Perfection	N/A+1
Leatherboy/girl	7+2
Bones/skeletal	9+2
Hulking Monster	8+2
Stigmata	N/A+1
Wood	7+2
Crystal, stone, brick, or other hard substance	9+3

* Includes animal types with any sort of tough outer covering such as turtles, armadillos, and hard shelled insects like cockroaches, etc.

A simpler approach is to take a base number (use the chart above if you like) and add +1 for each different Nightbane characteristic. Let's say your Game Master sets the base number at 6. Your character has two animal characteristics, one Stigmata, and one Biomechanical trait, resulting in a total A.R. of 10. A third option is to set a base number and add the roll of 1D6. Of course, all this is optional based on what your G.M. will allow.

New Morphus Tables

Now the part you've been waiting for: new Morphus generation tables. The thought behind these, and indeed most of this article, is to explore your character's background, personality, and motivations. In some cases, this means granting him or her instinctive skills that apply only while in Morphus form. Some entries give the character a free Talent. This Talent is gained automatically at first level (ignoring any level restrictions), at no cost (doesn't require 'burning off' P.P.E. to acquire).

Dream Job/Childhood Fantasy

This table is made up of 'ideal' jobs, basically the answer to the question "What do you want to be when you grow up?" If you don't find your particular job here, don't take offense. These jobs are what I think the average 6 to 9 year old considers cool or interesting (at least when I was a kid). Let me put it another way: if you can make a Halloween costume out of that occupation, it belongs on this list, so feel free to add to it. Such a form might reflect childhood innocence, or the Nightbane's lament that they have not reached their goals or regret over a path not taken. ("I wish I'd studied harder to become a doctor" or "If

only my eyesight was better. I could have been a pilot” and so on.)



01-07% Astronaut: This trait is especially common among ‘Banes born between the post-war years up through about the mid 1980s. The Morplus is clothed in a spacesuit of some sort, either of realistic design or something from a science fiction movie. This gives them great resistance to extremes of heat, cold and radiation (all do only half damage). When the visor is down and sealed shut, the character is immune to gases and the vacuum of space. The oxygen supply lasts for six hours. Unsealing the suit for two hours or reverting to the Façade for an hour replenishes the supply. Add 3D6 S.D.C. and +1 to Horror Factor. Also, the character gains one skill from the areas of Mechanical, Medical, Science, or Technical at +15%. Note: This trait also counts as Biomechanical.

08-14% Cowboy: Still a favorite after generations, this trait can manifest in several ways: either the character is dressed to fit the role and/or he takes on animal attributes appropriate to the Old West, with horses being the most common, but buffalo, snakes, certain birds, and even scorpions being possibilities. Roll on the appropriate animal table. All cowboys gain the skills of Horsemanship +10%, W.P. revolver (+1 to strike), and +1 on initiative. The G.M. can also opt to include skills from other settings like Sharp Shooting, rope tricks, etc.

15-21% Police Officer: The Morplus may or may not be clothed in a uniform (intact or otherwise), but it does gain W.P. blunt (nightsticks), W.P. Pistol or Revolver (choose one), as well as +10% to the Find Contraband and Streetwise skills. He

also gains either the Darkbonds or Lightning Rider Talent (the Nightbane equivalents of handcuffs and tasers).

Police detectives (or private investigators) gain W.P. Pistol or Revolver (choose one), and +15% to the Interrogation skill, along with either the See Truth or Remove Façade Talent.

Both types of police can also temporarily boost their M.A. in order to command or intimidate. Each 3 P.P.E. spent adds +1 to their M.A. The effect lasts two minutes per level of experience.

Option: The player can also opt to roll on the Canine animal table for more features. Typical breeds that work with law enforcement are German Shepherds, Dobermans, and Bloodhounds, though you might decide on something different.

22-28% Firefighter: Arguably what most sets firefighters apart from the rest of us is their amazing courage, running toward danger while everyone else runs away from it. Add +2 to initiative, +4 vs Horror Factor, +2 to P.S. and P.E., and W.P. Axe. Takes only 1/4 damage from heat and fire and suffers only half the penalties when caught in a fire (such as being blinded by smoke, etc.). If dressed in firefighting gear, add 4D6 S.D.C. as well. Or select traits from the firefighter’s symbol, the Dalmatian.

29-35% Medical Professional: Doctors, dentists, and veterinarians all gain the appropriate medical skill at the M.D. level: 80%. Surgeons may find the fingers or nails of one hand replaced by scalpels or razors, while the opposite hand sports clamps or other tools. Likewise, dentists can have drill bits growing out of their fingers. They work, too, doing 2D6 plus punch damage. Such tool hands add +2 to Horror Factor. Veterinarians may choose to roll for an animal form, as well. Or select one Talent that best fits the character: Infectious Control, Sharing the Flesh, Lord/Lady of the Wind.

36-42% Musician: The Morplus gains either the Singing skill or a specific Play Musical Instrument skill (professional quality for either) at +15% and the Darksong Talent for free. Further Nightbane characteristics can turn the character into a one person band: a Morplus with multiple mouths can sing different parts of a song (lead and backup vocals, be a one-man barbershop quartet, etc.), while multiple limbs enable them to play more than one instrument simultaneously.

43-49% Actor or Entertainer: Add +2 to M.A. and roll once on the Physical Perfection table, *or* add +2 to M.A. and select either the Reshape Façade or Borrow Morplus Talent for free.

50-56% Pro Athlete: Roll on the Sports table below or select one that’s appropriate.

57-63% Soldier or Warrior: See example above for ideas. All soldiers, regardless of other features, also gain one Modern W.P. (or Ancient, if playing an ancient style warrior), a +2 bonus to strike with that W.P., +1 to strike, parry, and dodge, +2D6 S.D.C., and +5% to any Military skills they know.

64-70% Spy/Secret Agent Man: This Nightbane probably grew up during the spy movie heyday of the 60s and 70s. They gain the skills of prowl +10% and add 10% to any espionage skills they know, plus W.P. Knife or Pistol, +2 on initiative, +1 to disarm and automatic knockout/stun on the roll of a 17 or better. Amazing how they can knock anybody out in one punch, eh? The Morplus may also be wearing clothes to fit the part like a tuxedo or typical ‘G-Man’ attire: a dark suit and sunglasses.

71-77% Ninja: Who *didn't* want to be a ninja when they were a kid? These Nightbane have an instinctive ability to prowling at 80% +1% per level. Add +3 to Perception Rolls, +2 to strike, +2 to P.P. as well as W.P. sword and two other ancient W.P.s of choice. Ninja outfit is optional. Hmm, spies and ninjas... if only there were a game that combined those two.

78-84% Pirate: Another childhood fantasy that comes to life for some Nightbane. The character gains the skills of Swimming and Pilot: Sailboat, both at +15%, as well as W.P. Sword. Tolerance for alcohol is twice that of regular people. Lastly, roll on 1D4 of the following tables: Biomechanical, Unusual Facial Features, Animal (avian or sea animals only) and Alien Shape. Give the results a proper pirate spin like a hand that morphs into a hook, eye patches covering three out of six eyes, or parrot feathers replacing hair.

85-91% Comic Book Style Super Hero: Driven by a desire to help and protect innocents, these beings are powerful even compared to other Nightbane. Roll once on the Unearthly Beauty table and once on the Nightbane Characteristics table but *ignore* any calls for multiple rolls that result. Then add 2D6 to P.S. and P.E., +1D6 to M.A., +3D6 to Spd, +2 to initiative, +1 to Perception Rolls, +2 to strike, +10% to all Physical skills, +20 to P.P.E., +25 Hit Points and +2D6x10 S.D.C., plus give them one extra Talent for free. Skintight superhero costume optional. Sounds great, but there's a catch or two. The character needs 10% more Experience Points to advance each level. So while other Nightbane need 28,301 points to reach 6th level, you need 31,131 points. Plus, if your alignment falls to Selfish or Abberant (all suitable for anti-heroes), reduce all combat bonuses by 25%, and by 50% if the character becomes Miscreant or Diabolic!

92-98% Other: There are a lot of you and only one of me, so somebody's bound to come up with another great idea. Lumberjack, politician, jewel thief, plumber, the only limits are your imagination and the Game Master's permission. Or roll twice on this table, ignoring rolls of 92% or higher.

99-100% As above, but roll three times.

Hobbies

A Nightbane's preoccupation with something often translates directly into his or her Morphus. Cat lovers become cats, hunters develop gun limbs, etc. Here are a few more ideas involving common pastimes and how they relate to the character.

01-05% Sports: This guy plays touch football at family picnics or is on a hockey team. It's not their profession, just something they do for fun. Roll or select from the Sports/Athlete table.

06-10% Technology Freak: This Nightbane just has to have the latest gadget, phone, MP3 player or game system, preferably the day it comes out, or might be a computer whiz. Roll or select from any Biomechanical table, or give the character an appropriate Talent like Lightning Rider, or a 20% bonus to an appropriate skill (he is pretty good with computers, but in Morphus form, he's a super hacker!) or something else that feels right.

11-15% Car/Motorcycle Nut: This is the guy who's always in his garage tinkering with his prized classic vehicle. Roll or select from the Car/Motorcycle table, select an appropriate Biomechanical feature, or give the Morphus a skill or skill bo-

nus to Automotive Mechanics, Basic Electronics, or a piloting skill.

16-20% Animal Lover: Roll or select an attribute from an appropriate Animal Form table.

21-25% Activist: This person's powerful beliefs translate into his or her Morphus form. For instance, Nineteenth Century abolitionists would have been covered in several lengths of chain or have whip marks or other Stigmata to show their empathy with slaves. Protesters against genocide might have a Morphus riddled with bullet holes. If there is a particular animal they are trying to save, they take on features of that animal (roll on the appropriate table). Environmentalists can roll on the Plant Form Table or gain the Storm Maker Talent (Mother Nature's fury unleashed) for free. All activist Nightbane also add 3 to M.A. to represent their strong convictions.

26-30% Creative Type: This person enjoys some type of art or craft, from painting to sewing to sculpting. The Morphus gains the chosen skill(s) at 70% +2% per level, and may also take on attributes from the chosen field. A sculptor's Morphus may look like a statue carved from marble, for example. Or, at first and forth levels, choose one Talent and modify it per the Talent Shaper O.C.C. below.

31-35% Gardening: This particular Nightbane has a proverbial green thumb. Select one or more from the following: roll on the Plant Life table (Nightlands world book), select the Thorns or Bark-like Skin traits from the main RPG book, roll on the Insect table (the exact type of bug can be one that is beneficial to plants, like bees, or one that devours them, depending upon the character's outlook on life), or the Nightbane automatically has the Storm Maker Talent for free.

36-40% Collector: Collectors have a special fondness for something, from cards to action figures to movie posters, or whatever else you can imagine. Their love of these collectibles (or fear that the items may become lost or stolen) manifests itself in several ways. Some Nightbane end up wearing rows of their favorite trinkets such as a vest made of stamps or 'chain-mail' armor made from rare coins. Others might have their collectibles imbedded into their flesh in some terrible way. Sports fans might be covered in memorabilia like an autographed jersey or hat. In any event, the Nightbane will be quite knowledgeable about the value of such items (can guess the market price within 5%). Any of the above manifestations results in bonuses of +3D6 S.D.C. and +1 to Horror Factor (more odd than frightening in most cases).

Option: Instead of toys or comics, this character collects attributes from the Nightbane universe. In other words, *he* is the collection. Roll 1D4 plus 2. Take the result, and select that many *different* tables to roll on. Apply each result to a separate body part like the head, torso, or a limb. Then add another table (like Biomechanical, Stigmata, or Unnatural Limbs) to modify the whole mess. So you might end up with the body of a gorilla, a lobster-like left arm, a robotic right arm, a reptilian left leg, a bird-like right leg, and the head of an Elf! Then you could add wings or a tail or open wounds or who knows what to make a truly bizarre creation. Roll on the tables as normal, but apply the result to only that one area. So if you rolled for a full bird form, you get either one single wing in place of an arm, one single bird leg, a bird body, or a bird head. If you go with this option, add bonuses only to the *appropriate* areas (a robot arm adds to

P.S., not Spd, obviously). Add all bonuses including S.D.C., then divide by half, rounded down. Why? Because the bonuses listed usually assume a symmetrical form (two cat legs, for example), and you are probably employing only one. That's half, and hence, half the bonus.

41-45% Games: Many people worldwide have a passion for chess. Or maybe this character wants to win big at poker. In any case, the Morpheus takes on some aspect of the character's favorite game. They could resemble game pieces, like chess players gaining a horse head or other feature to make them look like a 'knight' or their clothes change into monastic robes to become a 'bishop' and so forth. Or their skin and hair may take on a black and white checker pattern.

Texas Hold 'em players might find themselves dressed like the joker or their skin imprinted with card images or an intricate pattern from the back of the card (the "Bicycle" logo, and so on). Or give them the No Face feature found under the Unusual Facial Features table for that truly unreadable 'poker face.'

Dice chuckers (like role-playing gamers) might have dice imprinted on their irises or even replacing their eyes! Another possibility is that a gun limb shoots dice instead of bullets (damage and all other stats unchanged). Also see the Fool's Luck Talent below. For any of the above, add +1 to any two saving throws or combat bonuses, 5% to any one skill, and +1D4 to Horror Factor, or bonuses as per another table where appropriate (such as the horse head in the above example).

46-50% Tinkerer or Enthusiast: This person is probably not a full-time architect, mechanic, or whatever, but they do dabble in their spare time. They might build a ham radio, train pigeons, or read medical journals simply for their own enjoyment. This enthusiasm grants extra skills available only to the Morpheus form. Select three from any of these categories with a 20% bonus: Communication, Electrical, Mechanical, Medical, Science, or Technical. These skills progress normally as the character goes up from one level to the next. Or, simply re-roll on this table to determine what the character dabbles in.

51-55% Woodworking/Carpentry: I know we always got the safety lecture the first day in shop class, though this person might not have been there. The Morpheus form is granted the Carpentry skill at +20%, and the player may opt to roll on the Stigmata or Biomechanical tables for other features that match this hobby (missing a finger or two, circular saws instead of hands, etc.).

56-60% Historian: The first option is the academic who is well read in a variety of disciplines and traveled abroad for a few years conducting research. More than just straight intelligence, these studies have granted insight. The Morpheus form is wiser and not easily fooled: add +2 to M.E., +2 vs Horror Factor, and +5 to save vs or see through any type of illusions. Also add 10% to any Lore skills or give the character one Lore skill +10%. Second option: Add +2 to I.Q. and as if by magic the Morpheus speaks and reads all languages at 80% +1% per level and knows all Lore skills at 50% plus 5% per level. Third option: Choose skills as per the Tinkerer above, plus the character has built-in versions of Speed Reading and Total Recall (works just like the psionic power but is automatic, requiring no I.S.P. or P.P.E.). Fourth option: Choose an animal form that you feel is appropriate, like an owl to signify wisdom or an elephant (as they say, an elephant never forgets).

61-65% Historical Re-enactor: Much like the Historian above, this person knows a great deal about some group or individual from the past. The Morpheus gains the skills and knowledge (and possibly the attire) of the archetype being copied. Examples: The bard at the local Renaissance Fair gains impressive singing and dancing abilities in Morpheus form, while a knight gains W.P. Sword or W.P. Lance and Horsemanship, etc. The clothing, and indeed the persons themselves, can be as beautiful or monstrous as the player desires. So a Colonial blacksmith might have a pristine outfit, or one that's ripped to shreds, while his body is perfectly human, utterly beautiful (the Unearthly Beauty table), or frightening (deformed, extra limbs, or an animal form).

Special consideration must be made for military re-enactors and their gun limbs (if any). These weapons will invariably match their role, with musket balls replacing modern bullets. See the Soldier description elsewhere for hints, most re-enactors gain +1 to Horror Factor and usually pick up an appropriate skill or W.P.

Armorgraft is another way to tailor a re-enactor type character. The armor will of course reflect their area/era of knowledge, from Greek Hoplites to gladiators to Medieval knights. (In **Rifts®**, the results could resemble common M.D.C. suits or human scale power armor, possibly even Skelebots.)

66-70% Occult Studies: This person was interested in the occult but might not have had the aptitude to perform magic, or he had a run-in with the supernatural or simply suspected that he was different. Imagine his (happy?) surprise upon learning that he is a Nightbane! Add a one time bonus of 20 P.P.E. to the character (available to the Façade and Morpheus alike) and the following: For the Nightbane Sorcerer O.C.C.: Add two additional spells to your starting knowledge and a 10 P.P.E. bonus. For the Nightbane Mystic: Add 1D6 spells plus a bonus of 10 P.P.E. These spells are gained at any new level after level one. Any or all of them could show up, so if you rolled a three, you can add all three at second level, or add just one and save the others for a later level. For other non-magic using Nightbane: Add one Lore skill at +20% or add 10% to any existing Lore skill, and the player can also select one additional Talent for free plus a one time bonus of 20 P.P.E.

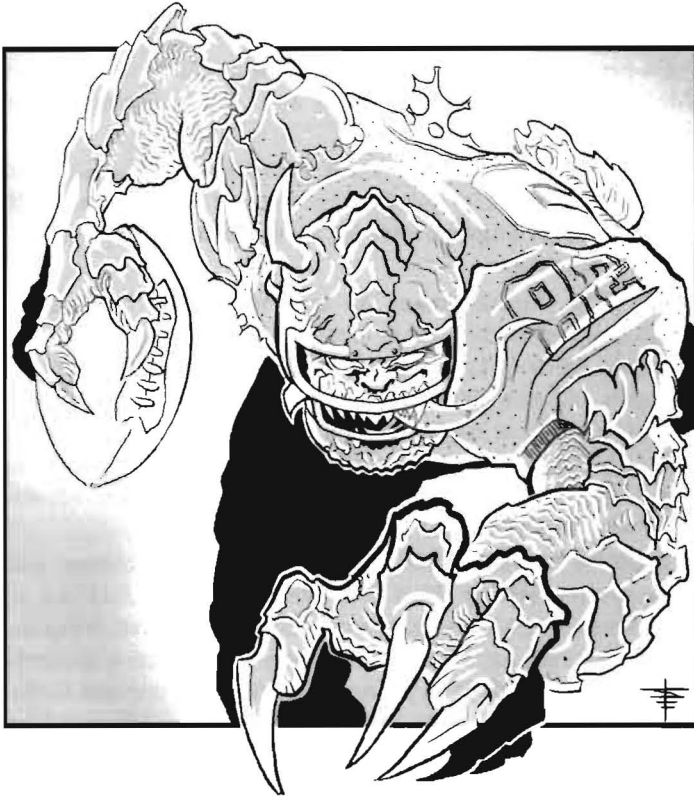
71-75% Taxidermy: This extreme version goes beyond just stuffing or preserving dead animals. The Nighbane becomes an expert on death and dismemberment, adding +10% to any skills that can scientifically determine the cause of someone's death. Also, the 'Bane automatically recognizes any form of the undead and can even sense their presence within 100 feet (30 m). The downside is that this guy will be a little creepy, even among other Nightbane: +1D6 to Horror Factor.

76-80% Body Modification: We're not talking a few tattoos or getting your tongue pierced. No, this is the over the top type of stuff you see on tabloid TV shows like people who undergo dozens of plastic surgeries to look like a certain celebrity or some other strange fixation. Roll 1D4 times on any Stigmata tables, and add another +2 to the total resulting Horror Factor because the end result is always that much more extreme and disgusting.

81-85% Addiction: Not a hobby per se, but it is something that takes up far too much of the character's time and money. Check under the Stigmata table in this article for options.

86-95% Dream Job: Roll on the Dream Jobs table or choose one.

96-100% Surely there's something I've overlooked. Create your own hobby and assign bonuses as you see fit or roll twice on this table, ignoring rolls of 96 to 100.



Sports/Athletics

This table is for those Nightbane who aspire to be an athlete of some sort. As with many other instinctive traits and abilities, the Nightbane will only have access to said bonuses or skills while in the Morphus form. If a skill is duplicated, the player and G.M. can decide what's most appropriate: Either roll again on this table or select a new characteristic, take the higher of the two percentages (the Facade knows prowl at 45%, but the Morphus has the skill at 70%, so you use the 70%), or in a *rare* case, Game Masters can allow the bonuses to stack (add them together).

A better alternative is to accentuate a different aspect of the sport. Let's use Boxing as an example. Ways to express the Morphus form's pugilistic prowess might be to have it dressed in boxing attire, or increase the range of the undeclared knockout (e.g. any natural roll or 18-20 scores a knockout), or the face and body is bruised and cut from past matches (see the Punching Bag listing under the Stigmata table below). Still another idea is to make the character even more resistant to punishment (add to P.E. and S.D.C. or make him *immune* to stunning/knockout blows, or add another +5 to roll with impact), or give the character an Armor Rating of 7+1D4, or add some other feature to make them fearsome fighters (Biomechanical fists or arms, spiked knuckles, etc.). See? All those ideas just from one little Morphus feature.

The player may also opt to make his character look like the mascot of his favorite team. These can be scary, comical, or any combination you like. Many teams are named after animals, so

just roll on the appropriate table. A San Francisco 49ers fan could be outfitted in miner's gear, and so on. Look elsewhere in this article for ideas related to occupations.

One final note: There's no possible way I could have included every sport or activity known to man, but this table should hopefully give you some ideas on how to adapt what you know about a sport. Remember to think beyond just the attribute bonuses. Someone into Curling might be able to run across ice/slick surfaces at full speed without fear of falling, or because it's more of a gentlemanly game, add to M.A. instead. Lacrosse players might develop their own unique *Armorgraft* or volleyball stars could have extraordinary leaping abilities. Pads and helmets can look like the real thing or can take on monstrous appearances. Be creative! Other gear like cleats would add 1D6 damage to kicks and stomp attacks.

01-05% Acrobat/Gymnast: Select any two: the Morphus knows the chosen skill at +10%, +2 P.P., automatic dodge, or adhesion (can walk on walls and ceilings, carrying himself as well as up to half his P.S. allowance in weight).

06-10% Boxer: Give the Morphus the Boxing skill, or add bonuses as you see fit (see the example above or the Punching Bag in the Stigmata table below).

11-15% Swimmer: The Morphus has the instinctive ability to Swim at 70% +2% per level, regardless of its shape, or add 15% to the Facade's swimming skill. Alternatively, the Morphus could have the ability to hold its breath for 1D4 melee rounds per point of P.E. and gains an automatic dodge in the water.

16-20% Dancer: The Morphus can move with grace and energy. Give him or her the Dance skill at +20%, or add +10% to the Facade's skill, and add +2 P.P., or give the character the Dervish Dance Talent for free.

21-25% Weight Lifter/Bodybuilder: The arms and/or legs of the Morphus become disproportionately large (at least twice as big), adding 10% more weight to the character, +1D4 to P.S., +2 to P.E., +4D6 S.D.C. and +2 to Horror Factor (considered a Stigmata, Unnatural Limb or Alien Shape), *or* the character is so proud of his muscles that he wants them seen *directly*, as in without any skin! Add 3D6 S.D.C. and 1D4 to Horror Factor (considered a Stigmata).

26-30% Race Car Driver: Roll on the Car/Motorcycle table or select one that seems right.

31-35% Runner: The character's specialty determines what bonuses apply. Sprinters add 1D4x10 to Spd and gain a quick strike ability like some animals. Once every ten minutes, the character can double his or her speed, adding two attacks per melee round, +4 to all combat rolls and granting an automatic dodge! The effect lasts just one minute, and the character is fatigued during the next five minutes (all combat bonuses are half) as he recharges himself. Marathoners add 1D4+3 to P.E. and 2D6 to S.D.C. They can run at their full speed for 20 minutes per point of P.E. before feeling fatigued. Cross Country runners gain 2D6 S.D.C. and +1D6 to P.E. as well as the Land Navigation skill at +15%.

36-40% Extreme Athlete: These are unconventional sports like ice wall climbing and bungee jumping. As such, they appeal to the fearless (or stupid): Add +2 on initiative, and +2 to save vs Horror Factor. Also choose one bonus that best describes the

character's chosen sport: +2 to P.S., P.E. or P.P., or +3D6 to Spd. The G.M. may decide that the player also knows a skill associated with that sport, like Parachuting if he's a BASE jumper. Also, because these guys tend to get hurt quite a bit, add 3D6 S.D.C. and roll at least once on the Stigmata table (cuts, bruises, broken bones and shards of glass are all extremely common).

41-45% Golfer: Golfers add 2 to their P.E. (long walks) and gain the unique ability to enter into a limited berserker rage state. By making an M.E. roll (same as the Becoming) they can fly into a fury that temporarily gives them 50 extra S.D.C., +4 to strike, +5 to damage, one additional attack per melee round, W.P. Blunt, and add +3 to their Horror Factor while enraged. The downside is that defensive rolls like dodges are performed with only half their bonuses, rounded down. The golfer's rage lasts for one melee round per every three P.E. points, but once it ends, he is fatigued (all combat bonuses are halved) for 1D6 minutes. Chasing that little white ball can be so frustrating.

46-51% Baseball Player: The Morphus may or may not be wearing a uniform, batting helmet (+2D6 S.D.C.) or catcher's pads (+4D6 S.D.C.). But he will enjoy bonuses of +1D6 S.D.C., +2D4 to Spd, and automatically gain W.P. Blunt (batter up!). Throwing distances are increased 50% and he's +1 to strike with thrown objects or weapons. Pitchers add another +2 to strike with thrown weapons and their throwing range is doubled.

52-57% Basketball Player: Slam dunks will be easier because the character's love of the sport stretches his body, adding three feet (.9 m) to his height. Add 2D6 S.D.C., +10 to Spd (long legs = big strides), plus increase throwing distance by 50%.

58-63% (American) Football Player: The Morphus is partially armored by pads and a helmet, adding +2 to roll with impact and 4D6 S.D.C. And *everybody* practices throwing, catching, and tackling at least a little bit. Add +1 to strike and +5 to damage from a tackle, and increase throwing distances by 25% (double all throwing distances and weight limits for quarterbacks).

64-69% Soccer Player: Add 1 to P.E., +2 to P.P., +8 to Spd, and all head butts and kick attacks inflict +2D6 damage.

70-75% Hockey Player: Add +2 to P.E., and the character gains W.P. Blunt and takes only half damage from cold. Pads and gear create a makeshift Armorgraft that adds 4D6 S.D.C.



and adds +3 to roll with impact. If the Morphus has skates, they add 2D6 to kick damage.

76-80% Cyclist: This Nightbane always dreamed of winning the Tour de France. Add +1 to M.E., +3 to P.E. and +2D6 S.D.C., plus the character can peddle a bike with amazing speed and agility. Gains automatic dodge while riding a bike and speed equals the Morphus' speed plus 20! Piloting skill is 80% +1% per level. Or, the upper body has been fused to a bicycle in Morphus form (same as Wheels and Treads Biomechanical trait).

81-85% Rugby Player: These guys are tough and just a little bit crazy. Add 2D4 to P.E., +1 to strike, 3D6 S.D.C. and rolling once on the Stigmata table for a 'permanent' injury wouldn't be a bad idea either.

86-91% Outdoorsman: As an avid camper, hiker, backpacker, or hunter, this person loves the great outdoors. He or she gains the skills of Land Navigation at 70%, Tracking (both humanoids and animals) at 60%, and Camouflage at 70%. Or the character's skin is imprinted with a camouflage pattern, helping him to blend in with his surroundings. Adds +1 to Horror Factor and +15% to Prowl when moving at half speed or lower (double if he remains motionless).

92-97% Martial Artist: The Morphus form is blessed with even greater fighting skills than other Nightbane. Add one attack per melee, +2 to strike, parry, and dodge, Paired Weapons, and the character gains automatic dodge and inflicts triple damage from Critical Strikes. Alternately, select any one non-Exclusive martial art form from *Ninjas and Superpies*, *Mystic China*, or *The Rifter*®. This form represents *only* the Morphus' fighting skills.

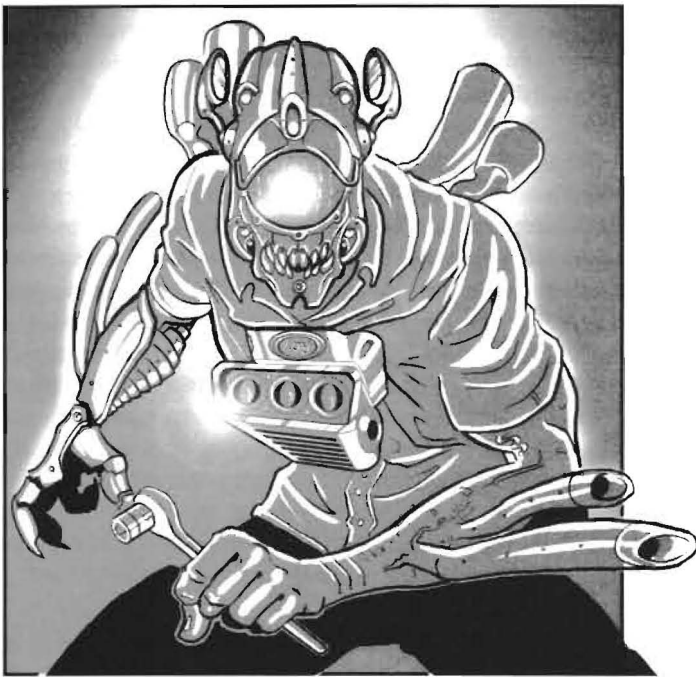
98-100% Choose another sport not mentioned here or roll twice on this table, ignoring rolls of 98% or higher.

Car and Motorcycle Table

Characters with a car or motorcycle inspired Morphus can be gearheads, car collectors, enthusiasts, or professional drivers (racers, stunt drivers, or even a criminal wheelman). Unless stated otherwise, these characters gain the skills of Automotive Mechanics at 50% and the appropriate piloting skill at 70%, or add 15% to those skills if they are known by the Facade. All traits marked with an asterisk (*) below also count as Biomechanical traits.

01-08% Driving Suit: The Morphus is dressed head to toe in some sort of official looking racing gear, including a full body suit with gloves and boots and a helmet with flip-up visor. Logos and patches cover most of the surface area of the suit. These can denote 'sponsors' (the Nightbane's faction?) or something random. The suits are fire resistant (fire does half damage) and slightly padded, adding +2 to roll with impact and 2D6 S.D.C. Motorcycle racers will have similar outfits except that they appear to be constructed out of leather and feature extra padding at the elbows and knees, adding +4 to roll with impact and 4D6 S.D.C. instead. Increase base piloting skill to 80% in either case.

09-16% *Dash Board: Somewhere on the Nightbane's body (usually the chest) is a set of gauges, readouts, or indicator lights. These can be digital like a jet fighter's heads-up display or old school analog gauges with dials. While these might ap-



pear to be little more than random flashing lights and numbers, look closer. Most of the systems serve some function for the Nightbane. A fuel gauge might measure how much P.P.E. the character has left. A check engine warning light means the character has sustained a great deal of physical damage (lost Hit Points!) A pressure or temperature gauge is usually a good indicator of the Nightbane's mood. When it's reading in the red, don't upset him! Use your imagination to explain what all the displays mean. Add 2 to Horror Factor and 2D6 S.D.C.

17-24% *Lights: Several powerful lights grow from the head or torso. Possible locations include the forehead or even replacing the eyes (add another +2 to Horror Factor), one big one at the center of the chest, or the shoulders. They are just as powerful as a typical car's headlights and the Nightbane can switch them on or off at will. Optionally, the Nightbane could sport flashing police or emergency vehicle lights. In that event, he'll also have a siren or loudspeaker built into his body capable of broadcasting sounds up to 100 decibels. Add 2 to Horror Factor. Also, by spending 10 P.P.E., the Nightbane can empower his light beams to dispel unnatural (magical) darkness, reveal Shadowbeasts, and turn zombies and the undead. The effect lasts one minute per 10 P.P.E. spent.

25-32% Crashed!: The Morphus carries the scars of at least one major crash. Roll for two random Stigmatas and give them an automotive flavor, like impaling the Nightbane with a sheared off piston, broken glass, or other debris.

33-40% *Mirrors: Growing out from the Nightbane's chest or shoulders are two side mirrors just like you'd find on any car or motorcycle. The player can select their exact size, shape, and style. They are living parts of the Nightbane, and while you can check your reflection, they cannot be used to Mirrorwalk or perform any Talents requiring a mirror. However, they do act as a set of eyes for the Nightbane, so they cannot be surprised from behind. The view is a bit distorted (objects may be closer than they appear) but still effective. Add 2 to Horror Factor, +2 to initiative, and +1 to Perception Rolls.

41-48% *Shields and/or Weapons: One or both arms can have a shield or weapon fashioned from scrap metal and spare parts. A car door and window fused to the forearm works just like a SWAT team riot shield and has 3D6+40 S.D.C. and adds 2D6 to damage when used as a blunt weapon. Bucklers made from hubcaps or motorcycle tires have 25 S.D.C. and add +4 to parry. A Biomechanical Weapon Hand/Limb (see RPG, page 105) will morph into something vehicular like a muffler (W.P. Blunt) or a crude weapon seemingly made from junkyard discards and scrap metal. Add 2 to Horror Factor.

49-56% *Armorcraft: Identical to the Biomechanical Trait from the RPG except that it manifests itself here in the form of vehicle parts. The Morphus wears a sort of patchwork armor made up of bits of cars or bikes: shoulder pads made from bits of tires, a helmet shaped like a motorcycle gas tank, and so on. Emblems and hood ornaments can be added for flair or arranged to look like military awards.

57-64% *Machine Man: A more extreme version of the entry above, this Morphus is clearly mechanical in nature. The Machine Man looks like a vehicle that has shifted its anatomy into a humanoid shape, much like a certain famous toy line. Sadly, the Nightbane cannot transform into a vehicle, but his mechanical body is extremely powerful and rugged. Add +4 to P.S., +4 to P.E., +5D6 to Spd, +1D6x10 to S.D.C. and +1D6 to Horror Factor.

65-72% *Engine: There is an automobile engine growing out of the Nightbane's chest! It can be a high tech or futuristic looking power plant, but most likely it looks to be a hunk of Detroit iron pulled right out of a vintage muscle car. Adds 2D4 to P.E. +1D4x10 to S.D.C., and +1D4x10 to Spd. Also add 1D4 to Horror Factor and the character fatigues at half the usual rate.

73-80% *Chrome Skin: The very skin of the Morphus seems to be made of either silver or mercury. Any hair will often be white or silver (possibly gold or copper) and may look more like fine wire than actual hair. The reflective nature of the skin means that the character takes only half damage from lasers and other light based attacks. This living hood ornament adds 3D6 S.D.C. and 1D4 to Horror Factor.

81-88% *Pit Crew or Mechanic: The Morphus has built-in features that make the Nightbane a master mechanic. The fingertips are replaced with different size/style screwdrivers or bits that spin to function like airguns. One or both arms contain hidden hydraulics that allow the limb to triple in length to reach inaccessible places. The character can 'lock' any joint into one position so that his very body can act as a temporary jack stand. Add +3 to P.S. and P.E., -2 to Horror Factor and increase the base Automotive Mechanics skill to 70% plus 2% per level.

89-96% *Fuel Tanker: This trait enables the character to store 20 gallons (75.7 liters) of fuel within his body. There is at least one port on the Nightbane's body, though some Nightbane with this trait just prefer to chug the gasoline. In addition to the obvious benefit of having a hidden stash of gas, the Nightbane can also spit fireballs fueled by his internal reserves! Each fiery blast burns off 1 gallon (3.785 liters) of gas and inflicts 1D6x10 damage with a range of 100 feet (305 m). Add +1 to Horror Factor, temporarily boosted by two when anyone sees him drink petrol, +1D4 when he breathes fire.

97-100% Other: Think of something else that could be related, like a car stereo, mudflaps, or a glove compartment and add it to your Nightbane. Or select a Biomechanical trait (like good old Wheels or Treads) and give it a vehicular twist, or roll twice on this table.



Military Hardware Biomechanical Table

Here's an optional replacement for existing Biomechanical tables. The theme here is military weapons and gear, suitable for soldier or militia types as well as military history buffs or anyone looking for more offensive punch in their Morphus. Land, sea, and air specialties are all represented along with traits that cover multiple services and some experimental weapons that *may* be standard issue some day.

01-05% Gun Limb – Military: Identical to the standard Biomechanical feature from the RPG, but with an extra +2 to strike and all P.P.E. costs are halved, so 1 P.P.E. affords *two* dice of damage and just 1 P.P.E. makes the weapon fully automatic. The gun will take typical military calibers such as 5.56 mm, 7.62 mm or .50 cal. Maximum damage available gets bumped up to 8D6.

06-10% Gun Limb – Sniper: Much like the standard Gun Limb, but with vastly improved range and accuracy. The Nightbane's eyes are equipped with telescopic vision equal to binoculars. The player may opt to make this feature obvious, like an optical implant attached to the Nightbane's eyes. The

gun limb has a range of one mile/1.6 km and enjoys a bonus of +4 to strike, but is not capable of firing bursts. The maximum damage available remains 6D6.

11-15% Tank Gun: A huge cannon (equal to three quarters of the 'Bane's height with a softball-sized bore) is built into the Nightbane's body. It can be mounted on an arm, shoulder, or on the back. Alternatively, there could be a wide but stubby barrel protruding from the chest or forehead! In any case, the damage is an impressive 1D6x10 and the weapon has an effective range of one mile/1.6 km. The gun is fixed (can be combined with turret, below), so the Nightbane will have to point the appropriate body part to aim the weapon. Unlike the standard gun limb, the Tank Gun has an internal payload that slowly regenerates over time. Twelve shells are ready to fire at a rate of up to three shots per melee round. The payload regenerates one shot per hour, or in the alternative, the Nightbane can fuel the gun with his own Hit Points and P.P.E. Each additional shot costs 5 Hit Points and 5 P.P.E. (both regenerate normally), rate of fire remains the same. +2 to Horror Factor.

16-20% Reactive Armor: Much like a modern tank, the Nightbane is tricked out with armored plates that explode outward to dissipate incoming warheads. In game terms, the Nightbane has an additional 200 S.D.C. *separate* from his normal S.D.C. (keep track of both). The reactive armor soaks up half of all damage from missiles and other types of explosive weapons. The Nightbane can still attempt to roll with the impact of an explosion to halve the damage again. Any attack beyond the 200 S.D.C. inflicts full damage to the Nightbane. The reactive armor heals at half the rate of the Nightbane, 5 S.D.C. per melee. +2 to Horror Factor.

21-25% Smoke Screen: The Nightbane is able to generate clouds of thick black smoke that obscures vision and clouds sensors (-10% to Read Sensor rolls). Standard rules for fighting blind apply. The smoke streams from vents, exhaust tubes, or the character's nose and mouth. The cloud is 25 feet (7.6 m) in diameter and remains in place for 5 minutes unless blown away by wind or other forces.

26-30% Future Soldier: The Nightbane is studded with sensors and optical enhancements, giving him an edge on the battlefield, much like the advanced warrior concepts currently in testing. The Nightbane gains +3 on all Perception Rolls, +2 on initiative and +5% to all computer and Military skills.

31-35% Walking Battleship: This Nightbane is an extremely tough customer. The character transforms into a brute, adding 25% to his height and weight along with +6 P.S., +8 P.E., +40 Hit Points and +2D6x10+50 S.D.C.! Optional A.R. of 15. The skin takes on a dull gray hue and is slightly cold to the touch. The character is not indestructible, though. Gases, psionics, magic, and plain old huge amounts of physical damage can still fell the titan. Add 1D6 to Horror Factor (perhaps more impressive than scary).

36-40% Battleship Cannon: Identical to the Tank Gun above, but damage is 2D6x10 to a ten foot (3 m) radius, payload is six shots, range is three miles (4.8 km). +2 to Horror Factor.

41-45% Lift System or Hovercraft: Much like the Wheels or Treads trait, the upper torso of the Nightbane is fused to a small hovercraft that resembles a hover car or cycle or the Navy's LCAC (Landing Craft Air Cushion). The Nightbane

skirts over the ground at a height of between one foot/0.3 m and 10 feet/3 m (the maximum altitude possible). Operating in small spaces or enclosed vehicles will be difficult, if not impossible. On the upside, the propulsion system is fairly quiet (+10% to Prowl if moving at half speed or slower), plus there's zero chance of setting off buried land mines and similar traps. The hover system allows travel at full speed across water or land, even over the roughest terrain. Add 1D6x10+20 to Spd, +4 to P.E., +1D4 to Horror Factor, and add 2D4x10 S.D.C.

46-50% Communications Suite: A series of implants, sensors, and tiny antennae or radar dishes make this Nightbane a walking, talking fount of electronic intelligence. The Morpheus is equipped to send and receive radio signals (and cell phone calls) along a wide range of frequencies out to a range of five miles (8 km). The Nightbane 'hears' transmissions directly in his mind, but outgoing messages must be spoken aloud. However, outgoing transmissions do have the added bonus of being scrambled and secure to prevent enemy eavesdropping. He can also jam other such transmissions within a 2000 foot (610 m) radius. The Nightbane can also speak and understand most languages at 75% proficiency. The skill drops by 10% to 25% for ancient, obscure, or alien languages.

51-55% Fire-and-Forget Smart Missiles: Racks of small (roughly the size of a pencil) missiles are built into the shoulders or chest of the Nightbane. Alternately, the racks could also be mounted on the wrists, head, back, or mounted in turrets (see below). Total payload is 12, damage per missile is 4D6 (no blast radius). The missiles have a range of 2000 feet (610 m) and can be fired singly or in volleys of any size from two up to the entire payload. Spent missiles regenerate one per hour until the total payload is restored. These missiles are intelligent hunter-seekers that twist and turn in flight to track their targets like something out of anime, +3 to strike plus any bonuses from the W.P. Heavy Weapons skill. Add +2 to Horror Factor. *Permanently* sacrificing 3 P.P.E. doubles the missiles' range, and another 3 P.P.E. adds another +2 to strike. The payload can be increased to a maximum of 20 by burning 1 P.P.E. per missile, while two P.P.E. adds fragmentation warheads with a 10 foot (3 m) blast radius.

56-60% Flight – Rockets or Jet Engines: Identical to the standard Biomechanical feature but this Nightbane is a bit faster and more graceful, adding +1 to initiative, +2 to strike and +3 to dodge in flight. Top speed is increased to 100 mph (160 km).

61-65% Flight – Winged: The Nightbane has airplane wings attached to their arms or shoulders/back. Arm wings might look like large shields to the uninitiated. To fly, they simply extend their arms and run, like a little kid pretending to be an airplane! Wings mounted on the shoulders or back can fold back out of the way, but are still stiff and impossible to conceal. They spring out into position to provide flight. Either type of wings have 3D6+50 S.D.C. (heals as normal) and provide a speed of 150 mph (240 km) and an altitude of 5000 feet (1524 m). VTOL and hovering are not possible. +2 to Horror Factor.

66-70% Flight – Rotors or Propellers: Helicopter style blades or propellers are attached to either the back or the top of the head. The head mounted variety will be comically small, like a propeller beanie. Back mounted blades will have a rotor diameter equal to roughly half the Nightbane's height, but they can be partially folded up/retracted into a Quasimodo-like me-

tallic hump. Either style provides full hover and VTOL capabilities along with a top speed of 100 mph (160 km) and a maximum altitude of 2000 feet (610 m). Rotor assemblies have a total S.D.C. of 40+2D6 (heals as normal). Add 1D4 to Horror Factor.

71-75% Heads-Up Display (HUD): The Nightbane's eyes feature tactical overlays that provide crucial combat information. Displays include speed (even if traveling in a vehicle), altitude, attitude (basically which way is up) and a compass, as well as targeting and threat assessment info. The Nightbane can mentally alter the layout of these displays to suit his own preferences or to prioritize valuable data. The targeting and early warning systems add +2 to initiative and all Perception Rolls, along with +1 to strike, parry, and dodge.

76-80% Stealth Skin: The Nightbane's skin looks normal from a distance, but feels rough or scaly. Viewing the skin under a microscope reveals its true nature: the skin is made up of tiny, jagged ceramic plates that trap thermal emissions and disperse radar signals, making the Nightbane very difficult to detect electronically, -35% to any Read Sensor rolls. Add +2 to initiative and +1 to Horror Factor.

81-85% Experimental Weapon – Laser: Energy weapons only started popping up on Nightbane during the last half century or so, perhaps inspired by the numerous science fiction movies that became popular starting in the 50s. A thin firing port or barrel unleashes a powerful energy beam inflicting 6D6 S.D.C. damage with an effective range of 2000 feet (610 m). The laser is powered by P.P.E., at a cost of two P.P.E. per shot. Rate of fire is equal to the number of hand-to-hand attacks available. The beam is supernatural in nature, and bypasses the A.R. of Hounds and other such beings, and burns vampires like sunlight, but at only half damage (3D6). The laser is +1 to strike and is completely silent. +1 to Horror Factor.

86-90% Experimental Weapon – Rail Gun: One or both arms have metallic bands or rows of rectangular plates linked by wires or power cables. The system is actually a powerful electromagnet that can hurl small metallic objects at incredible speeds. 'Ammunition' for the rail gun usually consists of tiny bits of metal like coins or paper clips. The Nightbane grabs a small handful, aims and fires. The magnets hum with power and launch the 'rounds' at supersonic speeds. The ultra high velocities generate tremendous amounts of kinetic energy, inflicting 1D4x10 damage, great for punching through armor, effectively lowering the Armor Rating of the target by 5. Range is 4000 feet (1219 m). +1D4 to Horror Factor.

91-95% Turrets: The Nightbane can rotate 360 degrees at the waist like a turret, with full control, so he can run one direction and face the opposite direction to engage the enemy. Adds +5% to Escape Artist rolls, +1 to parry, and +1 to Horror Factor. In addition, the Nightbane can opt to mount any body weapons like guns into miniature turrets. Most turrets have 360 degree rotation and a 90 degree arc of fire. Ball style turrets have 180 degrees of freedom in all directions. Turret weapons can function normally as living parts of the Nightbane or they can be set to automatic. In this mode, each weapon turret has three attacks per melee, but enjoys no bonuses to strike whatsoever.

96-99%: Roll twice on this table, ignoring any roll of 96% or higher.

100%: As above, but roll three times.

(Another) New Stigmata Table

Always a fan favorite, here are some more awful ways to deform your Nightbane. This particular table is meant to reflect a Nightbane's inner demons such as fears, addictions, guilt, suicidal tendencies, possible insanities, reckless behavior, or personality quirks.

01-07% Burns: This person either survived an inferno (the famous Burger-Face as detailed in *Nightlands*™, pages 79 and 80) or has an intense fear of fire. Damage could be isolated to an area or more severe in some places than in others (hands burned down to the bone, but only superficial burns on the face, etc.). The wounds can take the form of red, raw skin like a bad sunburn, missing patches of flesh and muscle, bubbled or boiled skin (like Burger-Face), or charcoal black scorched patches. Any of these add 1D4x10 S.D.C. and +1D4 to Horror Factor. Takes only half damage from fire.



08-14% Drowning Victim: Probably resulting from a water phobia, this person looks like he or she drowned and spent a week in the ocean before washing ashore. The skin will be blue-gray or pale, not to mention slick to the touch (adds +5% to Escape Artist rolls, +2 to roll with punch, and attackers are -2 to entangle this character). Small bits of debris like seaweed, fishing line or discarded trash may be stuck to the person and there's a good chance (65%) that he stinks like dead fish! Add 1D6 to Horror Factor.

15-21% Chalk Outline: This person feels marked for death. Whenever he sits or rests on a particular spot for more than ten minutes, a simple chalk outline forms on the ground around

him, as if traced by an invisible hand. The outline also covers beds, furniture, carpets and anything else the person touches. It is just chalk, and can be brushed off or washed away as needed, but a careless Nightbane could make it very easy for someone to track him. On the other hand, this little quirk can be used to deliberately throw someone off his trail or to leave messages (crude, humorous, or otherwise). Seeing the outline form has a base Horror Factor of 6, or temporarily adds 2 to the Nightbane's Horror Factor.

22-28% Suicidal: People with this kind of Stigmata might not necessarily have tried to kill themselves. It could just as easily symbolize hopelessness, recklessness or alienation. Some possibilities include rope marks and/or a noose around the person's neck, scars or cuts along the wrists (possibly still bleeding), or a gaping bullet (or laser) hole clear through the person's head! You can literally see daylight through the other end. All of these will be disturbing, though they don't seem painful to the afflicted Nightbane. Add 1D6 to Horror Factor and 3D6 S.D.C. Additionally, the Game Master may declare a temporary bonus or penalty to the character's M.A. attribute depending on the circumstance. Moments of empathizing with a person ("I know what you're going through. *Believe me...*") can add a bonus of up to +5. Likewise, risky plans ("Yeah we're outnumbered, but they'll never see it coming! Uh, guys?") or other situations might incur a penalty of up to -5.

29-35% Fatigue: This person looks like he hasn't had a decent night's sleep in a month. The skin will be a shade paler than it should, the eyes are bloodshot and there are deep circles under the eyes. This is just an illusion, as the person is completely alert and ready for action. In fact, he can go without sleep for 24 hours, plus one hour per every P.E. point without feeling the effects of fatigue. Add 2 to P.E. and 1 to Horror Factor.

36-42% Karma Tattoos: What makes these marks stand out from other tattoos is that they convey something personal about the Nightbane. This is usually some terrible secret or something that causes the person to feel tremendous guilt. Messages like "I cheated on my wife," or the words "Traitor" or "Coward" appear on the person's face, neck, arms, or chest. The tattoos can even show up on bone, metal, or leather, depending on the character's other traits. Characters of a good alignment might have tattoos of the faces of innocents that they failed to protect. These marks cannot be covered by makeup or by ripping the flesh off (it just heals back), but can be concealed by clothing or darkness. But odds are that someone will eventually discover them. These mystic reminders can serve to motivate the Nightbane to make amends or change their ways. If the Game Master allows (and if the player has tried really hard), every new level of experience, there is a chance that a mark will be erased or altered. For instance, bringing a murderer to justice might cause the tattooed face of his victim to vanish. This can be a great hook for deep character driven play. As long as the tattoos remain, they add 1D4 to Horror Factor.

43-49% Broken Bones: Were you clumsy as a kid? Fall down the stairs much? This character has 1D6 little "mementos" from past encounters. Some of these broken bones are obvious because the jagged end is sticking out. Others lie hidden away until he twists a limb the wrong way, pops something out of place, or otherwise reveals that he has what's essentially an ex-

tra joint. It's gross but makes for a great party trick or bar wager. +1D4 to Horror Factor (+2 when pulling stunts with the intent to impress or disgust), +2 to roll with impact, +5% on Escape Artist rolls, and +3D6 S.D.C.

50-56% Punching Bag: This person looks like he was on the receiving end of a nasty beating that lasted a week. The face has cuts and some missing skin, one or more eyes are partially swollen shut, there are bruises all over the face and/or body, and was that a tooth he just spat out? Add +2 to P.E., +3 to roll with punch, 4D6 S.D.C. and +2 to Horror Factor.

57-63% Crippled: The Morphus looks like it has some injury or defect. These may or may not be present on the Facade, as well. Despite appearances, the Nightbane is not hindered by these fake flaws, but is instead empowered by them. Add 1D4 to Horror Factor and select the nature of the disability or injury. Some ideas include: Blindness: The eyes are all cloudy white or gray, or are covered by a strip of cloth, or they're missing entirely! Nightvision range is increased to 1000 feet (305 m), and add +2 on any Perception Rolls involving sight. Empty sockets add an additional +2 to Horror Factor. Deafness: Missing or deformed ears add +1 on initiative and +2 on all hearing based Perception Rolls. Damaged Limb: One or both arms or legs have been broken, crushed, mangled, or otherwise deformed. Or they have partial casts or braces attached to compensate for being weak or sickly. Add 1D6 to P.E., +4D6 to S.D.C., and either +4 to P.S. or +4D6 to Spd (possibly both). Paralyzed: The Nightbane looks like he has been rebuilt after a spinal injury. The upper body could be fused to a wheelchair (same stats as the Wheels or Treads Biomechanical characteristic) or there could be wires and circuitry connecting the extremities to the head to restore brain signals to the body. On Rifts Earth, the result might look like a nightmarish Juicer harness. They can rebuild him, better, faster than he was... Add 3 to P.S. and P.E., +2 to P.P., +2D6 to Spd and +4D6 S.D.C. Or roll on the Biomechanical table to determine what limb or other body part was 'severed' and then 'replaced' with a machine equivalent.

64-70% Diseased: The Nightbane has an obvious sickness of some kind such as jaundice, golf ball-sized tumors, or leprosy (sheds lots of skin plus the occasional ear or finger, but the missing pieces are all restored upon returning to the Facade and every time he shifts into Morphus). Pick a suitable ailment. This familiarity with illness turns a negative into a positive however, as the character is +5 to save vs *all* diseases (magic or otherwise) and adds +5% to any skill involving diagnosing sicknesses. Also add 1D4 to Horror Factor.

71-77% Addicted: This Stigmata may indicate the character's drug of choice (track marks on a heroin fiend) or it may indicate an addictive personality. ("I've been playing this video game for 20 hours straight!") Players can use the Insanity table and the sections on Obsessions and addictions for inspiration. Some ideas include heightened speed or aggression from cocaine, PCP or even caffeine (+3 on initiative, +2 to strike), greater 'intuition' from mind altering substances (being in tune with 'the cosmos' adds +2 on all Perception Rolls), or there can be physical manifestations of the drugs like nosebleeds, very rapid speech, slurred speech, or hypodermic needles sticking into the person's body. Add 2 to Horror Factor.

78-84% Insane: The worst part of this Stigmata is that it could be completely random and affect a person who's perfectly

well adjusted. Again, check the Insanity tables for inspiration, or you can go with the classics: the person's eyes are WIDE open like he's keyed up or high, bloodshot eyes, foaming at the mouth, facial ticks or twitching, uncontrollable laughter or sudden screaming fits, or the person is wearing the torn remains of a straightjacket. Add 1D4 to Horror Factor. Other possibilities: The Morphus has multiple heads (1D6) that always argue or seem to have their own personalities (multiple personality disorder?). You can choose or roll to figure out what each head looks like (normal human, an animal or mechanical head, misshapen, etc.). Add 1D6 to Horror Factor. Or, give the character the Splittin' Image Talent, but give it a sinister twist, like the two halves hate each other or have a Jekyll and Hyde relationship, etc.

85-91% Surgery Goof: The result of one too many facelifts causes the Nightbane's face or body to be misshapen or mutilated in some way. Large extra flaps of skin could be pulled tight and stapled up out of the way, there could be big chunks of missing skin, muscle or bone, stitches that don't fully close wounds, or some other surgical calamity. Add 1D4+1 to Horror Factor and 3D6 S.D.C.

92-98% Roll twice on this table, ignoring rolls or 92% or higher, or roll on any other Stigmata table.

99-100% As above, but roll three times.

New Talents

Many players forget that Talents are a great way to flesh out your Nightbane. Not just what Talents are selected, but how they manifest themselves. Does your character's Darkwhip look like a shadowy pair of nunchuks, a length of chain, or a bolt of lightning? Customize!

Now, take a moment to decide what your Talents say about you. Protectors will often choose defensive powers like Anti-Arcane or healing abilities like Sharing the Flesh. Fighters favor Darkwhip, Shadow Blast and the like, while a shy or secretive person might look into hiding using The Shroud or Nightbringer or using Soul Shield to ward off interrogators. Inquisitive people like scientists or detectives will gravitate toward abilities that provide insight or uncover the truth like See Truth, Mirror Sight, and Premonition. Manipulative people could opt for Infectious Control or Deus Ex Machina, and so on.

Optional Rule: To me, powers that surround the character in darkness such as Nightbringer, Coldfire (see below) or Shadow Shield also bestow the rough equivalent of Shadow Meld at the same time. It just seems to me that the effects would be almost the same, but it is up to your Game Master to allow that bonus in your campaign. Remember, unless stated otherwise, Talents have a duration of one minute per level of experience when activated, and almost all require line of sight to target an opponent.

Black Hole

This Talent functions much like the old 'portable hole' joke from the cartoons, allowing the Nightbane to reach through solid objects like doors and walls. At first level, the Nightbane can create a small dark spot or shadow roughly the size of a soccer ball. Then as if by magic, he can pass his hand and arm through the area of darkness and out the other side. Only the

Nightbane activating this power can reach through; to anyone else, the wall or object will remain solid. Some mystical force holds liquids and objects in place when they should just pour out, thus the Nightbane must *will* any object to be pulled out. So casting Black Hole on a fish tank won't cause a small flood, but the Nightbane *can* reach in and pluck the fish out if he chooses.

With a little imagination, the uses for this talent are endless. Cast Black Hole on a door, then reach through and unlock it. Cast it on the hood of a car and you can pull out the wiring to disable the engine. Can't crack a safe? No need! Just Black Hole it and reach in to pull out the loot. And it works both ways. The Nightbane can open a Black Hole to toss something through a wall to the other side. This is great for planting evidence (that safe is still locked, remember?) or chucking grenades at enemies behind cover, etc., leaving no trace behind.

Starting at 5th level, the Nightbane can enlarge the opening enough so that his or her whole body can pass through (roughly about 10 feet/3 m in diameter). The Black Hole functions as a two-way door for its creator until the duration expires. Fantastic for surprise attacks.

Limitations: Usable by the Morphus only.

Cost: 10 P.P.E. to acquire permanently, then 5 to create small holes, 15 for holes large enough to accommodate the Nightbane's body.

Coldfire

Activating the Coldfire Talent engulfs the Nightbane in an aura of flickering fire made from shadow. Coldfire has several benefits. As the name implies, the aura is freezing cold to the touch, causing anyone who contacts it to suffer 2D6 damage. Used offensively, the Nightbane can add that 2D6 damage to his punches or kicks, or add 4D6 from wrestling or grappling attacks.

Additionally, the intense cold masks the Nightbane from thermal sensors and optics. Operators using such devices will incur a -70% skill penalty when trying to detect the Nightbane. Finally, the aura offers an extra 50 S.D.C. worth of protection, reducing damage from darkness based attacks (Darkwhip, Shadow Blast, etc.) by 25%, but the aura suffers double damage from light based attacks such as lasers or the powers of Guardians.

Limitations: Usable by the Morphus only.

Cost: 8 P.P.E. to acquire permanently, 4 to activate.

Feral (Elite Talent)

Characters who use the Feral Talent openly embrace their animalistic nature. Feral heightens the senses, adding +4 to Perception Rolls and +10% to any instinctive skills. The character also gains uncanny tracking abilities equal to a base skill of 50%, +10% to hunt others of their own kind (a snakelike Nightbane hunting other snakes, etc.). Add 10% to the tracking skill when dealing with supernatural or magical beings and another 10% when following the scent of blood.

Feral characters have keen senses for survival, equal to Land Navigation at 50%, Identify Plants and Fruits at 40% (+20% for herbivores), and Wilderness Survival at 60% (locating fresh water, avoiding avalanches, etc.). They can also predict upheavals

in local weather patterns, anticipating storms and their severity at 65% proficiency. They also heal slightly faster while using Feral: 1D6+10 S.D.C. per melee.

These benefits come at a price. Characters under the sway of Feral are very in tune with their inner animal, suppressing their human skills and sentiments. They may speak in growls or otherwise have a distorted voice, making them difficult to understand. Operating mostly on instinct, they will eschew any modern devices and weapons, lashing out with their bare hands/claws/talons/fangs when needed.

Feral can erase the line between man and beast to the point where the character cannot control his impulses. When provoked, the character must make a save vs Insanity or else succumb temporarily to his animal instincts. This could mean that a Nightbane molded after a predatory animal will chase off after prey or savagely attack a 'competitor' invading his territory. A deer or horse-like Nightbane might turn and flee instead of choosing to fight, and so on. The result is often all or nothing, such as attacking without any thought of defense (never tries to dodge) or running away at top speed, ignoring calls for help, injuries, or any type of danger. The character can try to regain control by making another roll vs Insanity once per minute/four melees. The character returns to normal when the time elapses or when he dispels the Talent.

Prerequisite: At least one Animal attribute.

Duration: 30 minutes.

Limitations: Usable by the Morphus only, not available until third level.

Cost: 10 P.P.E. to permanently acquire, 12 to activate.

Flightbane

This Talent may have been created by a Nightbane who was jealous of his winged brethren. Quite simply, it enables the character to fly, taking the fight right to Hunters and other airborne threats. Maximum altitude is 2000 feet (610 m), max speed is 75 mph (120 km), plus 10 mph (16 km) per level.

If the player so chooses, he or she can customize just how the Flightbane Talent manifests itself. Some Nightbane grow wings made of shadow or black energy similar to the Darkwhip Talent. Others are seemingly propelled by streams or 'jet exhaust' of that same energy, leaving contrails as they pass. Still others fly with no visible means of propulsion. Again, these are simply options to allow the player to further tweak his character.

Duration: 10 minutes, plus five minutes per level.

Limitations: Usable by the Morphus only.

Cost: 10 P.P.E. to permanently acquire, 7 to activate.

Food For Thought

Dead men *do* tell tales – Food For Thought enables the Nightbane to glean some scrap of information by eating a few bites of a corpse! Though this power is frowned upon by many elder Nightbane and even some demons and monsters because it smacks of Necromancy, it is hard to argue with results.

To use Food For Thought, the Nightbane must have some specific piece of information in mind, such as the password to a computer, the location of a hostage, or the identity of a killer. The Nightbane must then take 1D4 sizeable bites (just one if

they possess any animal characteristics, aren't you lucky) *and* swallow it all, even if it doesn't stay down for long. Assuming that the subject actually knows the desired information, the Nightbane will learn what his 'meal' knew, and he will retain that knowledge permanently. Food For Thought works on mortals such as humans as well as supernatural beings.

Game Notes: I didn't want to codify the use of Food For Thought, but just to prevent any arguments, here's the intent: To gain any *single* bit of intel, like ONE bank account number, ONE address, etc. So Player #1 can't say "I'm going to find out EVERY undercover agent working for this guy" or "I want to find out ALL of his safehouses/hiding places." If the player wants to know an additional bit of info, he must activate Food For Thought again and take another taste.

Likewise, skills are not absorbed via Food For Thought, so you can't munch on a bomb maker and suddenly become his equal, but you *can* learn the deactivation code or which wire to cut for one, specific instance.

One last thing: Can Food For Thought be used on the living? Should it? Yes, and probably no, respectively. That's best left up to the G.M., and players should consider their character's alignment, as such a use would be gruesome and cruel, equal to torture. Still, it might be necessary in some circumstances. Ooooh, a moral dilemma! The heart of good role-playing!

Limitations: Usable by the Morphus only.

Cost: 12 P.P.E. to permanently acquire, 8 to activate.

Fool's Luck

Fool's Luck subtly alters the laws of probability. The Nightbane wins more hands of poker and dodges attacks with greater ease and finesse. But one can only cheat Lady Luck for so long, and eventually good luck turns bad. Guns jam at a critical moment or an enemy gets in a lucky hit.

Fool's Luck is also known as "the Rookie's Talent," because many neophyte Nightbane develop this Talent. It gives them an edge that shortsighted youths think will last forever. Elder, wiser Nightbane view Fool's Luck as a dangerous crutch because it can backfire with tragic results. As such, they counsel those with this Talent to avoid using it, especially in dire circumstances. Yes, if it has a positive influence, the result can save lives. But if you're unlucky, you may not live to learn from your mistake.

In game terms: When activating this Talent, the player can declare how he intends to use it. Fool's Luck can be used to add +25% to any skill roll ("Honest, I don't know how I was able to hack that computer, I'm usually not this good.") or +6 to any Perception Roll ("How did you find this secret door?") or +4 to any saving throw.

Once per combat session (whether it lasts one melee round or two hours), the player may do any one of the following:

- Declare an automatic hit (meaning that an opponent must roll a natural 20 to dodge or parry the attack).
- Declare that a successful strike inflicts critical (double) damage (before any damage rolls are made).
- Ignore a critical hit against him (takes normal damage instead of double damage).

- Declare that his character gains automatic dodge (still needs to roll) for 1 minute/4 melees.
- Some other benefit that the player and G.M. agree on.

Fool's Luck is a ticking time bomb, however. The player and G.M. may have to have a little conference about the possible consequences of using this Talent. A good rule of thumb is that every five non-combat uses or three combat uses warrants a backlash. These include the above bonuses turning into penalties, usually at some vital moment like defusing explosives or performing CPR.

Other small nuisances can crop up, such as a permanent -10% penalty on a skill that is frequently boosted by Fool's Luck, other Talents requiring 10% more P.P.E. to use, or frequently losing some important item like car keys or a computer disk. The G.M. may consider having the player roll for a random insanity every three levels as well, with phobias and paranoia being the most common.

The player character may begin to feel like bad luck is following him. Perhaps everyone in his apartment building contracts the same, mysterious illness. Coincidence? Or is it fate balancing out the player's good luck with loads of bad luck for others? This can be a great opportunity for deep role-playing.

The only cure is to abstain from using Fool's Luck for an extended period of time. If the player character does not use Fool's Luck for six months (in game time) or one full level of experience, the negative effects will begin to subside and Fate will 're-set' itself.

Limitations: Usable by the Morphus only. **Special:** Only characters who have NOT reached fourth level can acquire this Talent.

Cost: 5 P.P.E. to permanently acquire, 3 to activate. The low cost is part of what makes this Talent so appealing.

Groundshaker

As the name suggests, Groundshaker creates targeted, localized earthquakes. Tremors measuring 3.5 on the Richter scale rock a radius of 300 feet (91.4 m) plus 50 feet (15.24 m) per level. Those within the radius lose two attacks per melee, are -3 on all combat rolls, and -25% on all skills. There is also a 45% chance per melee of losing one's balance. Falls result in loss of initiative and another attack. The only sure way to avoid these hazards is to fly away.

Incredibly, the Nightbane can choose who is affected by the quake, targeting only enemies while leaving his friends untouched. The most amazing part of this Talent is that despite the violence of the mini-quake, no buildings or vehicles are damaged.

Limitations: Useable by the Morphus only.

Cost: 15 P.P.E. to permanently acquire, 15 to activate.

Hush

Hush is a very useful Talent for covert operations. It surrounds the Nightbane in a 20 foot (6.1 m) bubble of total silence that follows him wherever he goes. No sound can escape the bubble, so the Nightbane can easily slip past patrols or eliminate guards without raising an alarm. The problem is that the silence works both ways, as no sound can enter the bubble, thus careless

Nightbane can fall victim to their own power and be taken by surprise. Still, well trained fighters can use Hush to their advantage safely, using lights, gestures, touch, and other signals to communicate. Used in conjunction with the more P.P.E. expensive Shroud (switching from one to another as needed), a Nightbane can infiltrate almost any place.

The bubble starts out at 20 feet (6.1 m) in diameter, but increases by 2 feet (.6 m) per level.

Game Notes: Hush *will* silence the report of any weapon fired within the bubble, but once the projectile/blast/missile leaves the area, it can be heard by anyone within earshot. Same goes for thrown objects. If the impact zone is outside the bubble, it will be audible. On the other hand, if your vehicle can fit within the bubble, you can also drive/ride/fly in total silence. Wonderful for tailing someone.

Limitations: Usable by the Morphus only.

Cost: 10 P.P.E. to permanently acquire, 7 to activate for the first minute, but costs only 2 P.P.E. per minute thereafter to maintain.

Lay Bare the Soul (Elite Talent)

It's difficult to make a good first impression, especially if you are a hulking, misshapen horror. But beauty can be skin deep, and a terrifying exterior can conceal a kind heart. Lay Bare the Soul works much like the See Truth Talent in reverse. The Nightbane activating this Talent will reveal his true nature, radiating his alignment and intentions, much like the psionic power of Empathic Transmission.

Everyone within a 20 foot (6.1 m) radius is unaffected by the Nightbane's Horror Factor for the duration of the Talent. The Nightbane's M.A. is temporarily boosted by +8 (or a minimum M.A. 20, whichever is higher). Every word and gesture of the Nightbane exudes honesty and trustworthiness. In fact, it is nearly impossible for the Nightbane to lie or mislead someone when Lay Bare the Soul is active. Such a deception requires the Nightbane to save vs insanity at -3.

So why would anyone willingly open up like this? So that other people can look past their exteriors and truly connect to the Nightbane. Good Nightbane who want to help can convey that message clearly despite their monstrous appearance. Likewise, villainous Nightbane broadcast their evil. Threats carry much more weight because everyone in the affected radius *knows* that he's not bluffing.

Prerequisite: Minimum Horror Factor of 13.

Limitations: Usable by the Morphus only. Not available until third level.

Cost: 7 P.P.E. to permanently acquire, 4 to activate.

Misery Loves Company

This Talent temporarily bestows one of the Nightbane's flaws or injuries upon another. If the Nightbane's target fails to save vs magic, one of the following is transferred to that target: Either *one* of the Nightbane's insanities, or the Nightbane can transfer any wounds he has sustained within the last five minutes.

Targets afflicted with insanities will have to roll to save vs insanity but with a -2 penalty. Obviously some insanities can

provide a unique opportunity or tactical advantage (see example below).

Any and all damage suffered during the last five minutes/20 melees can be transferred to any one opponent. The advantage is twofold: The Nightbane is temporarily healed of the damage, and his enemy is harmed. Some Nightbane prefer using Misery Loves Company as an ambush tactic, soaking up tremendous amounts of punishment, then turning the tables on their attacker and transferring the wounds over to them. Dangerous to be sure, but also lethally effective.

The shock and pain of the sudden injuries are equal to a Horror Factor of 15 for humans and other frail mortal foes, 10 for Nightbane and other supernatural creatures. Reduce combat bonuses and skill performance by half. The damage is considered magical or supernatural, and bypasses all armor or shielding (like telekinetic force fields or Armor of Ithan spells). If the damage transferred exceeds the S.D.C. and Hit Points of the target, they are instead reduced to just 1 Hit Point and they collapse into a coma. Normal coma rules apply, but they are -10% to recover. If the damage is more than double the person's available S.D.C. and Hit Points, they are instantly killed instead!

Only one enemy can be targeted per insanity or injury. In other words, if the Nightbane has three insanities, he can transfer one insanity per activation of the Talent, targeting up to three different enemies or just one. Likewise, only one amount of damage can be transferred to one target. Any 'new' damage incurred by the Nightbane can then also be transferred. At the end of the Talent's duration, the insanities and damage return to the Nightbane, who heals as normal. The physical damage inflicted to the target is instantly healed.

Examples: A Nightbane with an intense fear of heights activates Misery Loves Company and targets a Hunter flying overhead. The Hunter fails to save versus magic, and for the duration of the Talent, the Hunter suffers acute acrophobia. Unable to fly for fear of falling or spiraling out of control, the Hunter has no choice but to land, preferably on the ground, as rooftops are just too high up. Of course, now the Hunter is much more vulnerable. **Example #2:** A Preevert thug drills a Nightbane with a short burst of submachine-gun fire, inflicting 18 points of damage to the Nightbane. The Nightbane smiles as he gets his revenge by casting Misery Loves Company on the Preevert. Small wounds roughly the size of bullet holes magically open up on the thug. His eyes open wide in pain and horror as blood pumps out. But when the duration elapses or the Nightbane cancels the Talent, the wounds close and all the pain disappears, though the shock and fear caused by the attack will likely send the thug running.

Limitations: Usable by the Morphus only. Not available until fifth level.

Cost: 12 P.P.E. to permanently acquire, 15 to activate.

Pit of Darkness

This power opens a hole to a small pocket dimension. Each Nightbane creates his or her own temporary pocket, and no two Pits of Darkness are ever connected in any way. Being trapped inside the pocket dimension is a bit like experiencing sensory deprivation. The individual is surrounded by darkness. Time seems to pass slowly. There are no exterior sights or sounds. All the person can hear is his own voice, and even this sounds faint,

distorted, or distant. Escaping from this pocket is possible if the character possesses the Doorway Talent or some form of dimensional teleportation. However, such powers cannot be attempted for the first melee round within the pocket due to disorientation.

Despite the nasty sound of its name, Pit of Darkness has benevolent uses. True, you can temporarily capture a foe using the Pit, but you can also fling yourself into it in order to catch a breath, reload weapons or heal. The Pit can also be used to remove innocent bystanders from a dangerous situation.

At first level, only one being can be placed into the Pit. At third level, the Nightbane can cast the Pit over an area of ten feet (3 m), plus ten feet per every three levels of experience thereafter. This enables several people to be placed into one Pit at a time. Only people and the things they are carrying can be placed into a Pit, so no cars or houses or portions thereof ever get whisked away. When the time limit is up (or the Nightbane cancels the power), anyone inside the Pit pops back into the world right where they left it.

Notes: Beings who are able to see/sense dimensional pockets and similar anomalies will be able to detect a Pit of Darkness from the 'outside' world. They can use any teleportation or Rifting spells to remove people from the Pit. Likewise, those within the Pit can escape using those same types of magic. However, only the Nightbane who created the Pit can put anything *into* it.

Duration: Two minutes per level of experience.

Limitations: Usable by the Morphus only.

Cost: 10 P.P.E. to permanently acquire, 7 to activate.

Righteousness (Elite Talent)

Nightbane who possess this Talent tread the path of angels. Only the purest souls confident in their convictions can master Righteousness. Those few who do become powerful weapons against the forces of darkness.

Righteousness projects an aura of cleansing energy that is beautiful to behold, unless you're evil. To the Nightlords, their minions, vampires, and other foul beings, Righteousness burns like acid with a dash of fingernails on a chalkboard. It is utterly revolting to them. Even humans of an evil alignment will scurry away in terror.

In Game Terms: Righteousness instills several holy powers upon the Nightbane. Once per melee, he can heal another by touch, restoring 2D6 S.D.C. and 1D6 Hit Points. All those of a good alignment within a 50 foot (15.2 m) radius will feel invigorated and confident, granting +1 to save vs magic and psionics, +4 to save vs possession and mind control and +2 to save vs Horror Factor. They are also immune to that Nightbane's Horror Factor.

Conversely, Righteousness has a Horror Factor of 14 to supernatural evil beings (16 to evil ordinary humans, but only 10 to Nightlords), and all saves vs Horror Factor are done without benefit of any bonuses. Righteousness also adds an additional 3D6 points of damage to physical attacks against supernatural evil.

Selfish alignments caught within the radius enjoy no bonuses nor suffer any penalties except for a sense of uncertainty, as if

the universe is calling on them to stop sitting on the fence and choose a side.

Prerequisite: Available to Principled or Scrupulous alignments ONLY! Only a pure, determined soul can hope to wield the power of Righteousness. The player must be ever vigilant to always walk down the straight and narrow path.

Limitations: Usable by the Morphus only. Not available until fifth level.

Cost: 12 P.P.E. to permanently acquire, 6 to activate.

Shadowboxer

Much like a reflection in a mirror, a person's shadow is entwined with their soul, often revealing their thoughts and fears. The Shadowboxer Talent takes advantage of this mystical link. It acts like a curse or enchantment, making the target's shadow a physical extension of himself. The result: attacks against the shadow inflict damage directly to the target! The Nightbane punches the enemy's shadow, but it is the foe who feels the impact.

Natural or artificial light will do, and depending upon conditions, that shadow can become a huge bull's-eye. The downside is that the target takes only half damage (rounded down) from attacks against his shadow. So 25 points of damage against the shadow translates into just 12 points actually inflicted against the enemy. The only other catch is that the damage must be dealt out with the Nightbane's own hands. So no tossing grenades at the shadow or hosing it down with automatic gunfire.

Limitations: Usable by the Morphus only. Not available until third level.

Cost: 10 P.P.E. to permanently acquire, 5 to activate.

Skin of Thy Enemy

This gruesome but effective Talent lets a Nightbane disguise himself as a recently slain foe. The body of any intelligent (non-animal) creature will do. The Talent is activated, and the Nightbane steps into the corpse and pulls it around himself like a fleshy jumpsuit! The process is stomach churning to watch (optional Horror Factor of 14), as the Nightbane's body is often contorted or (seemingly) squished to fit inside the dead body, especially when the Nightbane is much larger than the body he's wearing.

After about a melee round of horrible sights and sounds, the Nightbane is encased entirely inside the dead body, which is magically made to look completely alive and healthy. This disgusting disguise will also fool those with the ability to read auras or see through illusions, though their readings may be slightly off. Any unique physical properties of the body such as special vision, wings or gills are available to the Nightbane, but no skills, memories, magic, energy blasts, etc. The voice, if any, remains unchanged. The Nightbane still retains all his own senses and powers, including Supernatural Strength.

When the duration lapses, or the Nightbane chooses to cancel the power, the dead body melts away, falls off in lumps, or is torn apart as the Nightbane rips his way free.

Resistance cells have found that the best way to take advantage of this power is to first capture a subject, restrain it, then behead it (double damage direct to Hit Points)! It sounds heart-

less, but this is war, after all, and no one will cry over a slain Hound or other monster.

Duration: Human bodies up to a day old can be used as a disguise, lasting 30 minutes, plus 10 minutes per level. Skin of Thy Enemy must be used on *supernatural beings* within five minutes of their death. Duration is only 20 minutes plus 5 minutes per level when used on such creatures. Don't forget, many creatures, such as Nightbane in Morphus form, dissolve into nothingness when they perish.

Limitations: Usable by the Morphus only. Not available until third level.

Cost: 15 P.P.E. to permanently acquire, 5 to activate when using a human or other mortal as a disguise, 20 when used on a supernatural being.



The Nightbane Talent Shaper O.C.C.

When I first picked up the **Nightbane® RPG**, I was blown away by the creativity on every page. The setting was new and interesting, and rolling up a new gruesome Nightbane was fun. One of the things that really caught my attention were the Tal-

ents. Totally new and unique powers that no other creatures in the entire Palladium Megaverse possessed! *Until* the next few sourcebooks rolled out. Pretty soon, even *humans* (Warlocks) had access to the Talents that should have rightfully been exclusive to the Nightbane. But now, a new, emerging group of gifted Nightbane are renewing that relationship. They are the Talent Shapers.

All Nightbane have an instinctive understanding of their Talents. The strength of these powers increase as the Nightbane grows with age and experience. However, there is also a component of will involved, as a Nightbane can choose to sacrifice a portion of his or her Potential Energy to gain new abilities. Not so with the Talent Shaper. They gain a wide range of Talents for free as they progress in level. But their true strength lies with their ability to mold and bend Talents to their will. They can tweak a Talent so that it costs fewer P.P.E. to activate, or they can increase the duration of a Talent once it's activated. Such mastery puts them on a whole separate plane from other creatures, even their fellow Nightbane.

To create your Nightbane Talent Shaper, simply roll up a character as normal. Design the Morphus as usual; P.P.E. and all bonuses remain the same, etc. Then select any skill package, including the Nightbane Mystic or Sorcerer. These skill sets would indicate either a more spiritual Nightbane or one with an interest in the occult, respectively. However, no matter what package is selected, the Talent Shaper is limited to only *two* Secondary Skills at level one, and one new Secondary Skill at levels 3, 9, and 12. This is because most of their time and effort has been spent honing their Talents (see below).

Gaining New Talents and the Art of Talent Shaping

The real difference between the Talent Shaper and other Nightbane comes when selecting Talents. The Talent Shaper starts with one Talent as normal at first level. At second level, select *two* new Talents with all the normal restrictions (e.g. no Talents that aren't available until third level). At level three, the Talent Shaper gains two more Talents, but these and any future Talents may be selected *regardless* of level restrictions.

Here's where the Talent Shaper really begins to stand out. At fourth level, they begin to understand their true potential as they stretch the limits of their abilities. Add a one-time bonus of 20 P.P.E. and modify any one Talent the character possesses as follows:

- Decrease the amount of P.P.E. necessary to activate a Talent by 25%, rounding down (minimum of one P.P.E. for activating an ability).
- Increase the range of a Talent by 50%. (Example: Darkwhip would have a reach of 90 feet/27.4 m instead of 60 feet/18.3 m.)
- Increase the duration of a Talent by 50%. (Example: Anti-Arcane would last 1 and half minutes six melees per level of experience.)
- Increase the damage of an offensive Talent (such as Shadow Blast) by 50%.
- Increase the protection/S.D.C. of a defensive Talent (such as Shadow Shield) by 25%.
- Increase the number needed to save vs a Talent by +1.

Upon reaching fifth level, the Nightbane gains enough mastery that he can select any Talent *regardless* of any prerequisites or limitations, including Elite Talents. This means a character without any Stigmata could still select the Bloodbath Talent, and so on. Starting at fifth level and for every level thereafter, the Talent Shaper may select one new Talent and modify one Talent he possesses *or* modify two existing Talents.

Limitations: A Talent may be modified multiple times, but each time, a different aspect of that Talent must be chosen. Example: the Shadow Blast Talent could be modified to increase its damage from 1D4 to 1D6 per P.P.E. spent. Then, the range could be bumped up to 750 feet/228.6 m. But the range or damage could not be further modified.

The greatest single limitation for a Talent Shaper is that they are incapable of purchasing new Talents by burning P.P.E.

Game Notes: So how does a Talent Shaper use Talents that call for prerequisites like animal characteristics or Stigmata? They make do as best they can on a case-by-case basis. For example, when activating Bloodbath, the Talent Master's skin will rip open in a few small spots, or the blood will shoot from the nose, mouth, or eyes, or simply ooze out of the pores. Swarm Self will simply create an army of tiny clones that look just like the Nightbane, except, well, smaller. Other powers like Lord/Lady of the Wild that enable the character to command or communicate with animals can change every time if the player wants. One day he controls birds, the next time it may be rodents, and so forth.

Experience: Use the Nightbane Sorcerer experience table.

Telekinesis and Ectoplasm

Optional Rules and Material for Rifts® and Other Games

By Mark Hall

Time was running out. Terrence's strength was flagging, and the Dog Boys were too close, and too fast, for him to get away. He'd stayed conscious as they'd hit him with their Neural Maces; he'd managed to shrug off the confusion, but not the broken rib that was jabbing him repeatedly in the lung. Even if he could drain himself of energy fast enough, they'd follow him by the trail of blood and sweat he was leaving on the cracked pavement of Old Chicago. Faced with this, Terrence allowed himself to collapse against the wall, let the others get further ahead, hoping to buy time for all of them... especially for his Kitty.

His group pounded on, oblivious, as a whitish ooze seeped from each of his pores. First a questioning tentacle, it soon grew to be nearly his double in size, trembling slightly with his exhaustion, his fear at the nearness of the coming pack. He looked back, directing it to stretch across the alley, pouring more of his will into the web of Ectoplasm until it was firmly anchored to

the opposing walls and, if not hard enough, at least enough to slow the Dog Boys for a moment. It would be enough.

From behind, he felt a questioning touch on his mind; a simple question from a mind he knew so well, one asking if he meant to catch up, but knowing in the moment of asking that there was no way he could. In those few short seconds, he knew all of Kitty's love for him; all her pain at his loss, all her fears for a future without him. He let his will gently surge, and saw, again, the whitish ooze, this time no more than a mist upon the breeze.

Terrence reached out and gently cupped her face; even separated by more than half a block, he could feel the gentle tracks of her tears as they made their way down her face. He felt the Dog Boys cutting at the barrier... he could afford her only an instant more. He brushed across her lips, then pushed her, gently, away. He primed the cell on the pistol, and set the timers on his grenades to twenty seconds. They would not give him more than that.

Ectoplasm is perhaps one of the great unappreciated powers of the Megaverse, whereas Telekinesis, which has a similar effect, is frequently seen as overpowered. Ectoplasm, after all, has many drawbacks that Telekinesis does not share. It is slow, requiring fifteen seconds to create and seven seconds to withdraw. It is vulnerable to attack and sunlight. It is of extremely limited strength, making it less than useful at what would seem to be its primary role, that of an object manipulator. Telekinesis (and its related powers of Levitation and Super Telekinesis), on the other hand, is traditionally regarded as having all the advantages; with no saving throw required when a psychic attempts to pick up an object, it is possible to strip a person of his weapon, or even toss him about like a rag-doll, and he has no recourse in the face of Telekinetic might. Telekinesis is also far faster; it takes place as soon as the psychic chooses to use it, without any preparatory meditation. This article seeks to introduce some parity between the two. First, it does so through some optional rules on redesigning both Telekinesis and Ectoplasm to make them both integrate more smoothly into the game, and make them a little more customizable. Secondly, however, it will highlight some of the advantages that Ectoplasm enjoys, and introduce some new powers for both Ectoplasm and Telekinesis, as well as altering some familiar powers. Before this can be done, however, the concept of auras must be more fully discussed, as these are critical in understanding all psychic powers, but Ectoplasm and Telekinesis in particular.

Aura

All things, living and unliving, organic and inorganic, have an aura. In most humanoids, this aura only extends a small amount from the body; a handsbreadth to a fingersbreadth. For dragons, demons, and the like, it can extend for yards around them, letting even those who are not psychic be aware of "something" close by due to the strength of its aura. The aura is a manifestation of the strength and health of an individual, both identifying and protecting a person.

Every single aura is unique and identifiable. Even as changes are made in a person's life, his aura will remain identifiable to people who have viewed it before, so long as his True Name has

not changed or he has not altered his aura. Aura sight will identify experience through the strength of the aura, P.P.E. base by its brilliance, health by its integrity, race by its shape, and the presence of magic, psionics, or possession by additional dimensions or flaws. Thus, if a psychic or a spellcaster looks at the aura of a human, he will know it is a human, even if she has changed her shape to look like an Elf. If a Wolfen Druid changes into animal form, she still has a Wolfen's aura. There are a few exceptions; the Changeling has an aura that is very similar to both a human and Elf, and certain Men Of Magic will warp their auras through their arts. Of course, psychics may also use the power of Alter Aura to change their aura as they wish, though unless they also have See Aura, their changes are usually more random, or enhancements of their own auras (it is difficult to imitate a Dwarven aura if you have never seen one, after all).

Auras also protect a person, however. As a manifestation of their internal energies, auras react automatically to external threats. Attempts to manipulate a person, be it with a Hypnotic Suggestion or a Bio-Manipulation, will be resisted with the strength of a person's aura; since their aura's strength is determined, in part, by their mental health, a high M.E. results in a bonus to save vs psionics, and a high P.E. results in a bonus to save vs magic as your aura also reflects your physical health. As one's aura extends, in most cases, far enough to cover one's clothing and armor, these receive your saving throw so long as it is within your aura. Most weapons, however, extend beyond an aura's protection, and so are vulnerable to attack. Certain effects (such as the Temporal spell "Attune Object to Owner," or the bond between master and Familiar) can allow a person to tie an item to her aura, and other abilities can let a person extend their aura somewhat, but the protective qualities of one's own aura remain the same.

Both Telekinesis and Ectoplasm rely on the aura of things, but in different ways. Ectoplasm is, essentially, a person's aura, filled with psychic energy and life force, then spun out and made manifest into the real world. The aura renews itself, but doing this is taxing, meaning that there is a practical limit to how much Ectoplasm will be created each time the power is used. Telekinesis, in attempting to interact with a person or object, is actually psychic force acting upon that person or object's aura; in cases where two auras overlap (such as an item on the person of a human being), the stronger aura shields the weaker aura; if the weaker is completely contained, it's invulnerable to manipulation. Because of this, individuals subject to direct Telekinesis (i.e. being lifted by Telekinesis or Levitation) are allowed a saving throw to resist the effect; those subject to indirect Telekinesis (i.e. having a knife thrown at them) have the opportunity to dodge.

Alter Aura (Minor, Physical)

Range: Self.

Duration: One hour per each level of experience.

I.S.P.: 2

Saving Throw: Special.

This power enables the psychic to manipulate his psychic energy in such a way that it changes his aura. The altered aura will send the wrong message to those who see auras, and also allow

the psychic to make a few adjustments which might surprise other psychics. Alterations include:

- General level of experience can be made to seem much lower (level 1 or 2) or much higher (2D4 levels higher) than it really is.
- Conceal the presence of psychic powers.
- Conceal level of base P.P.E. (made to seem much lower).
- Conceal the presence of magic.
- Conceal fatigue, sickness, or injury (looks fresh and healthy).

If the psychic has the power of See Aura, he can also reverse many of these changes; instead of hiding psychic or magical powers, he can pretend to have far greater powers, or use Alter Aura to feign weakness, fatigue, or even another race (so an Elf might feign magical powers and a human aura, leading his enemies to think he is a human wizard, instead of an Elven psychic).

Furthermore, a psychic who is targeted by Telekinesis can use Alter Aura to parry Telekinesis. Each use of Alter Aura in this way requires another 2 I.S.P. and allows another save vs psionics, but consumes one of the psychic's attacks for that round. Furthermore, it will leave the aura horribly distorted, so a final use of Alter Aura will be necessary, after the fight, to smooth over any alterations.

Lastly, a psychic can use Alter Aura to make his or her aura bigger. For 10 I.S.P., the psychic's aura will double in size. This allows the psychic to protect more within his aura, and a temporarily enlarged aura may be used for Ectoplasm, but it will only last for 1 melee round per level.

Manipulations from this power are not subject to saving throws; the psychic is doing them to himself, so he presumably wants them. However, when he is subjected to scrutiny through See Aura, it may be appropriate for the G.M. to require that the psychic pass a save vs psionics to avoid his alterations being noticed.

Using Telekinesis

Telekinesis (and its relatives) is a subtle and powerful ability, but it's not all-powerful. It has some distinct limitations to go with its manifest strengths, and careful use is required to make the most of it.

The largest limitation of Telekinesis is sight. If you cannot see it, you cannot touch it with Telekinesis. This is sometimes a benefit over Ectoplasm; Telekinesis can be used through force fields and view screens, so long as you are otherwise within range. However, if you are blinded, or in the dark, or something is simply behind you or moving too fast for you to see, it cannot be directly affected by your Telekinesis. This also applies in very small spaces; Telekinesis can't pick locks unless they're big enough that you can see the lock mechanism. Note that Telekinesis will work on the entire object; if you know that a button is on the far side of an object, you can press it without seeing it. It should also be noted that briefly obscured vision (moving bodies, swirling smoke or leaves, etc.) will not interrupt Telekinesis that has begun, but if the psychic loses visual contact for more than 15 seconds at a stretch, he needs to make a save vs psionics to maintain contact with the item.

The other limitation that Telekinesis often encounters is the auras of others. It is difficult to directly manipulate people's bodies and things on their person. As noted above, their aura will usually extend a distance from their body. In humans, this is about the thickness of their thumb for first level, and another fingersbreadth per additional level. Unfortunately for Telekinetics, humans tend to identify with their clothing enough that clothing and armor, especially uniforms, are usually included in these. This aura will actively resist any attempts to use Telekinesis upon the target. Of course, this simply means that psychics attack objects that are outside the auras of their targets; the rug beneath them, the chandelier above them, the table behind them; even if they're unable to damage their opponent, they can knock them down, pin them, or hinder them with tables thrown in their path, sprinkler systems turned on, or fires started (you may not be able to throw fire, but you can throw burning wood!).

And lastly, there is the fact that simple (non-Super) Telekinesis cannot do multiple things at once. You cannot press down on an item and turn it at the same time; you cannot press on two buttons that are on different sides of an object simultaneously. This somewhat limits the dexterity of simple Telekinesis, and is frequently used in worlds where Telekinetic foes are common to reduce the ability of enemy psychics to disable technological weapons. On Rifts Earth, for example, the Republic of Japan requires that E-Clips eject through the manipulation of two switches, that helmets can only be removed by pushing two buttons, and that grenades have a two-step fuse (push down and turn, much like a modern child-proof cap); while these measures do not make their soldiers immune to magical and psychic sabotage, it makes such acts less simple. 20th and 21st century grenades and magazines, however, are quite vulnerable to such tactics; pulling a pin on a grenade may even go unnoticed until detonation.

One of the simplest uses of Telekinesis is to supplement the user's own muscles. Simple Telekinesis can be used against an object that the psychic is trying to lift, effectively lightening it by the amount of the Telekinetic force used; a P.S. of 4 would lighten the load by 40 pounds (18 kg). Even Levitation will lift an object off the ground to where it can be more easily pushed. Of course, Super Telekinesis can often completely replace muscle power, but the supernaturally strong find it to be an added advantage in their greater loads. Because of the single-object limitation of Levitation and simple Telekinesis, many psychics will use lightweight bags or baskets to help carry weight more efficiently; it may add three pounds (1.35 kg) to use such a bag, but it means all of your items are together, and lifted with the same Telekinetic force.

Telekinesis is also valuable in dealing with traps. Unless the trap can follow the aural trail back to the psychic, or generates an area of effect large enough to encompass the psychic himself, disturbing a trapped object with Telekinesis rarely rebounds on the psychic. Telekinesis does not have a fine sense of touch, of course; you cannot put precisely ten pounds and three ounces of pressure on a pressure plate with Telekinesis; but you can simply stand back and trip the plate, or grab the golden monkey idol from across the room.

Levitation (Minor, Physical)

Range: Up to 60 feet (18.3 m) away; maximum height is 6 feet +1 foot (1.8 m +0.3 m) per level of experience.

Duration: 2 minutes per level of experience.

I.S.P.: 4+

Saving Throw: Standard.

Levitation is a limited form of Telekinesis that can raise an object or a person straight up into the air and suspend it there, hovering in the air. Sideways movement is NOT possible.

Four I.S.P. gives the psychic the equivalent of a P.S. of 1. Two more I.S.P. will increase the P.S. by one, and the P.S. can be set as high as the psychic likes at the moment he activates the power. Each point of P.S. from Levitation allows the psychic to lift 20 pounds (9 kg), as with normal P.S.. If the psychic is lifting himself, no saving throw is required, and the maximum height is 10 feet (3 m) +2 feet (0.6 m) per level of experience. The maximum P.S. of Levitation is equal to the psychic's M.E. plus his level of experience (or what the psychic can afford in I.S.P.).

Telekinesis (Minor, Physical)

Range: Up to 60 feet (18.3 m) away.

Duration: 2 minutes per level of experience.

I.S.P.: 4+

Saving Throw: Standard.

Telekinesis is the ability to move objects without any other means than directed psychic energy. The character can make an object hop, fall, roll, rise into the air, suspend it there or make it fly across the room (speed of 12). When directed at other characters, they receive a saving throw vs psionics.

In order to move an object by Telekinesis, the item must be clearly visible, within the psychic's range (60 feet/18.3 m) and the point of focus. Thus, each Telekinetic feat counts as one of the character's physical attacks for the round; a character with 4 attacks per melee round may use a combination of Telekinetic and other actions (be they physical or other powers the character may have).

When a psychic decides to begin the power of Telekinesis, he must decide how strong he wishes it to be. For the initial 4 I.S.P., he is considered to have a P.S. of 1. For every two additional I.S.P., he may increase the P.S. of the Telekinetic force by 1. Each point of P.S. allows the Telekinetic force to move 10 pounds (4.5 kg), as with normal P.S. A psychic can actively control only one item at a time, and lifting a new item requires the old one to be put down, or the power to be activated again. Each point of "unused" P.S. (P.S. above what is currently needed to lift the object) adds 2 points to the speed of any thrown object. The maximum P.S. of a Telekinetic force is equal to the psychic's M.E. plus his level of experience (or what the psychic can afford in I.S.P.).

It is possible to fly using normal Telekinesis to lift yourself. However, it is very expensive to do so, as the psychic must lift his entire weight, including equipment. As with Levitation, no saving throw is required when a character chooses to lift himself; the speed of flight is the same as any other movement via Telekinesis.

Other Statistics:

- +3 to strike with Telekinesis; physical and skill bonuses do not apply when Telekinesis is used, though a psychic can learn W.P. Targeting specifically for use with Telekinesis, gaining bonuses to strike (and only bonuses to strike).
- +4 to parry with Telekinesis by using a Telekinetically controlled object or sheer Telekinetic force to block an attack. Using sheer Telekinetic force costs 6 I.S.P. Note that parrying with Telekinesis is never an automatic parry, unless you have Hand to Hand training, spend *another* skill specifically to train in using Telekinetically controlled objects to parry, and already have such an object under control when the time comes.
- S.D.C. Damage from hurled objects:
 - 6 ounces to 1 pound (0.17 to 0.45 kg): 1D4
 - 1.5 to 2 pounds (0.6 to 0.9 kg): 1D6
 - 2 to 4 pounds (0.9 to 1.8 kg): 2D4
 - 5 to 10 pounds (2.25 to 4.5 kg): 3D4
 - 11 to 25 pounds (4.95 to 11.2 kg): 3D6
 - 26 to 40 pounds (11.7 to 18): 4D6
 - add 1D6 per additional 20 pounds (9 kg).

Telekinesis (Super)

Range: 100 feet (305 m) per level of experience.

Duration: 2 minutes per level of experience.

I.S.P.: 5+

Saving Throw: Standard.

Super Telekinesis functions much like normal Telekinesis except it is far stronger. Drawing upon the strength of a mind capable of generating Super Psionic powers, it generates a Telekinetic force which is supernaturally strong. The base speed of objects hurled with Super Telekinesis is 25.

When a psychic decides to begin the power of Super Telekinesis, he must decide how strong he wishes it to be. For the initial 5 I.S.P., he is considered to have a Supernatural P.S. of 1. For every three additional I.S.P., he may increase the P.S. of the Telekinetic force by 1. Each point of P.S. allows the Telekinetic force to move 50 pounds (22.5 kg), as with Supernatural P.S. A psychic can actively control as many as one item per level of experience, as long as the total weight does not exceed his total weight capacity. Each point of "unused" P.S. (P.S. above what is currently needed to lift all the current objects) adds 5 points to the speed of any thrown object. The maximum P.S. of a Telekinetic force is equal to the psychic's M.E. plus his level of experience (or what the psychic can afford in I.S.P.).

Because of the strength of Super Telekinesis, it can be used to fly. As with Levitation, no saving throw is required when a character chooses to lift himself; the speed of flight is the same as any other movement via Super Telekinesis.

Other Statistics:

- +3 to strike with Telekinesis; physical and skill bonuses do not apply when Telekinesis is used, though a psychic can learn W.P. Targeting specifically for use with Telekinesis, gaining bonuses to strike (and only bonuses to strike).

- +4 to parry with Telekinesis by using a Telekinetically controlled object or sheer Telekinetic force to block an attack. Using sheer Telekinetic force costs 6 I.S.P. Note that parrying with Telekinesis is never an automatic parry, unless you have Hand to Hand training, spend another skill specifically to train in using Telekinetically controlled objects to parry, and already have such an object under control when the time comes.
- S.D.C. Damage from hurled objects:
 - 6 ounces to 1 pound (0.17 to 0.45 kg): 1D4
 - 1.5 to 2 pounds (0.6 to 0.9 kg): 1D6
 - 2 to 4 pounds (0.9 to 1.8 kg): 2D4
 - 5 to 10 pounds (2.25 to 4.5 kg): 3D4
 - 11 to 25 pounds (4.95 to 11.2 kg): 3D6
 - 26 to 40 pounds (11.7 to 18): 4D6
 - add 1D6 per additional 20 pounds (9 kg).
- Mega-Damage from Huge Hurling Objects: M.D. is only possible with Super Telekinesis and only when the hurled object is 100 pounds (45 kg) or heavier and is a hard material like wood, stone, or metal (not people). Does 1D4 M.D. per 100 pounds (45 kg).

Combat Telekinesis

(NEW! Minor, Physical)

Range: Up to 60 feet (18.3 m) away.

Duration: 1 melee attack.

I.S.P.: 2+

Saving Throw: Automatically successful.

Combat Telekinesis is similar to simple Telekinesis, but it is limited to the manipulation of objects outside of a person's aura, and has a much shorter duration. On the plus side, it is capable of more manipulations per melee than simple Telekinesis, and has the potential to be more accurate. Though most who possess Combat Telekinesis also possess simple Telekinesis, this is not strictly necessary.

In order to move an object by Telekinesis, the item must be clearly visible, within the psychic's range (60 feet/18.3 m) and the point of focus. Thus, each Telekinetic feat counts as one of the character's physical attacks for the round; a character with 4 attacks per melee round may use a combination of Telekinetic and other actions (be they physical or other powers the character may have).

When a psychic decides to begin the power of Telekinesis, he must decide how strong he wishes it to be. For the initial 2 I.S.P., he is considered to have a P.S. of 1. For every two additional I.S.P., he may increase the P.S. of the Telekinetic force by 1. Each point of P.S. allows the Telekinetic force to lift 10 pounds (4.5 kg). A psychic can actively control two objects per level at a time, allowing him to do multiple things at once, or to make multiple manipulations of the same object, provided all of it is within the weight limitation of the Telekinetic force. Each point of "unused" P.S. (P.S. above what is currently needed to lift the object) adds 2 points to the speed of any thrown object (base speed is 18). The maximum P.S. of a Telekinetic force is equal to the psychic's M.E. plus his level of experience (or what the psychic can afford in I.S.P.).

Other Statistics:

- +3 to strike with Telekinesis; physical and skill bonuses do not apply when Telekinesis is used, though a psychic can learn W.P. Targeting specifically for use with Telekinesis, gaining bonuses to strike (and only bonuses to strike). Combat Telekinetics frequently take advantage of blindside attacks, or attacks from multiple angles. At the G.M.'s discretion, rules for volleys of missiles can be used in specific instances.
- +4 to parry with Telekinesis by using a Telekinetically controlled object or sheer Telekinetic force to block an attack. Using sheer Telekinetic force costs 6 I.S.P. Note that parrying with combat Telekinesis is never an automatic parry, due to its limited duration; you simply cannot control objects long enough to use them.
- Combat Telekinesis gains additional bonuses to strike and parry from a high I.Q., using the bonuses for a P.P. of the same value.
- S.D.C. Damage from hurled objects:
 - 6 ounces to 1 pound (0.17 to 0.45 kg): 1D4
 - 1.5 to 2 pounds (0.6 to 0.9 kg): 1D6
 - 2 to 4 pounds (0.9 to 1.8 kg): 2D4
 - 5 to 10 pounds (2.25 to 4.5 kg): 3D4
 - 11 to 25 pounds (4.95 to 11.2 kg): 3D6
 - 26 to 40 pounds (11.7 to 18): 4D6
 - add 1D6 per additional 20 pounds (9 kg).

Using Ectoplasm

Ectoplasm is psychic energy which permeates an aura, manifesting physically in a dimension. On the Astral Plane, it is everywhere; on most dimensions, it's a manifestation of specific psychic abilities or certain Entities. Without direction, it is almost always a white, luminous vapor; under the control of a psychic, it can become a tentacle, a hand, a disguise, a golem, or even a bolt of destruction.

As mentioned above, one of the main drawbacks of Ectoplasm is its speed of use; it is not a power you can simply whip out in an instant. Attempting to bring it out faster causes great pain, disrupting the psychic's concentration and causing the power to fail; this is the pain of ripping off your own aura, so it's not one to be easily shrugged off.

Ectoplasm is an extension of the body it comes from. That body, if it is capable of feeling, feels everything that the Ectoplasm does with remarkable acuity. If it is capable of controlling the Ectoplasm, it can act as a fairly dexterous limb (about equivalent to a P.P. of 17). In most cases, it functions like an octopus' tentacle, capable of grasping and exerting its full force anywhere along its length, but it can be shaped in many ways.

Because of this, Ectoplasm isn't limited the same ways that Telekinesis is. Ectoplasm can go beyond the sight of its psychic source, but like an arm groping beyond the sight of its bearer, it must go by touch. Because it is a limb and an extension of its creator, controlled Ectoplasm can perform multiple actions at once, such as pushing multiple buttons or activating a two-step grenade. It is limited in other ways: It cannot move through solid objects, nor can the solid form fit into very tight places.

Ectoplasm also carries with it part of the creator's life force; destroying it damages the psychic, and it can serve as a conduit for other powers or spells. A spell targeted at the Ectoplasm will affect the body it is attached to. While sometimes useful, this is often dangerous.

Ectoplasm (Minor, Physical)

Range: 40 feet +5 feet (12.2 m +1.5 m) per level of experience; reduce by half in sunlight or bright (250 watts or greater) artificial light.

Duration: Four minutes (16 melees) per level of experience.

Length of Trance: One melee (15 seconds) to create the vapor; half a melee (7 seconds) to return the vapor to the creator.

I.S.P.: Varies (6+).

This ability enables the psychic to create a slightly luminous vapor which exudes from his pores. Immediately upon creating the Ectoplasm, the psychic loses one Hit Point; if the Ectoplasm is returned without being destroyed, then he regains the Hit Point. If it is destroyed, he loses the Hit Point with the Ectoplasm (though he can regain that Hit Point through natural healing).

This vapor is a sort of floating, probing finger that can snuff out candles, open doors, knock over or pick up small objects (weighing under 9 ounces/255 grams), tap someone on the shoulder, rustle leaves and knock on a door. The vapor can be seen only by the creator, those who can see the invisible, or by those using infrared optic systems. Ectoplasm, although it is an invisible vapor, has physical properties, which means it can not go through walls or solid objects; however, if a breeze can get through, so can an Ectoplasmic vapor.

The psychic has full control of all Ectoplasm created with this power, and also has an acute sense of touch; while most prefer to control the vapor by sight, they can also guide it by touch, if necessary. The vapor has a volume slightly greater than that of the psychic (20% more than the psychic per level of experience, so at level five, there is twice as much Ectoplasm as psychic, three times as much at level ten, and four times as much at fifteen).

At the psychic's option, he may strengthen the vapor at creation, putting more I.S.P. into the power to create a stronger Ectoplasmic tentacle. For two I.S.P. beyond the minimum, the vapor has a P.S. of 1, and so is able to move up to 10 pounds (4.5 kg). Every two additional I.S.P. grants the vapor another point of P.S., though Ectoplasm has a maximum P.S. of four under most circumstances. This tentacle, it should be noted, is visible to the naked eye; with only one P.S. it is somewhat indistinct, but it is hard to miss in dim lighting. These tentacles must also be somewhat thicker than the vapor; they can be no narrower than an adult human thumb, though they can thicken on the other side of a narrow obstacle, and exert their full P.S. at any point along their length.

Ectoplasm, either as a vapor or a tentacle, moves at a speed of 18, and is capable of both hovering and flying. It's also very agile, and capable of an automatic dodge at part of its length; it is infused with a bit of life force, and so dodges on its own, independent of its creator. The psychic can direct a tentacle to hit any target he can see, though it is a poor combatant; it is capable of doing only a single point of damage without wielding a

weapon, and it is poor at using ranged weapons; unless the ranged weapon is aimed from the psychic's own perspective (i.e. the tentacle holds the weapon as if the psychic himself were using the weapon), he will have a -10 to strike when using the weapon, due to the poor angle. The vapor form is incapable of causing damage on its own, and can use no weapon weighing more than 9 ounces (255 grams); most often, these are extremely sensitive triggers of weapons that have been dragged into position. In either case, any action (except a dodge) by the Ectoplasm uses one of the creator's attacks per melee.

Other Statistics:

- +5 to auto-dodge
- +1 to parry
- +1 to strike
- P.P. is 17; these bonuses are the ones above, and should not be added.
- Both vapor and solid have 1 Hit Point. The vapor has but 3 S.D.C. Solid vapor has 10 S.D.C. for each point of P.S. If the Ectoplasm is destroyed, the creator loses one Hit Point and S.D.C. equal to the I.S.P. spent on the power (if all S.D.C. is gone, they do not lose additional Hit Points).
- S.D.C. Damage from hurled objects:
 - 6 ounces to 1 pound (0.17 to 0.45 kg): 1D4
 - 1.5 to 2 pounds (0.6 to 0.9 kg): 1D6
 - 2 to 4 pounds (0.9 to 1.8 kg): 2D4
 - 5 to 10 pounds (2.25 to 4.5 kg): 3D4
 - 11 to 25 pounds (4.95 to 11.2 kg): 3D6
 - 26 to 40 pounds (11.7 to 18): 4D6

Astral Bolts (Minor, Physical)

Range: 30 feet (9.1 m) plus 10 feet (3 m) per level of experience.

Duration: One melee round per level of experience.

I.S.P.: 10

Saving Throw: Dodge.

This power can only be used in the Astral Plane and other places with ambient Ectoplasm. The Astral Bolts inflict 1D4 S.D.C. per level of the psychic, and are +3 to strike. Targets can dodge normally. A psychic who uses his own Ectoplasmic vapor to create Astral Bolts may create one bolt per level of experience, but will lose the same number of Hit Points and S.D.C. at the end of the power as if the vapor had been destroyed.

This power was originally printed in the *Nightbane*® book, *Between the Shadows*™, as a Sensitive power, but is listed here as a Physical power to better fit with the presentation of Ectoplasm.

Ectoplasmic Tool (Minor, Physical)

Range: Touch.

Duration: Ten minutes per level of experience.

Length of Trance: One melee (15 seconds) to create the vapor; half a melee (7 seconds) to return the vapor to the creator.

I.S.P.: 12

Saving Throw: None.

The psychic can create a tool out of pure Ectoplasm. This tool will commonly appear in the psychic's hand, but can appear anywhere within the psychic's aura. These tools are always solid Ectoplasm, and cannot leave the psychic's aura, but can be made much finer than normal solid Ectoplasm. While normal solid Ectoplasm can only be as thin as a human thumb, an Ectoplasmic Tool can be practically any solid form the psychic wishes, even including hinges and rotational sections. As Ectoplasm, however, it still conducts heat and other sensations to the psychic, making it poorly suited to electrical work, or to certain kinds of weapons (you do not, for example, want to make a revolver out of it, as it would be the equivalent of having a bullet go off in your hand).

The Ectoplasmic Tool has a P.S. of 4, an S.D.C. of 40, and a P.P. of 17. When used for delicate work (such as medical skills and lock picking), the psychic gains a +10% bonus, due to the level of control he can exert. As with all Ectoplasm, the tool has 1 Hit Point, taken from the psychic, and only given back when the power is ended without the tool being destroyed.

Ectoplasmic Construct (Physical)

Range: Touch.

Duration: Two hours per level of experience.

Length of Trance: At least one melee (15 seconds) to create the vapor.

I.S.P.: 6+

Saving Throw: None.

The psychic creates an object of pure Ectoplasm, invests it with a portion of his life force, and then separates it from his body to exist independently. This construct is typically a tool or barrier, but can be anything that the psychic desires. As it is separate from him once finished, he gains no sensation from it, and takes no damage from its destruction, only from initially investing it with life force. Unlike most Ectoplasmic powers, it is impossible to regain the Hit Point lost in creating an Ectoplasmic Construct save by healing; once separated, the Hit Point is gone.

Because of the unique nature of an Ectoplasmic Construct, it is somewhat stronger than the standard Ectoplasm. For the base of 6 I.S.P., it has an equivalent P.S. of 1, but additional P.S. can be added for 2 I.S.P. each, up to a maximum of 10. Additionally, an Ectoplasmic Construct has 15 S.D.C. per point of P.S., and can support 20 pounds (9 kg) per point of P.S. Lastly, while the Ectoplasmic Construct is unable to auto-dodge, it has a Natural A.R. equal to the number of I.S.P. spent in its creation. If this construct is improved using the Harden Ectoplasm power, then the base A.R. is one and a half times higher, and the S.D.C. is 40 times the P.S.

Call Ectoplasm (Super)

Range: 20 feet (6 m) +5 feet (1.5 m) per level of experience.

Duration: Instant.

Length of Trance: None.

I.S.P.: 10

Saving Throw: Standard.

This power causes uncontrolled Ectoplasm to pour out of the target. The psychic has no control over the Ectoplasm created, but it is a disconcerting and uncomfortable process for the tar-

get, who is likewise helpless to control the outflow (unless he possesses his own powers over Ectoplasm). However, since the target is not purposefully trying to create or control the Ectoplasm, there is no investment of a Hit Point, nor damage if the Ectoplasm is destroyed. See the power of Ectoplasm for how much Ectoplasm is available from a given individual.

Each use of this power creates a limb of Ectoplasm with a P.S. of 2 and 20 S.D.C. which trails uselessly, or hangs somewhat above the target, moving vaguely out of time with the body it is attached to. Prowling, Swimming, Acrobatics, and Gymnastics become nearly impossible, with each use of the power subtracting 30% to applicable rolls. Combat becomes much more difficult; each use of the power subtracts 3 from parries and dodges and, depending on the location, 1 to 9 from strikes. This is because the Ectoplasmic limb will passively resist anything the target attempts to do. Trying to leap quickly out of the way? Not with an extra 20 pound balloon hanging above you, pulling you back. Trying to fire on your enemies? Not if you've suddenly grown an Ectoplasmic arm from your chest.

There are, of course, other uses of the power; directing the power at trees or buildings can result in walls of Ectoplasm to hinder or confuse your enemies, or provide a quick escape from a building.

If not directed at a living, sentient being, less Ectoplasm is available. Objects, including sentient computers and robots, have much weaker auras in general, and so will only have Ectoplasm equal to 10% of their volume, unless they are magical, in which case it will at least equal their own volume.

Plants tend to have very little Ectoplasm, and so will have only 25% of their volume in Ectoplasm. Of course, for a large tree, this can still be a substantial amount, but it's nowhere near what a giant or dragon of similar size may have.

Animals (and heavily cybernetic or bionic individuals) will similarly have small amounts of Ectoplasm; they will have only 50% of their volume in Ectoplasm.

Command Ectoplasm (Super)

Range: 20 feet (6 m) +5 feet (1.5 m) per level of experience.

Duration: 2 melee rounds per level of experience.

Length of Trance: None.

I.S.P.: 8

Saving Throw: Standard or none.

The psychic can take command of nearby Ectoplasm. This may be Ectoplasm that he has summoned via Call Ectoplasm, or it may be the ambient Ectoplasm of the Astral Plane, or it may be the Ectoplasm of another power, but he may attempt to take control of it and command it as he wishes.

If the Ectoplasm is currently uncontrolled (has no default controller, as with the Ectoplasm of Call Ectoplasm or the Ectoplasm of the Astral Plane), then the psychic simply controls it as if it was his own. If it currently has a controller, then they must roll a save vs psionics to maintain control of their Ectoplasm in the face of the psychic's powers. This is especially devastating against Entities, who often construct bodies for themselves out of Ectoplasm. Unless their claim to the Ectoplasm is using this power, then they may attempt another save next melee round.

Someone actively fighting the psychic for control of the Ectoplasm will rob him of one attack per melee round.

Harden Ectoplasm (Super)

Range: Touch.

Duration: Duration of other power.

Length of Trance: None.

I.S.P.: Varies.

Saving Throw: Standard or none.

Harden Ectoplasm is a power used to alter Ectoplasm. By filling it with psychic energy, it can be strengthened, forming it into a rigid structure which resists damage, but loses much of the flexibility of traditional Ectoplasm. Of course, using this with some powers completely ruins their primary purpose; it is almost impossible to maintain an effective Ectoplasmic disguise if the "skin" is rock-hard, though it occasionally has other uses.

To use Harden Ectoplasm, the psychic must choose to do so and expend twice the usual amount of I.S.P. for the Ectoplasm-based power in question (it cannot be used on Ectoplasmic vapor). It requires no additional time, only additional energy in building the Ectoplasm. The result is Ectoplasm with S.D.C. equal to its P.S. times 25 in S.D.C., and an A.R. equal to its total I.S.P. cost before hardening, or its normal S.D.C. turned into M.D.C. if in a P.P.E. rich environment.

This power has a slightly different interaction with the power Ectoplasmic Disguise. When used together, they can be used to form Ectoplasmic armor with an A.R. of 12 and 3 S.D.C. per level of the psychic.

New Skills

Mental Exercises: By constantly pushing his mental abilities and working to expand the strength of his mind, the character is able to expand the amount of I.S.P. he can hold. If taken as an O.C.C. Related Skill, this grants a bonus of 10 I.S.P. If taken as a Secondary Skill, this grants a bonus of 5 I.S.P. This skill may be taken multiple times to gain additional bonuses.

Telekinetic Flick [Psychic]: The character has mastered his Telekinetic abilities to the extent where he doesn't need to use the full extent of them for minor effects. He can perform a single action that would require only two fingers and less than a second; flipping a switch which is within arm's reach, bringing a small item across the table to him, opening a drawer or pushing a button. This skill requires no check, only the expenditure of I.S.P. and possessing either the power of Telekinesis, Super Telekinesis, or Combat Telekinesis.

Telekinetic Parry [Psychic]: The psychic has mastered the art of parrying with controlled objects. He is able to use a Telekinetically controlled object to automatically parry. The psychic must have automatic parry from some other source, plus a Telekinesis ability (Super or simple), and already be in control of an object, for the parry to be automatic. This also adds a +2 to parry with Telekinetically controlled objects.



The Scaring Crow

Optional Material for

Beyond the Supernatural™, 2nd Edition

By Steven Dawes, based on an original idea by
Bobbi Dawes

“May 13th, 1863”

Today is a very pleasant morning, cool and clear. It's been a few days since my last entry because a lot's happened on the trail. First off, we're still inside the Kansas territory; we lost one of our sick a few days ago; ferrying the wagon train across the river took longer than expected and a few of the wagons have had troubles. We all remain determined, one way or another we're gonna make that gold rush! We've moved off the Santa Fe Trail this morning just after daybreak and are now heading along a trail that's aimed for Oregon. We aren't going that far though, our captain says the settlement is just over the other side of the Colorado divide and we should get there in another week or two. I can't wait to get there and fill my pockets with all that gold I keep hearing about!

This afternoon, the strangest thing happened. I'm not sure how I'm going to describe this, but I'll do my best. I promised Bill that I would never tell anyone what happened, but I think writing it down to ponder over some day won't hurt anything. When I'd written about running into those Indian scouts a few days back who warned us not to go this way, I can't help but wonder if this was why. Maybe we should have listened to them.

We stopped at a small lake around noon to water the oxen and fix lunch. Afterwards Emily called us all together. She told us that Bill thought he saw some bushes with berries just inside some woods when we passed by and he went to collect some. He had been gone for a while and hadn't come back yet. After sitting in that jarring wagon all morning, I jumped at the chance to take a quick walk and stretch my legs awhile, so I told them I'd go look for him.

When I got to the edge of the trees I realized the woods were much denser up close. I was worried that I'd have a time finding him in all that mess of foliage. Turns out that finding him was the easy part; I suddenly heard him screaming. It sounded like he was screaming for his life and shouted “GET THEM OFF ME! THEY'RE KILLING ME!” I instantly took my knife in hand and ran towards his screaming, thinking maybe he found a family of coyotes or bears. But what I saw was something I'll never quite understand... or forget.

Bill was on the ground, flopping all around like a fish outta water while holding his head and screaming like a wild man. But I couldn't tell why, because he wasn't being attacked by anything! Seeing him act like that didn't make any sense. Bill's as stable and strong a man as you'll find and I reckon that nobody ever figured him for being crazy before. But seeing him rolling about like that scared me more than finding Bill fending off coyotes or bears would have. He continued thrashing about

while screaming so savagely that I was afraid to come near him at first.

Eventually I found my feet and ran to his side, trying to hold him down to keep him from hurting himself anymore than he already had. He'd been pulling on his beard during his fit so hard that his face was bleeding and there were stray whiskers sticking outta his clenched fists. I tried calling out his name several times to snap him outta whatever was ailing him before I eventually brought my calls up to a shouting pitch; I didn't think he could hear me over his own screaming. Again he shouted “GIT EM OFF ME!” and fought my restraint for several moments before suddenly snapping out of his fit.

For a second he just looked at me like he'd never seen me before and then looked around the trees like he was looking for something. A moment later he displayed a look of utter fear like I had never seen on a grown man before and began to break down into sobbing tears. I'll never be able to explain how hard it was to see a man like Bill broken down, shaking and crying like he was. Babies don't even cry that hard.

Through shivering lips he whispered to me “D-don't let them get me again... don't let them...”

I asked him, “Let who get ya, Bill, who?” He was too overcome with fear to speak after that, all he could do was look up for the slightest of an instant before turning to his side to hold me for what I imagine was comfort and protection from whatever was scaring him so bad.

I looked up at the trees like he'd motioned, but there wasn't anything to be afraid of. Nothing but tall trees, green leaves, streaks of sunlight and a big flock of crows perched amongst the branches. I was really confused; maybe poor old Bill was deathly afraid of birds or something? I was about to help him up and get him back to his wife, but he looked up again and screamed “NO!” in my ear. He let go and fell back to the ground in another bout of screaming hysterics.

His blood curdling screams were broken up with pleas of “GET THEM OFF ME! THEY'RE EATING ME! THEY'RE KILLING ME!” In my confusion, I looked back into the trees, but what I saw next I'm still having a hard time believing. It might have been a trick of the sun streaks or my being so worked up over Bill that I was starting to see things, but I swear to my Lord Almighty that all those crows were just staring down at us. Actually, now that I think on it, they seemed to be staring solely at Bill.

I didn't notice the first time I had glanced up at the crows, but now I reckon I'd never heard a sound or a single caw from them. They simply stood as still as statues, leering down at him. And then their eyes, my God... I swear they were glowing like lit candlelight in a dark cabin window; only they were green like in color. The sight of their eyes sent a chill down my spine like I'd never known before. The feeling was worse than a week or two back when we ran into those savages that were digging up bodies and eating them.

I don't know how or why, but in that moment I just suddenly had this indescribable “gut feeling” that the crows were “making” Bill act crazy. It makes no sense to me even now, but I just “knew” that I had to do something about the crows or they would keep on tormenting him. I spotted a good sized branch laying on the ground a few steps away. I ran over and snatched

it up in my hands while shouting at the crows to scat. I threw the branch where several birds were huddled close together. They never flinched, or even noticed that I was there (they just kept eyeing Bill) until the branch hit them. Surprisingly, even though I only hit a few, the entire flock suddenly flew away in all directions, leaving the trees, a few falling feathers and us behind them. Bill then stopped his screaming, returning to a bewildered state for a few moments.

I helped raise him quickly to his feet, taking his arm around my shoulder to support him, and wasted no time leaving. Bill was obviously exhausted and still scared out of his gourd, but he found the strength to move as fast as his legs and mine would carry him. We both ran till we were about halfway back to the wagons when Bill finally stopped to catch his breath. While we both stood there panting, I couldn't wait anymore. "What happened back there, Bill?"

Decipherer's Note: The remainder of Avery Miller's diary was absent (removed) when I had acquired it. I am assuming the missing pages were removed by a previous historian for purposes of documenting pioneer history. Reading Bill's firsthand encounter might have given more enlightenment in my report of the supernatural subject "Scaring Crow."

- Deepak Patel,

Genealogist and active member of the Lazlo Agency

The common crow (or the common raven as their pseudonym) has always interested and intrigued mankind. Their many signature traits, including their oily black plumage, distinctive croaking and caws, high level of animal intelligence, aptitude for survival, and eagerness to eat anything (including carrion), have earned them many different symbolic visages over the ages. Tales, folklore, legends, beliefs and superstitions from many different cultures and religions have been inspired by the crow.

For example, the Norsemen had their fabled mythological messengers Hugin and Munin. They were two ravens charged with delivering the news of the world to Odin every evening. The Inuit believe that crows are the creators of the Earth. Other various Native American tribes believe that a crow was once a snow white bird that brought the sun in its beak to the Earth, but during its journey it was scorched and forever colored black. Yet still other cultures believed them to be bad omens or bodies that host the spirits of the damned and the souls of murdered people. Even the Holy Bible (both old and new testament) gives reference to them in both good and bad light.

Our fascination with the crow has continued throughout the centuries with us, and has stayed prominent in modern society. For example, in the United States you can find the Baltimore Ravens NFL team, which in and of itself is a tribute to the classic poem "The Raven" by Edgar Allen Poe. Across the ocean in England you can find them as an important aspect of the "Tower of London"; legend states that England will never fall to a foreign invader while ravens reside within the tower. One can find examples of their inspiration throughout poetry & prose, comic books, movies, television and so on.

It is perhaps humanity's continual interest and acceptance that has brought the Scaring Crow demons to our world. The few parapsychologists that have researched and noted their existence in the Lazlo Agency databases have sorrowfully little in-

formation about them at this time, but they have deduced that they've probably been among us since our beginnings. However, their "less intrusive" nature and feeding habits, along with so easily blending into our everyday lives, have earned them less demanding requirements to be studied and documented. However, in hindsight this was poor judgment, as these beings have suddenly increased in either their numbers or activities (perhaps both) over the last century or so, catching The Lazlo Agency off-guard and with little knowledge of how to protect humanity against them.

While a few snippets of documentation have been found around the globe, the majority of our knowledge about Scaring Crows comes from a few personal accounts, from diary entries and "tall tales" of the American explorers and pioneers of the late 1700s through 1800s. During their journeys, some would document strange experiences that would be later dismissed by historians; labeled as byproducts of overactive imaginations or the superstitions and fears of being in a strange land.

However, those who know the truth such as members of the Lazlo Agency recognize that many of these details are accurate encounters. There's no doubt the supernatural saw pioneer trails in the same light as a predator would, hunting along a game trail. While the Lazlo Agency has recorded a few passages from this era of history, one journal in particular has caught the attention of more than a few parapsychologists. The diary of Avery Miller is considered to contain some of the most candid documented experiences of the supernatural on record.

Avery was like many other young and adventurous pioneers and settlers of the time; he left his native Ireland behind to follow the great Western expansion in America in search of "the gold colored fortune." His diary describes him with a zest for life and adventure, and budding talent as a writer, and he is believed by many parapsychologists to have been psychic (if only latent). Avery wrote many entries in his diary, detailing his arrival to Staten Island, then his western journey to Saint Louis before joining a wagon train going even further west to take part in the Pike's Peak gold rush. His writing might have even been prized material in a historian's collection, had it not been for the few "peculiar" passages Avery wrote along the way.

Speculating on what he had written, his caravan fell upon a pack of Grave Ghouls early in their trip, his testament detailing their feasting on the dead in a settlers' graveyard (he labeled them as "scurvy savages and grave robbers," not knowing any better). Not a week later, they had stopped at a settlement in the Kansas territory that was considered haunted by the locals. Avery recorded in vivid detail seeing a ghost of an "Indian Chief staring sorrowfully across the landscape," which was followed shortly afterwards by his account of Bill and the crows.

Sadly, Avery's notes ended in the middle of that entry, or more specifically, they were removed from the diary's contents. From stories pieced together with help from the Denver historical society, it's believed that his caravan was ambushed in the night and what remained was found by another group days later. What happened is uncertain and lost to time, but it's said that the travelers salvaged some of the "wreckage" (including Avery's diary) and traveled further into the Western Kansas Territory before settling down in Montana City (now Denver). The group described the wagon train wreckage as a "massacre" and there were no survivors, including the oxen. One man was

brazen enough to state that many of the unfortunate settlers looked as though they'd been half eaten by wild animals while they were still alive. His outrageous claims caused quite a stir and weeks of increased watchfulness around the settlement borders.

Avery's diary was first destined to become a founding piece of the town's new library. The diary was removed from the shelves with other similar journals decades later to be used for historical documentation. As one might imagine, the historians gave Avery's diary the "salad bar" treatment, taking the "accurate" notes of interest from the diary while leaving the rest behind. From there it gathered dust in a storage box and eventually made its way to an antique dealer, and by happenstance was found by genealogist and diary collector Dr. Deepak Patel, who happened to be among the growing network of Dr. Victor Lazlo's friends, securing its eventual place within the archives of the Lazlo Agency.

While Avery's account is vague, it's considered the best documentation of the Scaring Crow the Agency has uncovered (showing just how little documentation they really have). However, it's been discovered within the last few years that his documentation of the Scaring Crows wasn't the first. Another journal was recently discovered in Japan, and while its exact age is still being determined, it's believed to have been written in the 12th Century, during the beginnings of feudal Japan. Its owner was a man named Tanaka Kondo, who stated in his writings that he was a self-proclaimed demon hunter, and one of his notes mentioned "Demon Crows" with a similar description to Avery's writings. While his notes are brief and broken (Tanaka was not a writer), they point out an important fact: Scaring Crows have been amongst us at least several hundred years, and they have stayed quiet enough about their presence that their secrets have stayed carefully guarded.

Secrets and Habits

G.M. Note: You may want to keep the following information away from you players from here on if you want to use the documentation angle noted in the "G.M.'s Eyes Only" section below. In play tests the players enjoyed knowing very little about the Scaring Crow, feeling like they were contributing new information to the Lazlo Agency after they encountered them.

As little info as there is on the Scaring Crow, anyone attempting to use Lore: Demons & Monsters must roll a 10% or lower to know anything about them, and even then they will only know the basics. If attempting to research them anywhere else but within the Lazlo Agency database (something not everyone has access to), it will take twice as long as normal to research and has a -30% penalty to find anything about them.

It's important to note first off that the Scaring Crow is not a typical supernatural being; any horror aficionado would label them an "old fashioned" type of monster. They are creatures that gather in groups that literally thrive on scaring people, for they are empathic parasites who use crows/ravens for their hosts and feed off the fear of their human prey. They do not gain nourishment through P.P.E. nor by eating tangible foods (though their host body still needs to feed normally). This aspect of their nature has allowed them to exist quietly and remain virtually ignored over the years, as they do not need to go about killing or

eating their victims and bringing unwanted attention to themselves.

Actually, truth be told, they don't mind attention. In fact, they rely on their hosts' visage to allow their prey to accept them and hide in plain sight amongst them. Nearly every major city in the world today has a large population of crows, to a level where they are considered pests. Many rural and farming communities also have the annual duty of dealing with crows feasting on their crops. The point is, nearly everywhere you go, you're bound to find crows. These beings have chosen their hosts well.

Scaring Crows are intelligent, cunning and well coordinated, and have proven to select their victims and seize opportunities extremely well. The most common scene that attracts them is finding someone alone and going about their business, whether they're sitting on a park bench, walking home from work, sitting alone in their house or apartment with an open window, or even someone working in an office building with the shades open. They are all potential food sources.

It almost always starts the same: A lone bird lands nearby their victim and acts like any other crow/raven; picking at its plumage, eating the garbage and scraps it happens upon, or just perching to take a break from flying. Typically people who notice it may look at it musingly or uninterested for a brief moment and go back to their matters at hand. Then another lands near the first one, then another lands by them, and so on. In a matter of minutes, a small flock has suddenly formed while more continue to land. Even then most people won't do more than stare out of curiosity at the rapidly forming flock.

Once the flock grows to over twenty strong, or if the victim seems to be leaving their chosen area of ambush, their real intentions are revealed. In unison they will all drop their act and suddenly begin staring into their target's eyes. If this doesn't trigger a sudden twinge of fear in their prey, they will turn up it up a notch and start cawing rather menacingly while walking or flying closer to their target, suddenly surrounding him or her. From this point they will really turn up the volume and their eyes will begin to light up with a burning green glow, giving them an eerie and evil presence. As the victim begins to fear them, the typical instinct is to run away, but by then it's already too late.

Scaring Crows rely on their victims' fear in many ways. First and foremost it nourishes them, but it also creates a psychic connection or bond to their victims, allowing them to track and follow their food wherever it goes. At this point, not even walls can shield them from the Scaring Crow's radar-like senses. Even when their prey may feel safe, the unexpected abilities of the Scaring Crow can rekindle their fear by opening windows and doors or even breaking through them if locked (using Telekinesis) and visually relocating their prey no matter where they hide. This is done for the act of completely terrifying their prey, making the meal that much more delicious.

The Scaring Crows never tire in their pursuit. They strive to figure out new methods of spooking, scaring and closing in on their victims till they are either cornered or surrounded by their avian hunters. By this point, their most evil ability yet is unleashed upon the poor souls. Their psychic bonding to their prey's fear gives them the ability to instill a nightmarish vision upon them... over and over and over again.

These visions cause their prey to experience a painful and gruesome death by literally being picked apart and eaten alive by an overwhelming number of crows (hundreds of them). It all feels very real to the victim, and the agony of being picked apart by hundreds of beaks while you're helpless to stop them is nearly unimaginable. While only a brief moment goes by in the real time, the vision seems to stretch on into agonizing minutes. The Scaring Crows never physically attack nor even touch their victims; they merely watch in concentrated delight as their victims writhe, spasm and scream before them.

When the victim seems to gasp out her last breath and be dying on the ground in the forced nightmare, the vision suddenly flashes out and she's brought back to reality with the crows still surrounding her, still leering at her with their burning green eyes. This gives her just enough time to realize she's not dead, but she's still in the same predicament as before, just as they strike again, conjuring another horrifying nightmare of being eaten alive by the crows! Depending on how hungry the individual flocks are, if left undisturbed they can inflict hours upon hours of psychic agony upon their prey, the victim's fear now laced with a seasoning of excruciating pain, creating a near feeling of nirvana to the Scaring Crows.

Once they have had their fill, the flock will simply depart the scene and their prey, possibly returning to them again for another feeding one day. The victim will more than likely be forever terrified (if not phobic) of crows on sight, and therefore can be an easy meal for them every so often. It's not unheard of for a previous victim to suddenly spot a crow looking at them through a window in their home or workplace, as if haunting and checking up on their whereabouts. Scaring Crows can go months without feeding, and therefore have a lot of time on their talons to haunt their victim (or victims, as they can rack up several candidates over time to select from) or seek out new potential prey till it's time to feed again. Their constant haunting can even provide a snack as their prey may run in fear at the sight of them, releasing a quick bite to savor... an appetizer of the feast soon to come.

However, not all victims will be able to cope with these nightmares. Whether it's from their first experience or from being worn down over several feedings, the haunting and feedings of the Scaring Crow have driven some victims to madness. Modern day medicine will be at a loss to explain how someone who was known to be a healthy and intelligent person is found the next day a dribbling, gibbering wreck lying in their own filth in a corner of their apartment. Those with heart conditions or other debilitations could potentially be "scared to death" by the strain their body suffers during a barrage of psychic nightmares.

Those who survive their encounters with their sanity intact are forced to keep their experiences to themselves once they've realized they will never be believed. That is, unless they talk to the right people (like the Lazlo Society or the player characters), but most lack the knowledge of where to find these people so they're forced to resort to coping as best they can. Some will force self denial as they've experienced something so impossible ("It was just a bad dream... it had to be!"), while others accept their experiences as best they can. However, after so many repeat feedings they eventually realize that they MUST do something before they go completely insane (desperate, dangerous or even suicidal thoughts may emerge if haunted enough).

The Scaring Crow's calculating mind is impressive in that they rarely do anything hasty or rash. As they are all psychically bound to each other, they can disband and scour the city, looking for people who fit a certain pattern or seem easily spooked and/or timid. When one of them locates an ideal victim, the others immediately know and in unison will home in on their comrade to plan and execute their methods to feed. On the other hand, the Scaring Crows can also be as opportunistic as they are haunting. If they are hungry and happen to spot easy pickings (a homeless person in a back alley, a drifter wandering aimlessly in the middle of nowhere, a lone thief breaking and entering into a shop late at night), they will seize the moment and quickly yet efficiently begin their scare tactics.

Being as there is so little known about Scaring Crows as of yet, they can move about with near impunity. Psychics and hunters are forced to use known methods of combating the supernatural on this unknown foe and eventually hope to sift out what works and what doesn't. If there's any immediate danger to the Scaring Crows, it's their sudden increase in numbers over the last few decades. As the numbers of mankind and the common crow continue to flourish and swell all over the globe, so has the Scaring Crow. This leads to more encounters and therefore more experiences to document and submit to the Agency. Over time, there may be enough documentation to make a reliable profile to educate all their members on how to deal with Scaring Crows directly. Till then, they continue their scaring with little hindrance.

The Scaring Crow – Haunter and Lesser Demon

Also known as *Misery Ravens* and *Leering Murder*.

Alignment: Anarchist or Miscreant; self serving beings.

Attributes: While not applicable in its energy form (its natural state is invisible and intangible), it's intelligent, tactical minded and can be a relentless haunter with an I.Q. of 12+1D4. Otherwise, the possessing entity has the physical attributes of the host it controls, although its possession provides the host with some increased attributes.

Armor Rating: Not applicable for the ravens/crows it possesses.

Hit Points: 1D4x10 for the energy demon itself.

S.D.C.: The Hit Points and S.D.C. of the host raven/crow is increased above that of its normal capacity with 4D6+5 S.D.C. (typically 2D6).

Discorporation: Only people who can see the invisible or spirits can see a Scaring Crow's energy state, which interestingly strongly resembles its preferred avian hosts. Those who can see one and don't know what it is may mistake it to be a "ghost raven" of some sort. When destroyed, it shatters into several feathers that fall to the ground and simply vanish 30-60 seconds later. It's also interesting to note that upon its death, the host body reverts to its normal size and weight within seconds and if examined, the carcass will show no unusual characteristics.

Threat level: x4; Haunter, a Lesser Demon.

Horror Factor: Unless the observer already has a phobia of ravens, when "inactive" and portraying a normal raven they won't possess a Horror Factor (even in large flocks). However, once they've selected a target to scare, they will begin

to surround their victim, constantly leering at them (usually with their head cocked so only one eye stares at them) while cawing in a malicious tone. This typically instills fear in their victims and they must make a save vs a Horror Factor of 10 (12 if there are more than thirty crows present). Their real Horror Factor talents come from their natural abilities of "Induce Fear" and "Induce Murdermare" in conjunction with hounding and haunting their victim wherever they may run.

P.P.E.: 1D4+6

Size: Both in their energy form and when possessing a host, they are larger than life at 27-31 inches (69-79 cm; normal size is 17 to 25 inches/43-64 cm). The host grows to a larger size, but it does not swell up or look bloated in any way. In fact, besides their larger size they look identical to their non-possessed family.

Weight: While not applicable in energy form, the increased size of its host adds to its weight. A host will weigh between four and five pounds (1.8-2.25 kg), whereas their normal weight is usually from one to three pounds (0.45-1.35 kg).

Natural Abilities: Its natural state is an invisible and intangible energy form with a flying speed of 30 mph (48 km). In this state they are impervious to physical and energy attacks. Daylight does not hinder or bother them, and they possess incredible night vision (800 feet/244 m). Their hosts can fly with an enhanced speed of up to 45 mph (72 km) for brief periods when needed (1D6+2 minutes).

Special: Possess Corvidae: All Scaring Crows have the ability to seize control of any member of the *Corvidae* family. However, they seem to prefer possessing the larger and more intimidating species like the Common Crow/Raven, Thick-Billed Ravens, Rooks, Choughs and Jackdaws. Once possessed they can remain in their host till its death, but can leave it at any time and return later if they choose. Killing the host or expelling one from its host causes no suffering or debilitating effect, it simply moves on to another host.

Special: Mind Communion: Individual Scaring Crows new to this dimension tend to look for others and form groups. Their numbers can vary, but it is estimated they account for almost half of the numbers of the flocks they create. What's more amazing is their ability to link all their minds into one collective union. They all know what each other is doing and thinking at any given time. This also provides counseling benefits, advice in sizing up prey and working together as a like-minded whole. Those who leave the central flock can go two miles (3.2 km) before losing their bond, but they immediately reattach the link when they return.

Special: Summon and Contain Flock: To help keep its disguise hidden and call upon more host bodies as needed, the Scaring Crow can summon all *Corvidae* within a two mile (3.2 km) radius of their own flock. Once they have found the flock, they fall under a sort of psychic control and stay with the flock. Some birds can be hatched, raised, and live their entire lives in a flock inhabited with Scaring Crows. Flocks are typically 30-60 members, but will sometimes swell to 100 or more. This is rare, however, as the sight of so many pests can cause the residents of their hunting grounds to take action and lower their numbers.

Special: Induce Fear: Similar to a Horror Factor, the Scaring Crow gets its name from their ability to induce an overwhelming sense of fear in their victims. Their victims must already be alarmed if not already scared by their appearance and actions for this ability to work. They must also stare at the victim's eyes as their prey stares back into their burning green ones. The victim must make a save vs Horror Factor of 14 (17 if more than 30 are present) against this ability. The Crows may attempt this action twice per melee round.

Once the fear has taken affect, the victim will have an overwhelming urge to run away, they CANNOT find the will to fight. They will run until cornered or surrounded, and cower as they are chased down. The fear only subsides after the flock either is destroyed or has released their psychic bond over the victim, or if they leave the victim's location (their induced fear influence has a range of two miles/3.2 km!) If the victim tries to flee by car or another method that requires a skill roll, all rolls are made with a -50% penalty. Of course, the Scaring Crows will give chase no matter how he or she tries to escape.

Special: Fear Bonding: Once they have induced fear into their prey, the Scaring Crows have a psychic beacon on the victim and will always know where she is located, no matter where she runs. An apartment, house, building, underground basement, cave, wherever she may go, as long as she is within two miles (3.2 km) of the flock they can sense her. Like a horror movie chase scene, the victim may think she has lost them only to find them suddenly coming out of nowhere at her (something they love doing, in fact, as the victim's momentary relief of escape is suddenly washed over by a new surge of tasty fear).

Special: "Murdermare": Once they have cornered or somehow incapacitated their victim, the Scaring Crows will stare her down and try to force the "Murdermare" upon her. Victims must make a save vs psionics with a -2 penalty. Those who fail will suddenly be hit with a blinding flash and experience the horribly agonizing sensation of being picked apart and eaten alive by hundreds of crows! Her visions last for what seems to be at least fifteen minutes or more, but in reality is only 15 seconds. Once the psychic flash has ended, they may try again and keep performing the Murdermare repeatedly (they may try 2 times per melee round).

After two successful Murdermare flashes, the victim suffers an additional -2 penalty against the save vs psionics, and for every two successful attempts afterwards adds another -2 to the total. Eventually her mental defenses are crushed and the Scaring Crows can induce the Murdermare at will upon her.

There is no set number of how many flashes it may take to feed them all before they are satisfied, but a good working number can be equal to twice the number of Scaring Crows present. This can potentially mean their prey will suffer hours of agony when a large group has found her and no one disrupts them.

For Game Masters who include Insanity rules in their game, this is an opportunity to consider rolling to see if the suffering victim obtains a phobia of crows, or birds in general, and acts accordingly when she sees one from then on (whether it's a regular crow or possessed), or a phobia of be-

ing alone (or perhaps both), or consider the “Paranoid” entry under the Psychosis table or something similarly reflective of the repeated torturing she suffered.

Knows All Languages: The Scaring Crow magically understands all languages at 90%. While they cannot speak through their host body, they can communicate via Telepathy, although their communication will be at a minimum. Most of their communications will be one-liners to jeer and taunt their victims to add to their fear factor.

Dark, deadpan humor is not lost on them, and saying phrases like “*Did you know that a gathering of crows is called a murder?*” or a simple “*Quote the Raven, Nevermore*” in a slow and deliberate monotone as they stalk their victims is a delight for them. Also see *Psionics*.

Vulnerabilities: 1. All magic and psionic attacks, but they themselves are impervious to purely physical attacks (although their host is another story).

2. Exorcism can force them from their host and send them back to their home dimension, but this will prove to be a fruitless method as this is not wide range ability (must be within 8 feet/2.4 m). But it still can be useful for dealing with a lone bird or scout.

3. The psychic power “Suppress Fear” will block their “Induce Fear” ability. This may cause them to retreat for the time being, or if angered enough they might resort to physically attacking the psychic that’s hindering their ability till he or she has fled or is incapacitated.

4. The Psychic Medium’s ability of “Spirit Strike” affects Scaring Crows in their natural state.

5. Scaring Crows can only use the majority of their psychic abilities while they possess a host. Otherwise, the only psychic abilities available to them are “Possess Corvidae” and “Mind Communion.” This could mean that if one were to somehow destroy all the host bodies in the area, the Scaring Crows would be forced to retreat and rebuild their host numbers before they could hunt and feed again.

6. While not a vulnerability per se, the Scaring Crow is inexplicably prone to creating a large nest, as opposed to scattered nests around their neighborhood. While their bond over non-possessed crows allows them to build their own individual nests nearby, the Scaring Crows prefer to congregate in their host bodies on their own. This is a trait that can be exploited if paranormal investigators were to find this nest. One of the few instances where Scaring Crows may physically attack someone would be to defend their home, and hopefully kill off their witness before he or she can tell others where they are located. Their nests can be found anywhere that’s hard to spot from prying eyes, including abandoned buildings, dumps, barns, sewers, cellars, on the roof of an extremely high building, etc.

P.C.C. Notes: **Diviner:** If a Diviner tries to track a Scaring Crow(s), they are already -10% when tracking flying creatures, but there’s an additional -10% when tracking the energy of one Scaring Crow amongst so many moving throughout the area and so close together. They cannot track “all of the crows,” as divining is always a search for something specific. However, if a Diviner gets with six blocks of their nest, he or she loses the -10% penalty and gains a +20%

to tracking down the large ambient energy trail coming from their nest.

Ghost Hunter: When firing at a Scaring Crow in its host body with an Ecto-Slayer Shotgun, they inexplicably do double damage to both the host and the Scaring Crow! However if they spot a Scaring Crow with their Ghost Vision Goggles (in their naturally invisible state) and fire upon it, it will only suffer half the usual damage. Their Ghost Gun energy bolts do 2D6 S.D.C. to Scaring Crows whether in a host or not.

Nega-Psychic: The Nega-Psychic is a bane to Scaring Crows. If they come near a Nega-Psychic, they will quickly discover that their psychic union along with their hold over the flock is disabled, while their “Induce Fear” and “Murdermare” abilities have no effect. Consequently they can sense the palpable negative energy as well as any other supernatural creature can, and will usually follow suit and avoid it.

R.C.C. Skills or Equivalents (does not improve with experience): Land Navigation 89%, Track Humans 85% and Tailing 85%.

Equivalent Level of Experience: 1D4+2

Attacks per Melee: Three physical attacks per melee round in a host body, or two psionic attacks.

Damage: Beak/claw attacks do 1D4 damage. They mainly rely on their psionic abilities. But when desiring to physically attack someone, they are clever enough to use group tactics and use their mind union ability to their advantage. When they attack they tend to dive in as a group to maximize their effect (their defender can only fend off so many of them). When attacking, roll a 1D12+3 for the number of crows attacking in that action. Roll their attack as a single unit (one 20 sided roll) and their damage is cumulative (e.g. 10 birds doing 3 points each causes 30 points worth of damage). A defender can fend off 1D4 of the attackers with a successful parry or dodge roll (reducing the damage accordingly). Smart players will not combat a group of Scaring Crows in the open, as they will be quickly overwhelmed in numbers and their S.D.C. whittled down in a matter of moments.

In tight quarters their numbers count for little, and they would be able to attack in groups of 1D4 at best. A few lone crows may still try to attack in close quarters, but they’re much more defensible and vulnerable. At this point they may resort to psionics or retreat to find a new advantage, or simply lie in wait for their prey to come out into the open again. (“They have to leave their hiding place sometime!”)

R.C.C. Bonuses: +4 on initiative, +2 to strike (+5 when attacking in a group of 8 or more), +2 to dodge when grounded or in close quarters, +6 to dodge when flying, +2 to save vs magic and psionic attack, +8 to save vs Horror Factor, and is impervious to possession and mind control.

Magic: None.

Psionics: Needs a 10 or higher to save vs psionic attack. I.S.P. is 1D4x10 per Scaring Crow. **G.M. Note:** Typically creating an “I.S.P. pool” for all the Scaring Crows working in unison is easiest to keep track of.

Special: Enhanced Telekinesis: This power is similar to Telekinesis, with the added bonus of being able to create a force similar to “Telekinetic Bullets,” but not quite as focused or as deadly. This power is reserved more for shattering windows

and breaking down doors or any other object that might hinder them when hunting their prey. While normal Telekinesis allows them to open an unlocked door, if it's locked they will resort to this ability. Each attack counts as a psionic attack and does 1D6 damage for each Crow using the attack (again, roll 1D12+3 to determine how many). Each attack costs 20 I.S.P. from the I.S.P. pool, regardless of how many use it in a given attack. The Scaring Crows are not stupid, however, and won't waste their time or energy on a reinforced metal door, but may find a way to see the slide bolt from a different angle (perhaps a window located behind the door) to move it and so on (use their intelligence to their advantage).

Limited Psionic Powers: Bend Metal (3 or 8), Empathy (4), Bio-Regeneration (6), Impervious to Cold (2), and Telekinetic Push (4).

Enemies: They tend to stick to their own kind and “flock together,” as it were, and rarely get involved with other supernatural creatures. However, they do have a serious issue with the Bogey Man when one is on their turf. This is because their psychic bond over their host bodies and their flock is somehow overshadowed by their sensing a Bogey Man on the prowl, and they will respond accordingly. Once the gathering starts, either the Scaring Crows will have to wait till the Bogey Man's prowling has ended, or they may flee their hosts and look for new ones elsewhere. The Scaring Crows don't like a Bogey's ability to hinder their hosts, and may go as far as to try and lead hunters to their lair if they get annoyed with them enough.

Allies: None per se, but practitioners of magic do call on them (summon them) occasionally for services. As they are intelligent and easily blend in, they make great spies and scouts, while their natural abilities make them great enforcers by scaring their opponents and telling them to stay out of their masters' affairs. While they don't mind the work (in fact, they enjoy such activities already), they are strong-willed creatures and don't like being forced into servitude. If somehow set free of their summoning, they would flee the scene unless they were harshly treated during their captivity. In this case, they'd most likely attempt a Murdermare on their former master, if not physically attack them. But there have been rumors of lone Scaring Crows or groups smaller than twenty that have worked alongside both human and demonkind willingly.

Habitat: Anywhere you can find the Corvidae family in large numbers, you can find Scaring Crows.

G.M.'s Eyes Only

Dealing with Scaring Crows provides a unique perspective, in that the player characters' encounters with them can give your players the satisfaction of submitting documented reports of their encounters, and therefore helping educate others about their abilities and weaknesses. When using these creatures in my game, the idea of the characters getting credit for discovering something new about the Scaring Crow was reward enough for the group to investigate them.

I recommend that the Scaring Crow itself shouldn't be the starting or main point of a G.M.'s story. Their nature by design was to be an unexpected encounter that occurs when the G.M.

is having a lack of ideas, where the game becomes too quiet and the players bored, or when they are stumped on their current mission and need to step back from it for a moment. The players could spot these creatures in action while feeding, or perhaps a lone player character is ambushed by a flock for feeding. This would present an opportunity for them to either continue on the current mission/task, or decide to deal with this unknown, new threat and return to their previous agenda later. If they choose to further look into the crows, they will find that the Lazlo Agency has very little to offer and has sent a request out for its members to supply any information they can about them. Their sudden increase in activity is creating more urgency to study them.

The Agency will only be able to offer a few small details about the Scaring Crow, and will include none of its weaknesses. This means the players will have to figure out the Scaring Crow's weaknesses and abilities on their own. They will know about their ability of inducing “nightmares,” and that they travel in flocks, but they won't have any real details available about their Telekinetic abilities, their high intelligence and talent for tactics, and so on. This created an awesome “fear of the unknown” angle in my group, as well as some surprises when they encountered them.

For example, the first encounter with my group was indeed a lone player caught unaware in a park while looking for clues about another monster's activities. When he failed the Induce Fear saving throw, he ran and found a condemned building (he was in a bad part of town), ripped off the wood planks nailed over the front door and ran in, shutting and locking the door behind him. Thinking he was safe, he heard the sounds of planks being ripped off the frame one at a time, and then the door suddenly heaved with a few loud thuds before finally collapsing to the floor. The character watched in horror as the dust settled for a few moments, finally spotting a lone raven calmly walking inside and looking at him before cawing, sending in a flurry of green-eyed crows after him! In the end it went badly, as he was cornered in a janitor's closet and suffered hours of torment, acquiring a phobia of birds (narrowly saving against a fear of enclosed areas as well). This instigated the group to take action by hunting them down and exterminating them all.

Ultimately, the group will be required to think about the various weaknesses of other supernatural beings, and probably will try to come up with their own ideas of what may affect a Scaring Crow. This turned out to be a very interesting scenario, as my group came up with lots of ideas and set traps and what-not to test their adversary and document their findings. Eventually a trap that included live bait (a brave character traveling to their nest, in an old wine cellar they'd previously found, and getting their attention), a large netting trap, and a few fire bombs a la Molotov cocktails flung into the net trap once it was sprung, and the battle with the remaining Crows revealed several details to the players, who in turn submitted their findings to the Lazlo Society.

It's important to note that these are more classic monsters that deal in psychological terror before physical. A death will rarely occur on their behalf (and usually those will be accidental), but the players shouldn't know this fact at first. The players would more than likely assume that the birds are out to kill them all, until after a few feedings (if not after their first feeding experience), they should realize the horrifying thought that these

fiends are not out to kill them, but feed off them. Over time, the player characters could fall prey several times, as the Crows would return to feed on them until they figure out how to fight back, which means they will typically have to flee or be on the defensive in the meantime. There is an opportunity for a good chase scene when fleeing (a staple of the horror movie diet), and point out to the players how relentlessly haunting these creatures can be. This might go so far as to trapping the characters in a location where the Crows can't get to them, but then they'll deal with the fact that the Crows will wait them out for hours, if not days, before finally abandoning the chase.

The idea is to instill a different kind of fear in the characters and provide a different experience for the players. Of course, it need not go this far if the G.M. or the group isn't interested in digging any deeper. The Scaring Crow may not become anything more than the occasional encounter for the players to deal with during a given game session. That being said, the Scaring Crow can work for either purpose. Use your imagination and let it fly (pun intended).

Chrysalis

A Rifts® Short Story

By Mike Leonard

As usual, Levi woke peacefully, only to leap up with a start. The dreams from his childhood made the nightmare of his reality a jolting transition. He forced himself to breathe deep and steady, getting his bearings. His eyes adjusted quickly to the darkness, and he moved purposefully to stoke the faintly glowing embers of the fire. As he did, the fleeting remnants of his dream floated through his mind; his parents putting him to bed, kissing him goodnight, light wisps of snow passing his bedroom window as he fell asleep.

But that was long ago. Before the end. Before the Coming of the Rifts.

He quickly gave himself a sponge bath from the bowl of water on the makeshift table, then dressed to go out. His dwelling was small and cramped, formerly a security office attached to an underground parking garage. When he'd found it four years before he'd realized the intact ventilation duct would allow him a makeshift hearth without suffocation behind the sturdy door. Careful placement of fallen tree branches adequately obscured the smoke outlet, giving him a well concealed safe haven from the harsh world outside.

But today, he thought as he scrambled up the rubble out of the buried garage, *Today is a beautiful day*. Despite the roiling black clouds overhead and the dismal morning light, a smile crossed his covered face. Today he was getting married.

Never in his life after the Cataclysm did he imagine feeling such joy. To tell the truth, when he'd first met Franny he'd found her abrasive, even disturbing. But after a time, she had grown on him. Working together defending her settlement, routing the aliens that continuously plagued the region, they had grown to love each other.

Levi paused, surveying his surroundings. The ice cold wind stirring whiffs of snow made his eyes water, but the scarf covering the rest of his face and head protected his sensitive skin. It was hard to recognize what had been a suburban neighborhood when he was a child. Tons of ash and debris from countless devastating storms had turned it into a wilderness, with tall trees on rolling little hills that had once been houses and businesses. Even the worn path he was on used to be a wide highway; now he could reach his arms out in both directions and touch tree trunks.

It doesn't matter, he thought, *today everything is new. The past is past, this is my world now*. That mantra had helped him to settle with Franny's community, and begin to see a future of living, not just killing.

Abruptly, he stopped his march. Something was wrong; he could tell because his teeth hurt. He sniffed the air, and through the condensation of warm breath on his scarf he detected the unmistakable stench of brimstone permeating the sickly sweet smell of the Blue Line nearby. Drawing his machine pistols, he bolted toward the settlement, ducking low branches and leaping over fallen trees with the agility of a cat.

Entering the stump-filled clearing between the forest and town wall, he could hear the gut-wrenching roar of a demon and the flat "plunk-plunk-plunk" of a grenade launcher firing in rapid succession, drowning out the muted screams of the wall's defenders. He scanned toward the left and could see smoke rising from the line-side wall. Doubling his speed as he leapt over stumps, he ran straight toward its corner, forgoing the gate to flank the offending monster.

Levi paused at the corner, back to the wall and guns at the ready, steadying his breathing. As always before combat, he quickly cleared his mind, imagining a serene pool of water. He could see himself floating in the pool, totally relaxed.

His meditation took only three seconds. With a surge of energy from deep inside, he tore around the wall and in a blur, sprinted the remaining fifty feet to the raging demon, guns blazing. Silver bullets flew from the barrels in a flaming spray, pelting the demon under its outstretched right arm.

The Demon howled in agony, lashing out at the source of its pain; its right arm swung out, flinging a fallen defender at him. Levi dove to the left, narrowly dodging the decapitated body in partial armor as it crumpled in a furrow of red stained snow. He rolled across his shoulders, ending crouched at an angle with his left foot on the side of a stump, and with a surge of energy, he sprang at the demon, again firing with both guns.

His eyes widened at what he saw. The demon held a limp body in its left hand. It was Franny. Her arms dangled limply and her head lolled back, her face and hair matted red with blood. The demon seemed to register Levi's reaction, its eyes darting from him to Franny and back again, and with a terrible smirk, it waved its right hand wide in front of him.

Levi crashed to a halt in mid-leap, his guns turning before him as they impacted the invisible force field the demon had just summoned. Falling to the ground hard, he felt his right arm wrench and knew he'd dislocated his shoulder.

In a muted haze of pain, for a split second everything seemed to go quiet. The only sound he heard was a single "plunk" as one of the wall defenders launched another grenade at the beast.

The air burned in his lungs as he screamed "NO!!" while watching helplessly. The grenade flew at the demon, who quickly defended itself by throwing its left arm up in front of its head. The grenade exploded less than three feet from Franny's limp form. Through the flame and smoke, Levi could see the splatter of gore and knew it wasn't just the demon's arm disintegrating.

Unexpectedly, a wave of calm came over Levi. Getting to his knees, he held his right arm to his side with his left, then fell in a calculated arc on the edge of a stump, popping the joint back together. With a heavy, deep breath he picked up his guns and started running along side the force field between himself and the creature that had destroyed his world.

The demon stepped back from the explosion, dropping Franny's remains and cradling its left arm with its right. With a defiant thrust of its face towards the wall, it roared one more time then turned around and charged back toward the Blue Line. In its fury it didn't seem to notice the significantly smaller form shadowing it to its left.

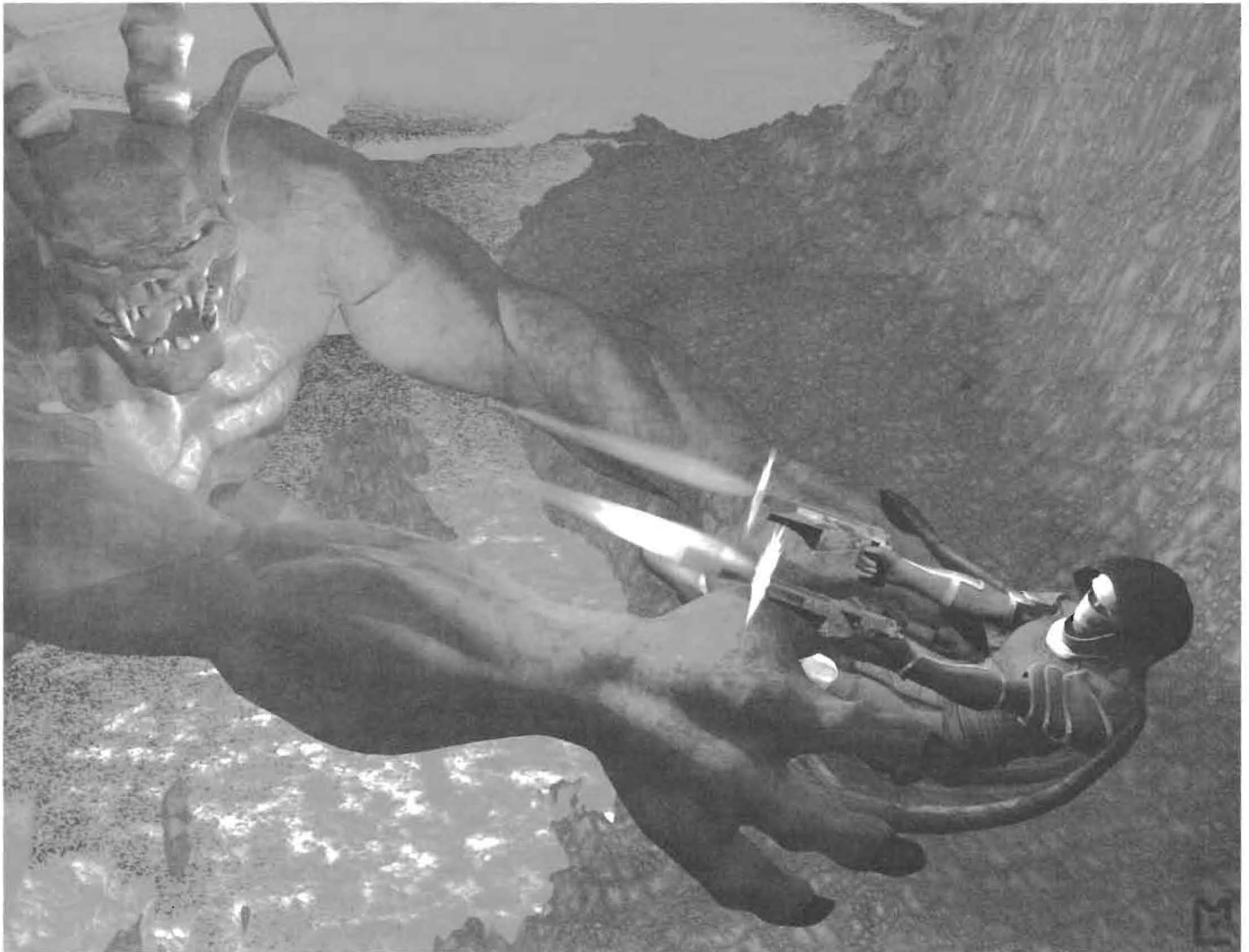
As he ran, Levi holstered one weapon to reload the other, then repeated with the first. A familiar wave of nausea came over him as he approached the Blue Line, but he ignored it to focus on traversing the rough forest terrain that buffered the settlement from its magical energies.

Despite the almost inhuman speed that propelled Levi along, the demon was more than twice his height and had a fast stride as well. When Levi reached the edge of the wood the demon was already halfway across the Blue Line, barreling towards a massive oval rip in the fabric of reality. As a grimace of determination crossed his face, he charged headlong into the Blue Line, intent on getting through that portal before it closed.

His blood boiled with the thought of revenge. He could almost taste the scent of the demon's blood and wanted nothing more than to see it dead. Nothing mattered anymore, just killing that horrible beast. He'd dared to dream of a good life, had felt the warm embrace of love, and now all of that was gone.

The portal was a glassy mass of inscrutable colors. He could see it shrinking as he approached and with a final reserve of strength, he leapt through it. He didn't know what to expect; perhaps a tearing feeling, like he was falling apart, or maybe a numbness. Instead he felt as though he had passed into a blast furnace.

He was prepared to tuck and roll as he hit the ground on the other side, but he wasn't prepared to impact a flat rock face a few feet from the portal. With a grunt he slid down the smooth face and found footing in loose gravel of some sort. Breathing in the heat would have been bad enough had he not knocked the



wind out of himself. His head spun and he collapsed to the ground, clawing at the scarf over his mouth, desperately trying to put air back in his lungs.

After a moment the air did return and he rose to his feet, leaning back against the rock and surveying his surroundings. His parents hadn't been religious when he was young, but after the Coming of the Rifts he'd encountered many people who were. Around him he saw red and black rock, pyres of flame and rivers of black and glowing red lava. This truly must be the Hell he'd been told about.

He looked up to see that the portal was indeed gone, but he was unconcerned. Nothing mattered but the death of the demon. Looking down at the black gravel he could see the massive hoof prints it had left behind and concentrated for a moment. As the sulfur-stained air burned his lungs he could again smell the demon's blood. He jogged after the scent, along the way finding a path up the jagged rock to gain the high ground for his attack.

It didn't take him long to find the beast; it sat next to a flow of lava, resting against a rock outcropping as its arm regenerated. Already the muscles had reformed and the skin was starting to close in around the wound. Levi worked his way around the demon, staying hidden behind rocks until he was positioned to come down on the monster from its left side, then leapt off the rocks, focusing his fire on the wounded arm.

The monster howled with a start and leapt to its hooves, caught off guard. When it saw Levi hit the ground next to it, the demon reached out to grab him. Levi dodged to his left, both guns blazing, his silver bullets hitting their mark on the abomination's chin, causing it to recoil while still trying to grab him.

Levi's guns were empty again. As he holstered one and reached for a fresh clip for the other, the demon grabbed him and began to squeeze. In agony Levi dropped the gun and gasped for air. The hood of his cloak fell back and his hair caught fire as the demon held him down toward the river of lava. He could feel his skin peeling away and his attempts to scream died without air in his collapsing lungs.

Suddenly, a fresh wave of nausea accompanied by renewed vigor overcame him. He managed to get his left arm free and pulled his scarf off, smothering the flames on his head in the process. His skin sloughed off along with the scarf, revealing a fresh layer of pale white underneath. His teeth ached like they never had before and without thought he leaned forward and bit the demon's hand, tearing a chunk of meat away.

The demon's eyes bulged in shock and it dropped the tiny human who had just changed somehow. It could feel its magic draining as it stepped backwards, and try as it might it could not regenerate the damage this person had done to it.

With surprising grace, Levi rolled toward the demon as he hit the ground and leapt up between its arms and chest, his newly sharp teeth finding a grip on the monster's throat. He could feel the creature's life draining into himself, empowering him as his hands gripped the demon's jaw and shoulder and pushed them apart.

With a sickening snap, the demon's neck gave way and blood sprayed from the wound under Levi's mouth, covering him in gooey, dark red gore. Levi rode the corpse to the ground and lifted his head to cry out in victory. He had won. He was the victor. Franny's death had been avenged. His shoulders slumped

as he thought about the woman, about the fleeting dream of living in peace. His body heaved as he began to sob, crying out for the loss and now the hollow victory. What would he do now? How would he go on? Had he truly damned himself to Hell?

Megaversal[®] Monster Showdown!

Recently, a bunch of Palladium's artists and writers decided to have a little competition, to decide who could create the biggest, baddest, giant monster to stalk the Megaverse[®]. We now present this monstrous menagerie for your enjoyment.

Sansarakhaana

The Devourer of the Earth – A Colossal War Mount

Optional Material for Splicers[®]

Art and inspiration by

Brian "Lives to star in the sequel" Manning

Background and text by

Todd "Gets eaten seeing if the coast is clear" Yoho

Rain descends in copious torrents; quick the lurid lightning fly,

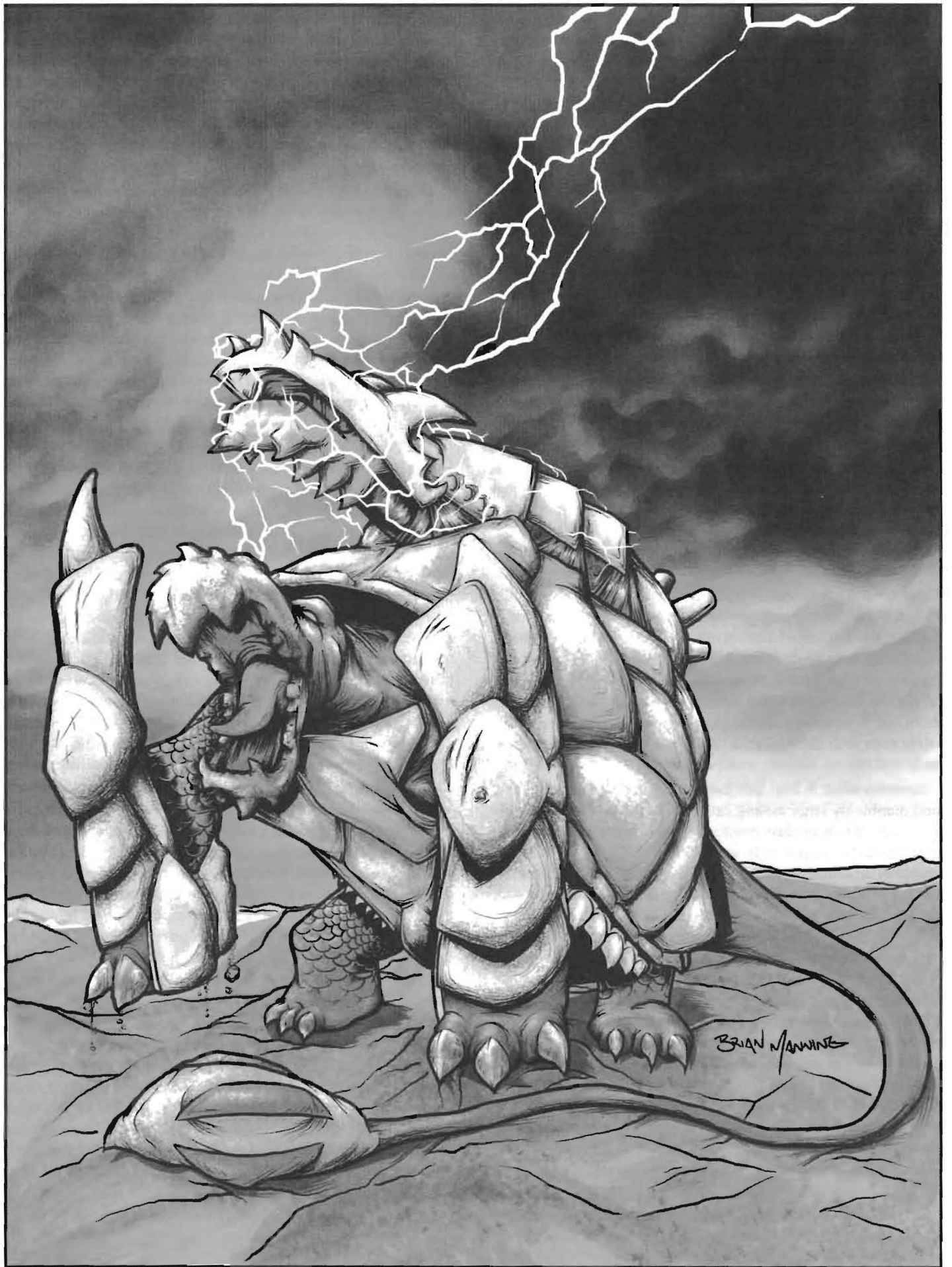
And the wide earth feels a tremor; restless thunders shake the sky,

Few there are who seek their weapons, as their nervous fingers shake,

And their lips they bite in anger, and their frames in tremor quake!

– *The Mahabharata, Book III*

Buried deep within the layered, labyrinthine mind of House Shiva's Enlightened Librarian is an idea of such colossal devastation that somewhere, amid the 0s and 1s that compose the personalities of the Machine, even the artificial intelligence itself derives a sum of authentic fear. It is an idea for a bio-organic doomsday weapon that will eat, stomp, smash, blast and cut a swath of earth-churning death and destruction across the ghoulish Splicers landscape. It will visit this cataclysm on humanity and Machine alike; ironic that it will take the combined genius and resources of both to bring about their mutual assured destruction. It is Sansarakhaana: The Devourer of the Earth.



This apocalyptic weapon has been a part of House Shiva's story since its inception. When implanting her delicious designs in the hypnotic suggestions intended to craft the personality of the Enlightened Librarian, Kali always intended for there to be an endgame. Eventually, a time would come when House Shiva would no longer amuse her, and it would have to be destroyed. What better flavor of irony than to have it come in the form of the Shiva's ultimate weapon, created and released at the height of their conquest and power? But, why not make House Shiva's ultimate weapon be The Ultimate Weapon? A design of such strength and power that it would not only destroy Shiva, but a weapon so terrible that it would burrow to the depths of ALL of the Great Houses and exterminate humanity once and for all? For a fleeting instant, Kali thought that perhaps she was going too far. But then, that was part of the fun in her game, wasn't it? And so, she proceeded ahead with her idea of a bestial, cataclysmic bio-weapon as the crown jewel to her House Shiva designs.

First, it would have to be gigantic. It would have to be something so enormous that the earth itself would feel pain with each of its steps. Sansarakhaana would have to be large enough to consume a mountain if necessary to accomplish its task. It would also have to pack so much raw firepower that it could affect the weather around it. Kali envisioned vast clouds of dust and ash illuminated by cascading arcs of electricity splaying across the sky to announce its impending arrival. Sansarakhaana would be a force of nature, toppling anything in its path, reshaping the earth, dominating the weather, and oblivious to harm!

But what form should it take? Kali wished it to be terrible, yet functional, sturdy and powerful. What kind of beast could shoulder the burden of destroying the world? Why, the beast whose duty it is to bear the burden of *supporting* the world! Within Kali's databanks is the phrase "turtles all the way down" and it gave the answer to her aesthetic dilemma. Among the stories of old there was the belief that the weight of the world ultimately rests atop the back of a turtle. Thus, armed and armored, sturdy and steady, massive and magnificent, Kali had her beast.

Sansarakhaana is first and foremost a delivery system for a mind numbingly large casting cannon that doubles as an electrified battering ram in close quarters combat. It is also armed with a prehensile tail tipped with an 8,000 lb (3600 kg) fluted club capable of smashing targets in a 360 degree arc around itself. Its mouth is combination shovel and scoop design that shreds soil, clay, mineral and stone with equal ease. Not even the advanced techno-hardened armor of the Machine's war robots can withstand the crushing power of its jaws. Sansarakhaana is protected by dense, interlocking bony plates, including long, shield-like forearms that it can duck behind when under attack. Rather than pull its head and limbs within its shell for protection, it crouches low, resting its cannon on the v-notch of the forelimb shields, and fires away at anything strong enough to make it take cover. When on the offensive, it propels its battleship-like mass at surprising speed, focusing the kinetic and electrical energy at the tip of the ram/cannon. For such a defensively built creature, it prefers to take the offense.

As if the impressive cannon, tail and armor that make up the primary capabilities of the beast are not enough, it also serves as a troop delivery system. Contained within its belly is a cavernous air bladder that can hold over 100 warriors in full host ar-

mor. Seeing this monster wading into the thick of combat is bad enough for an unlucky foe, but when its belly opens up to disgorge a legion of Pariahs and Dreadguards directly behind the crushed enemy lines, the result is demoralizing, gruesome, and final. Sansarakhaana is a devastating weapon of war unlike any ever seen on this planet, or on few others. It is a land mobile battleship in almost every respect, but it definitely will not come cheaply.

Because of its massive size and complexity, Sansarakhaana comes with a necessary built-in *do not open until doomsday* contingency. In order to create this colossus, House Shiva would have to devote a Herculean amount of resources to its growth and development. This ensures that Sansarakhaana will not be constructed before they are ready to unleash such a beast. It consequently has the added benefit, for Kali, that the Shivs won't bring this ruinous creation to life before she becomes bored with them! However, for all of its power, it still has to be an obtainable goal. After all, what fun is giving the humans the plans for a doomsday device, only to keep it perpetually out of their reach?

But despite all of Kali's machinations, her intricate designs, and her affection for her new favorite toys, it is entirely possible that House Shiva may never be powerful enough to give birth to this calamitous creation. This may well be best for everyone; the Machine included. In designing the ultimate weapon to unleash on humanity, Kali will have doomed the Machine, too. Sansarakhaana is, as she designed it, an unstoppable force of nature. It derives its sustenance from the earth itself, and it forever hungers. Its weapons can level mountains, and its armored shell can survive orbital bombardment. After Sansarakhaana obliterates humanity, it would turn its eye on the Machine in order to fulfill the integrated Shiv biological imperative; *remove all traces of humanity from the world*. In a perverse lapse of logic, Kali neglected to take into account that the Machine *was created by humanity*, therefore, like House Shiva itself, Sansarakhaana would dedicate equal zeal to eradicating the Machine as it would the other Great Houses! Machine ingenuity and human construction united in their mutual destruction.

It may take a thousand years, or ten thousand, or more, but in its never-ending imperative it would consume the planet bite by bite, using it to fuel its monstrous weapons, reducing all vestiges of man and Machine to rubble. And then proceed to consume the rubble until it is the only remaining creation of humankind and must then destroy itself. Perhaps on some level Kali *intends* to unleash this global cataclysm. Such widespread chaos and destruction would certainly keep her entertained until, well, the literal end of the world!

But there is still hope. This may be one of a million stray thoughts that never reach fruition. But oh how the world will tremble if it does! So, the plans for Sansarakhaana dwell deep within the near-conscious depths of the Enlightened Librarian. Each day, the plans inch ever closer to the surface depending on House Shiva's sphere of influence, their gross resources, their drive and determination to fight, and the subtle machinations of other buried commands and desires of the Enlightened Librarian.

And Kali laughs ever still.

Sansarakhaana

Class: Apocalyptic Heavy Assault War Mount; Troop Transport.

Crew: Typically none. Sansarakhaana is intended to be an autonomous entity given commands via a bio-comm like the Gorehounds. However, it can accommodate one rider neurologically linked. The danger is that anyone linked to Sansarakhaana is subjected to stresses like no other. The sheer size and power of Sansarakhaana will likely drive any Outrider insane with power and a thirst for devastation. This may or may not be an intentional side effect interjected by Kali's implanted design.

M.D.C. by Location:

* Tongue – 1,200

* Eyes (4) – 800 each

** Rider's War Saddle – 250

*** Head – 12,000

Forelimbs (2) – 8,000 each

Forelimb Shields (2) – 24,000 each

Hind Limbs (2) – 7,000 each

Tail – 6,000

Tail Club – 2,000

Casting Cannon/Ram Main Body – 10,000

Casting Cannon/Ram Mouth – 12,000

**** Main Body (Armored Shell) – 38,000

**** Main Body (Armored Underbelly) – 28,000

* A single asterisk indicates a small, low profile, or shielded target that is difficult to hit. An attacker must aim and make a "Called Shot" to hit such targets, and even then is -3 to strike.

** A double asterisk indicates a minuscule, likely imperceptible or shielded target that is difficult to hit. An attacker must aim and make a "Called Shot" to hit such targets, and even then is -8 to strike.

*** Destroying the head will stop the War Mount in its tracks, eliminates all optics and sensory systems, reduces the speed to 10% of max, reduces the number of melee attacks to three total (including the rider's) and negates all bonuses from the animal, but the rider can still fire the weapon systems and make the War Mount walk (at a ponderous rate) for up to 12 hours after the head is gone.

**** Depleting the M.D.C. of the main body will shut down the War Mount completely, rendering it totally useless and effectively destroying and killing it.

Speed:

Running: 100 mph (160 km) maximum, but it takes three full melee rounds to reach that speed and an entire melee round to make a sudden stop. Normal cruising speed is 25 mph (40 km) and the act of running does not tire Sansarakhaana. It can run all day, but does need three hours of sleep every 48 hours to maintain peak efficiency. If pushed without rest, reduce the number of attacks per melee by one and speed by 35% per 48 hours it goes without it.

Leaping: Impossible.

Digging: Sansarakhaana can devour whole caverns worth of rock at a rate of 8 mph (12 km), and can excavate enough space to create a tunnel for itself.

Swimming: Sansarakhaana is a powerful swimmer. It can swim at a speed of 60 mph (96 km) and withstand depths of up to one mile (1.6 km).

Flying: Impossible.

Statistical Data:

Height: 300 feet (91.4 m).

Width: 400 feet (121.9 m).

Length: 500 foot (152.4 m) long body, with a tail length of 600 feet (182.8 m).

Weight: 40,000 tons.

Cargo: Can carry or tow a staggering 12,000 tons behind it.

Physical Strength: 480, Supernatural P.S.

Production Cycle: 10 years gestation, plus 25 years to operational age. At operational age Sansarakhaana has 25% of the listed stats, which are for when it is fully grown. Once actively out in the world, it will reach full maturity in around 10 more years.

Operational Lifetime: Theoretically, Sansarakhaana could live for thousands of years. Like its more mundane cousins, Sansarakhaana has a predisposition to extremely long life. Once it reaches maturity its biological processes will move from a growth prerogative to a sustaining and regenerating prerogative. Unless a biological clock with a termination date is installed in the genetic code, Sansarakhaana will be a menace for an Age.

Trade Value: Priceless.

Bio-Regeneration: 6D6x100 M.D.C. per hour for the Main Body and 3D6x100 M.D.C. for all other locations. Sansarakhaana can regrow severed limbs and weapon systems. Lost limbs can be completely regrown in about 10 to 12 hours!

Horror Factor: 30

Senses & Features: Standard, plus Advanced Eyes, Electromagnetic Vision, Seismic Sense, Armored Head Crest, Increased Metabolic Rate, Reinforced Exo-Skeleton, Resistance to Cold, Resistance to Electricity, Resistance to Heat, Resistance to Kinetic Energy, Resistance to Lasers, and Resistance to Physical Attacks.

Feeding: Sansarakhaana is a lithovore, and needs to eat 6000+ lbs (2700+ kg) of rocks, dirt and minerals per day.

Sleep Requirements: Sansarakhaana only requires three hours of sleep every 48 hours.

Rider: There is an armored/enclosed War Saddle at the base of Sansarakhaana's skull that completely enshrouds the rider. When connected via the neural jacks, the rider experiences sensory input through Sansarakhaana, which is an extreme form of personal sensory deprivation and overwriting that most likely contributes to the high propensity for eventual madness.

Other Data (used when the War Mount is without a rider):

Sansarakhaana is intended to operate without a rider, so it is going to have more autonomous stats than the more traditional

cavalry-type War Mounts. It is more like a gargantuan Gorehound taking orders and directions rather than being ridden. However, it does have an armored War Saddle where a rider can mount and jack in, becoming one with Sansarakhana. This is a dangerous plan of action, as Sansarakhana is unlike any War Mount ever bred. The vast amount of power and destructive potential will drive anyone who establishes a neurological connection insane and they will be consumed by destructive impulses. For every day that a Splicer is jacked into Sansarakhana they must roll a save vs insanity 17 or higher or begin to develop a severe destructive psychosis. Failing 5 total rolls (note that these *do not* have to be sequential) means that the rider is irrevocably lost to madness and desires nothing more than to take Sansarakhana on an apocalyptic spree.

Alignment: Considered Miscreant.

War Mount Attributes: I.Q. 8, M.E. 12, M.A. 8, P.S. see above, P.P. 11, P.E. 200, P.B. 6, Spd see above.

Number of Attacks per Melee: 10

Combat Bonuses: +1 to initiative, +12 to strike, +8 to strike with ranged weapons, +12 to parry, -20 to dodge, +17 to roll with impact, immune to Horror Factor, impervious to toxins, poisons, drugs, disease and mind control.

Equivalent (instinctive) Skills of Note: Dowsing 60%, Excavation/Mining 50%, Land Navigation 80%, Masonry 60%.

Combat Capabilities: Sansarakhana may engage in ranged combat or hand to hand, or a combination of the two. Remember that the clubbed tail is prehensile and can reach over its head and body to attack targets in front of it. Sansarakhana is armed with a casting cannon and a lightning discharge device for ranged combat, but more than makes up for a lack of variety in sheer damage and potential for hand to hand combat.

Restrained Head Butt or Stomp Attack: 2D6x10 M.D.

Full Strength Head Butt or Stomp Attack: 4D6x10 M.D.

Power Head Butt or Stomp Attack: 1D6x100 M.D., but counts as two attacks.

Standing Stomp Attack: 2D8x100 M.D., but counts as two attacks and leaves the soft underbelly exposed.

Battering Ram Attack (plus also see below for electrical discharge attack): 2D6x100 M.D., and has a 01-95% chance of knocking an opponent up to 250 feet (76.2 m) tall off his feet and onto his back. Any opponent under 100 feet (30.4 m) tall is definitely knocked off his feet, but in this case, roll to determine the resulting penalty:

01-33% Sent flying 1D6x10 yards/meters and loses initiative, four melee attacks, plus is dazed for 1D6 melee rounds during which the victim's attacks per round are reduced by half.

34-66% Knocked down and loses initiative and four melee attacks, takes an additional 2D10x10 M.D.

67-00% The opponent is knocked down and trampled by Sansarakhana, suffering an additional 2D6x100 M.D.!

Kick with Front Legs: 5D6x10 M.D.

Kick with Rear Legs: 1D4x100 M.D.

Body Block/Ram: 2D6x100 M.D., and has a 01-85% chance of knocking an opponent up to 150 feet (45.7 m) tall off his feet and onto his back. If so, the target loses initiative and four melee

attacks. A body block/ram counts as only one attack for Sansarakhana.

Body Flip/Throw with Tail: 4D6x10 M.D., plus victim loses initiative and three melee attacks.

Swat with Club Tail: 2D6x100 M.D.

Full Strength Club with Tail: 5D6x100 M.D.

Bite with Shovel Mouth: 3D8x10 M.D.

Sansarakhana Bio-Weapon Systems:

1. Cataclysmic Casting Cannon: Mounted on the back of Sansarakhana is a massive casting cannon that doubles as an electrified battering ram. The cannon fires boulder-sized projectiles with the force of an incoming meteor.

Primary Purpose: Devastation.

Secondary Purpose: Assault/Anti-Morale and Terror.

Mega-Damage: 6D8x10 per single shot, 2D8x100 per four round burst.

Rate of Fire: Each shot or burst counts as one attack.

Effective Range: 10 miles (16 km).

Payload: 60 rounds.

Bonus: + 5 to strike.

2. Lightning Discharge Battering Ram Attack: In addition to the physical damage inflicted by being rammed by the shrouded casting cannon, it can also unleash a storm of raw electrical power on impact.

Primary Purpose: Close Combat/Anti-Materiel.

Secondary Purpose: Assault/Terror.

Mega-Damage: In addition to the battering ram damage listed above, the lightning discharge does 4D12x10 M.D.

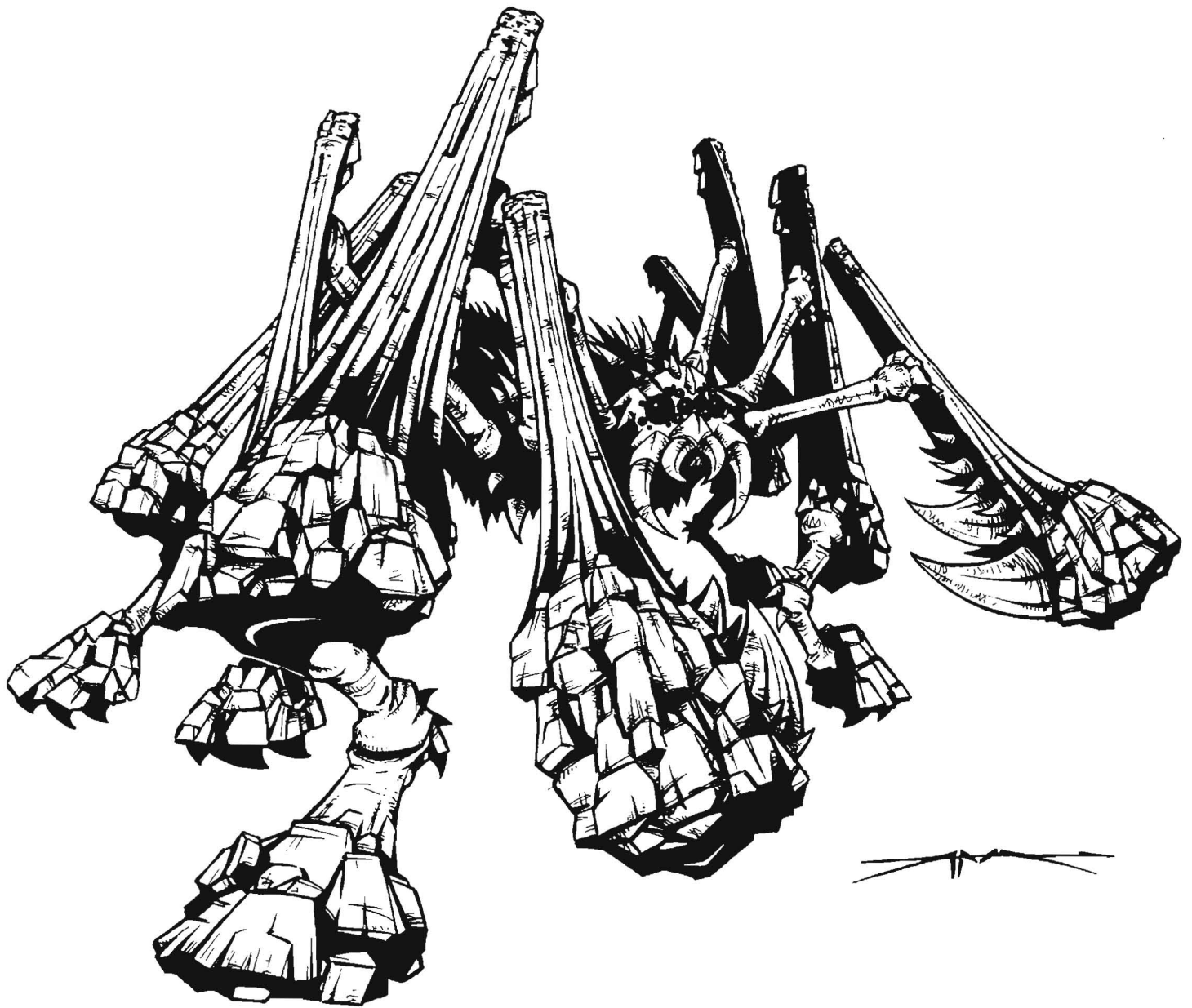
Rate of Fire: Each blast is considered simultaneous with the battering ram attack.

Effective Range: 100 feet (30.5 m) or touch.

Payload: Effectively unlimited.

Bonus: None.

3. Hand to Hand Combat: Rather than use long-range weapons, the rider or a riderless animal can engage in hand to hand combat using its head, feet, body and battering ram. Because the rider is completely enveloped by the War Saddle, he cannot use personal handheld weapons while jacked into Sansarakhana.



The Eldritch Spider of the Devil's Tower

**A Monstrosity of the Ancient World,
reawakened in order to destroy mankind!**

Optional Material for Rifts® & Heroes Unlimited™

By Allen Manning and Josh Sinsapaugh

Illustration by Allen Manning

To the indigenous people of North America, the Devil's Tower National Monument of northeastern Wyoming has always been sacred. Known to the Lakota people as *Mato Tipila* (the Bear Tower), the landmark rises prominently 1,267 feet (386 m) above the surrounding wilderness, overseeing a land that is as every bit as beautiful and lonely as the Tower itself. It

is thus no surprise that the truly iconic formation has made its way into the folklore of several tribes. To them, Mato Tipila was raised to save the lives of children fleeing the wrath of either Bear himself, or several average bears. Thwarted by the sudden change of the terrain, the great beast's (or beasts') claws left large scratches in the rock as he (or they) tried in vain to ascend the tower.

To scientists, however, the National Monument is nothing more than an igneous rock intrusion that formed without the aid of any elder gods or spirits. There is nothing magical about the Devil's Tower, as magic doesn't exist – its solemn beauty carved out by natural forces in a completely random turn of events. Even the ominous name holds no weight, itself a random occurrence, granted to the monument via a translation error courtesy of Col. Richard Irving Dodge's interpreter (or so the legend goes).

Unfortunately, the self-assured scientists couldn't be more wrong.

The Devil's Tower Spider in Heroes Unlimited™

Perhaps the Devil's Tower was formed by the whim of Wakan Tanka (the Lakota creator spirit) in order to save some children from the wrath of Bear, or perhaps it wasn't. Unless someone can time travel, no one will ever know. What is known though is that the Tower certainly was not formed by anything as natural or generic as an intrusion of igneous rock, this fact becoming more than apparent on June 21st, when the monument actually began to move! The people of Wyoming, the U.S.A., and indeed the world watched in horror as the tower broke apart, its sides unfolding into eight terrifying legs – revealing a truly gargantuan spider-like creature. Scientists, especially geologists and hardcore skeptics, were baffled at the turn of events, and were at a loss to describe how or why the massive structure was moving slowly across the state of Wyoming. Even more baffling, and twice as terrifying, was the fact that the “Tower” seemed to be seeking out and destroying human settlements, toppling pockets of population like dominoes. Worse yet, the “Devil's Tower Spider” (as all the major news media outlets have dubbed it) *currently* appears to be making its way deliberately toward larger population centers in Colorado!

Meanwhile, unlike their counterparts in academia, the Native American elders aren't baffled by the movement of the Devil's Tower. Sure, they're just as terrified as anyone else, but at least they know what is going on. Apparently, the same forces that shaped Mato Tipila to save mankind are also at work to move the tower to destroy him. Dissatisfied with how Man has treated the planet, nature is biting back, and biting back hard – awakening the sleeping giant that is the Devil's Tower and letting her (yes, her) loose on an unsuspecting world. Unless stopped, the monster will surely lay waste to the city of Denver and then continue to make its way eastward, obliterating all that Man has worked to achieve on the North American continent.

The Devil's Tower Spider in Rifts®

The Coming of the Rifts changed a lot of things. The oceans rose, the landscape changed, cities fell, and eldritch forces from Man's worst nightmares slithered out of the darkest corners of the Megaverse, claiming parts of the shattered world as their own. However, one thing that was left completely unchanged by the Great Cataclysm was the Devil's Tower in the Old American Empire State of Wyoming. Somehow, perhaps by fate, or perhaps because of the major ley line nexus that it seemed to mark, the Tower remained unscathed, standing like a beacon of the past over a hellish new world.

This all changed on the Summer Solstice in the year 109 P.A. Suddenly, with no warnings to presage such a disaster, the monument *moved*. Even the air seemed to shake as eight hellish legs, once the sides of the monument, unfolded to reveal a spider-like monstrosity that immediately set about to finish the job that the Great Cataclysm started all those years ago. Anti-White factions in the nearby Casper Preserve at first rejoiced at the news as word flooded in about the “Great Stone Spider,” as they assumed that the spirits had awakened some ancient guardian to help wipe the unworthy from the continent. Jubilation quickly turned to horror as the Devil's Tower Spider turned on the Casper Preserve, scattering the Lakota People there like feathers in

the wind. Those that tried to stay and fight quickly perished, swept away with a primordial savagery that seemed to know no mercy or restraint.

After the Casper Preserve was left in ruins (leaving the Lakota to rebuild all they had lost), the Great Spider continued eastward, stories of its sheer size and savagery preceding it as it carved a swath across the Old American Empire's wilderness. According to those few that have been observing it, it is making for the Domain of Man – perhaps making a beeline straight for the undisputed hub of North American civilization: the City of Chi-Town!

The Devil's Tower Spider Itself

Topping out at over 1,500 feet (457 m) tall, the Devil's Tower Spider/Great Stone Spider is truly an impressive and horrifying beast. Resembling in many respects the terrestrial spider, only a thousand times more terrifying, the monstrosity is able to move with surprising speed (30 mph/48 km) and precision as it carves its way across America. In fact, the terrifying gargantuan arachnid is alleged to have jumped gorges, climbed mountains, forded rivers, and negotiated all manner of terrain as it exited the State of Wyoming. Apparently able to differentiate between the works of nature and Man, the creature has so far opted not to go around, over, or between manmade structures – preferring instead to lay them to waste. Even the strongest, most well built buildings have been toppled like a child's building blocks, though with twice the ferocity and indifference. Truly an unstoppable force from the ancient world, the monster's hide is reputed to make ballistic steel seem like tissue paper, and the monster itself seems to be able to destroy *anything*.

If the behemoth has a weakness, it might just be its eyes, as the monster is rumored to have shielded them whenever it has been fired upon with heavy military ordnance. This has yet to be substantiated though, and might just be a falsehood born from the mass hysteria that the Devil's Tower Spider has spawned. Whatever the case, many have agreed that this lone tip may be the only chance that anyone has to fell the beast – and everyone is praying that it is more than just a rumor.

Even with all this being said, three questions remain: What *is* the Devil's Tower Spider? Where the hell did it come from? And why did it suddenly awaken one day? The latter question is perhaps the easiest to answer, as the increased magical energies of the Solstice likely had a hand in stirring the creature from its dormancy. But why now? Surely, it could have awakened on some other Solstice (or better yet, *during* the Great Cataclysm), so why now? Again, if rumors can be believed, a group of doomsday cultists, transfixed by the Devil moniker of the National Monument, are known to have made a pilgrimage there a few days before it awoke. They haven't been heard of since (if they even existed), though if they are responsible, finding them might be one of the best leads in finding out either how to destroy the beast or lull it back into eternal slumber. However, what it is or where it came from is unknown, with the only available explanations being those offered by the Native American elders or the fallback theory that the creature has alien origins.

The Eldritch Spider of the Devil's Tower

– Ancient Evil of Unknown Origin

Also known as: “The Great Stone Tower” and “the Devil’s Tower Spider.”

Alignment: Unknown, the thought processes of the gigantic spider are impossible to quantify; it lives only to destroy. Considered/assumed Diabolic.

Attributes: I.Q. 19 (very cunning, despite its “destroy everything” mentality), M.E. 28, M.A. 2, Supernatural P.S. 80, P.P. 20, P.E. 32, P.B. 3, Spd (running, climbing, or swimming) 44.

M.D.C. by Location:

Forelegs (the sides of the Devil’s Tower) (8) – 20,000 each

Upper Legs (8) – 5,000 each

Feet (8) – 8,000 each

“Knees” (6) – 9,000 each

Scythe Blades (4; two per front leg) – 3,000 each

Large Eyes (4) – 500 each

Small Eyes (2) – 240 each

Mandibles (2) – 600 each

* Head – 6,000

* Main Body – 40,000

* Destroying the head or main body will incapacitate the Eldritch Spider until it can regenerate (which generally takes 2D6 weeks).

S.D.C. Note: For Heroes Unlimited™, simply double the M.D.C. values for S.D.C. (so 240 M.D.C. becomes 480 S.D.C.), and apply a Natural A.R. of 18 to all areas except the eyes (A.R. of 12 for them).

Horror Factor: 19

Size: Roughly 1,500 feet (457 m) tall and 1,000 feet (305 m) in diameter.

Weight: Incalculable; millions of tons.

P.P.E.: 6000, though it cannot cast magic.

Natural Abilities: Does not breathe air, hawk-like nightvision: 2 miles (3.2 km) and day vision: 4 miles (6.4 km), see the invisible, sense intelligent being population centers (more than 10,000 people) within a 100 mile (160 km) radius, and has an unlimited depth tolerance. Has no need to eat (feeds off residual P.P.E. in the air, from ley lines, and from those it kills), drink, or rest, and can operate indefinitely at top speed. Detect Ambush 80%, Climb 90%/0% (though it will just as well smash through most obstacles made by man), and Swimming 98%.

Super Bio-Regenerate (Special): The Eldritch Spider heals miraculously fast, regenerating 1D6x10 M.D.C. to every location on its body per melee round, and will even come back from complete oblivion within 2D6 weeks. The creature can be destroyed though, just not by brute force (see *Vulnerabilities*).

Limited Invulnerability (Special): The Eldritch Spider is completely impervious to normal S.D.C. attacks, pain (except for the eyes), heat, fire (both S.D.C. and M.D. fire, including plasma), cold, disease, toxins, drugs, and radiation (but not

from the initial blast of an atomic bomb). The spell *Desiccate the Supernatural* has no effect.

Attacks per Melee: Eight attacks per melee round!

Damage: A stomp with one of the creature’s feet does a whopping 1D6x100 M.D., while a kick from one of its legs inflicts 1D4x100 M.D. and is likely (80% chance) to send anything that weighs less than 10 tons into the air, causing the victim to fly back 10 feet (3 m) per every 10 points of damage dealt (victims lose initiative and two melee attacks); victims weighing over 10 tons fly half as far and only have half the percentage chance (40%) of being thrown back in the first place; victims weighing over 100 tons are simply knocked over (20% chance), losing initiative and a melee attack; victims weighing less than a ton are automatically thrown back, flung twice the distance, and lose all their melee attacks. A bite inflicts 3D6x10 M.D., and a slash or stab with the large scythe blades inflicts 1D4x100+100 M.D.C. (subtract 50 M.D.C. per scythe blade that is destroyed) and is only plausible against a foe over 100 feet (30 m) tall.

Mule Kick (Special): Using both of its back legs, the Eldritch Spider can kick at large buildings or any other large targets (at or over 500 feet/152 meters tall), inflicting a tremendous 2D6x100 M.D.C.! Counts as three melee attacks and can only be used once per melee round.

Damage Note: The Eldritch Spider is a primordial creature of pure magic, and thus its physical attacks *can* injure beings that can only be harmed by magic. Furthermore, it still deals full damage to creatures and materials that take half damage from kinetic attacks. Creatures and materials that are impervious to magic are immune to the spider’s attacks (but may still be flung by a kick or crushed to death beneath its feet). In an S.D.C. setting, directly convert damage values as S.D.C. (so 1D4x100 M.D. becomes 1D4x100 S.D.C.) and add the creature’s P.S. damage bonus.

Bonuses: Despite its frightening size and destructive power (or perhaps because of it) the monster has few bonuses: No bonus to initiative and is automatically last at the start of a melee round, +6 to strike and parry, cannot dodge, +8 to save versus magic, and +10 to save versus psionic attack. Potential victims that are within 200 feet (60 m) of the monster are -10 to dodge the creature’s stomps and/or kicks, while those dumb enough to get within ten feet (3 m) are -16 to dodge and do not benefit from any bonuses aside from those provided by the P.P. attribute.

Vulnerabilities: There are not many ways to truly hurt or destroy the Eldritch Spider. What follows are the few options that anyone wishing to take down the behemoth have:

1. **Go For the Eyes!:** Once destroyed, the eyes will not regenerate for 1D6 days, during which time any attackers can assault the head of the creature from the inside (by shooting into the empty eye sockets or climbing inside and hacking away, etc.). Any attacks made inside the head or through the empty eye sockets deal quadruple damage to the creature’s head and regenerate at one tenth the normal rate. If the head can be destroyed, so too will the creature, collapsing into a giant pile of rubble.

2. **Nuclear Armageddon:** Nuclear weapons are one of the many ways that the Devil’s Tower Spider can be incapacitated.

tated – although it will normally just regenerate once enough time has passed. However, if the M.D.C. of the spider’s main body can effectively be reduced to negative 100,000 M.D.C. (-100,000 M.D.C.) via the use of a nuclear device (or devices), then the beast will have been completely atomized and will be unable to return to life. Unfortunately, this would require a large amount of nuclear ordnance, thus reducing the surrounding area into a radioactive dead zone for several decades (if not longer).

3. The Phoenix Manuscript: The Eldritch Spider was indeed awoken by a doomsday cult that became the great spider’s first victims. The cultists learned of the spider and how to awaken it by translating an ancient scroll known as *the Phoenix Manuscript* (so named because it was discovered near Phoenix, Arizona, not because of any connection to the legendary bird) with a spell to awaken the monstrosity. Luckily, it just so happens that the manuscript also has the spell to put the monster back to sleep. If the spell can be read out loud within a mile (1.6 km) of the monster, it will fall back to sleep – turning back into the Devil’s Tower. Unfortunately, the spell is very long (equal to about three pages) and will take five minutes to read aloud, during which time the Devil’s Tower Spider will seek out the reader in an attempt to destroy him or her. The spell also has a large P.P.E. cost: 2000. **Note:** On *Rifts Earth*, the manuscript can be found in a small library in Lazlo, while the Library of Congress contains the manuscript on the Earth of *Heroes Unlimited*. In both cases, a former member of the cult will approach the player characters to inform them that he or she knows how to lull the demon back to sleep.

Magic: None.

Psionics: None.

Enemies: All intelligent beings.

Allies: None per se. The Eldritch Spider doesn’t mean to harm wildlife, with any plants or animals maimed by its movements being thought of as collateral damage by the great beast.

Gulgoth

Demon Transport and Siege Weapon

Optional Material for

Rifts® and the Minion War™

By Brandon Aten

Illustration by Nick Bradshaw

The Gulgoth derives its name from a term in an ancient language referencing its massive, oversized head. The hideous creature was designed by Modeus and his generals to fill a special forces transport and assault role for the impending war with Dyval and any of the forces in the Megaverse that stand in their way. Modeus was able create these huge monstrosities with the aide of the Omega Book, much to his pleasure.

The Gulgoth is a combination troop transport and siege weapon, which fills the void between Netherbeasts and the Soul

Eater Transport. Capable of entangling enemy troops with globs of corrosive mucus, damaging sound waves, and a huge troop complement with many ways of being deployed, a single Gulgoth can level a small town, and multiple can destroy huge cities and troop encampments. Modeus and his generals have only used the Gulgoth in a few operations and when they have done so, they have utilized overwhelming force.

One of the most frightening sights that anyone caught in the middle of a battle during the Minion War can see, looking out from the battlements, is a troop of Gulgoth vomiting globs over the city walls that rupture like water balloons, releasing troops and allowing them to attack; or a Gulgoth ripping itself open only to see Alu running out onto the field of battle. A Gulgoth opening its mouth and dozens of Demon Flies swarming out, or its head taking a direct hit with a missile, cracking like an egg, and allowing Gargoyles to engage in aerial combat, or the Gulgoth pounding giant robots into scrap metal or minions of Dyval into goo with its giant reinforced fists, are also common sights.

The hulking, brutish creature has an incredibly low intelligence, and only lives to hurt, eat, and destroy, but at the base of its oversized skull there is a special compartment where a demonic pilot can control the beast. Hundreds of barbed bundles of nerves rip through the flesh of the pilot, connecting him to the nervous system of the Gulgoth, giving the pilot complete control, but also making it impossible for anything but a supernatural being with bio-regeneration to pilot the creature.

Gulgoth, NPC Monster

Alignment: Diabolic. These creatures live only to inflict pain on other creatures.

Attributes: I.Q. 1D6, M.E. 1D6+12, M.A. 1D6+2, P.S. 3D6+50, P.P. 1D6+10, P.E. 2D6+30, P.B. 1D6+2, Spd 4D6+20. Attributes are considered supernatural.

Average Size: 480 feet (146 m).

Weight: 200 tons. Approximately 400 tons fully loaded.

M.D.C. by Location:

Upper Arms (2) – 12,300 each

Forearms (2) – 16,500 each

Hands (2) – 9,100 each

Legs (2) – 19,400 each

Tail – 13,200

* Tail Spikes (3) – 460 each

* Eyes (2) – 160 each

* Teeth – 300 each

* Tongue – 400

** Head – 4,000

*** Pilot’s Compartment – 16,200

**** Main Body – P.E.x1,000

***** Belly – 3,700

* Items marked with a single asterisk are difficult to hit, so the attacker must make a Called Shot, and even then is -5 to strike.

** When the head is destroyed, the creatures inside are free to fly out at will.



Big-Bad-bradshaw
2008

*** When the pilot's compartment is destroyed (but only when a Gulgoth is being piloted), the pilot is killed and the Gulgoth is destroyed in the same manner as if the main body was destroyed.

**** When the Main Body is destroyed, the Gulgoth collapses and melts into a pool of acid that covers a 100 foot (30.5 m) radius, doing 1D4x10 M.D. to everything in the area, per melee, for 2D6 minutes.

***** If the belly of the Gulgoth is destroyed, the creatures inside pour out onto the ground and are free to attack at will.

Horror Factor: 18 (19 when unloading its troops through an open belly).

P.P.E.: 5D6+P.E.

Natural Abilities: Impervious to toxic gasses, poison and mind control, bio-regenerates 2D4x10 M.D. per melee, hands are large enough to completely engulf target 50 feet (15.2 m) or smaller, see the invisible.

Cargo Capacity: The Gulgoth can carry 80 Gargoyles (with Gargoyle Mages and Gargoyle Lords mixed in) in the hollow cranial cavity. They can be replaced with 150 Demon Bats, or 300 Demon Flies. 1D4x10 flying creatures can be released per action simply by opening the mouth and allowing the creatures to fly out. 50 Alu or Gurgoyles, or 10 Magots, can be carried in the swollen belly of the Gulgoth. Creatures carried in the belly are released in two ways. The first is to be vomited out in self-contained globs of a mucus-like substance. These globs can contain up to ten of the smaller creatures, or one Magot, and can be launched 1,000 feet (305 m). The second form of unloading these troops is for the Gulgoth to grip the center of its belly with its massive hands and to pull it open, regardless of how much M.D.C. is left. The remaining creatures then spill out onto the ground, ready to fight.

Tail Attack: The Gulgoth mainly uses its tail to attack large, slow-moving or stationary targets, but can attack human-sized targets, demons and power armor troops. This is usually done by thrusting the tail through the ground and coming up from beneath the target (target is -8 to dodge or parry).

Glob Attack: The Gulgoth can vomit globs of a sticky, corrosive substance that is a combination of its acidic blood and the substance used to launch troops. These globs will affect a 30 foot (9.1 m) area. Anyone caught in the affected area will see their attacks halved and will be -8 to strike, parry, and dodge. The Gulgoth can fire these globs 2,000 feet (610 m).

Sonic Attack: The Gulgoth can roar, causing 6D6 M.D. of sonic damage to everything within 500 feet (152 m).

Teleport: The Gulgoth can teleport 500 miles (800 km) if the location is known by the pilot. The creature cannot teleport on its own.

Dimensional Teleport: The Gulgoth can dimensionally teleport at 32% plus the Dimensional Teleport ability of the pilot. The creature cannot dimensionally teleport on its own.

Demonic Pilot: The Gulgoth can be piloted by any Greater Demon, but most often a Gallu, Brek-Shell, or Baal-Rog. The pilot's compartment is filled with small, barbed harpoons

(about 40 in all) that all fire into the pilot, doing 1D6 M.D. each once the pilot is seated.

Magic: None.

Psionics: None.

I.S.P.: 1D6

Combat: 8 attacks per melee. When piloted, attacks per melee are the attacks of the pilot +4.

Combat Bonuses (in addition to attribute bonuses): +2 on initiative, +5 to strike, +3 to strike with ranged attacks, +4 to parry, +2 to dodge, +3 to roll with punch, fall, or impact, +1 to Perception Rolls.

Damage:

Restrained Punch: As per Supernatural Strength.

Full Strength Punch: As per Supernatural Strength +1D6x10 M.D.

Power Punch: As per Supernatural Strength +2D6x10 M.D.

Tail Attack: 3D6x10 M.D.

Allies: None. They are too brutish to have any true allies. They will follow orders of the highest ranking demon in their troop complement, unless they have orders from a higher master.

Enemies: Humans, minions of Dyval, and anyone they are ordered to attack.

Habitat: They can be found throughout Hades but have no natural habitat.

Philly Brood Gulper

Optional Material for Rifts®

By Irvin L. Jackson

Illustration by Nick Bradshaw

"It swallows you alive, and that's where the real nightmare begins."

This giant, horrific beast is a threat to all living creatures, both large and small. It is not that the Brood Gulper is an incredible fighter by itself, although it is extremely capable and dangerous, but it is its reproduction rate and method of reproduction that strikes fear into every sane being it encounters.

The Philly Brood Gulper, named so because they first began to appear around and in the ruins of Philadelphia, appears engineered for one specific function: to breed the toughest offspring possible. And it breeds them in scores. To ensure that its offspring are the most capable and powerful of its kind, this semi-intelligent monstrosity keeps its numerous brood inside a massive, rigid, hive-like egg sac. Mostly hollow, this sac is as large as a stadium and has air to breathe, and the walls are lined with dozens of baby versions of the parent creature (1D4x10+10 at any time). The Brood Gulper makes a habit of eating anything roughly man-sized or larger that it can fit in its mouth (which could be anything up to the size of an elephant). But it does not eat them to consume them. It has a special throat that redirects live prey into the egg sac, which is actually its own personal coliseum of death!

The poor victims are swallowed, deposited in this dark, dank hell-on-earth, and then attacked by the Brood Gulper's off-



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spring. The offspring generally attack one-on-one, but will fight larger groups with equal-sized groups of hatchlings. This is the “winner takes all” contest from hell. If the victim who was eaten can manage to kill one of the hatchlings, and remove its small, undeveloped egg sac, the other hatchlings will leave it alone. Removing the egg sac releases pheromones which tell the Brood Gulper that the hatchling has won, and it deploys dozens of tentacles. These tentacles remove the victor from the egg sac, depositing him through an orifice (a wholly unpleasant experience) back outside, thinking it is releasing its hatchling. If the hatchling wins, however, the parent-beast senses it and the tentacles remove the baby instead... introducing a new terror into the world that dealt death and tasted blood before it was even born!

Obviously, it is very important that the person attempting to escape this cauldron of death actually gets an egg sac before getting free.

The dead bodies of its victims are eaten by the hatchlings, and the remains consumed by the host creature. However, any unnatural substances (like guns, gems, armor, etc.), are coated in resin-like goo and end up stuck in odd places within the hive walls.

Like its hatchlings, the adult Brood Gulper is a vicious monster whose goal is to attack and consume as many smaller creatures as possible. It is extremely territorial, and will attack any other creature that threatens its dominance in a 100 mile (160 km) radius. Specifically, it will target other large monsters and things that may scare off the smaller creatures (humans and D-Bees) that it eats to make its children stronger. Interestingly, this has also led to it attacking armies of technologically-equipped invaders as well, as it realizes that war and violence are just as likely to drive people off as other monsters.

The Brood Gulper’s outer defenses are more developed versions of those wielded by the hatchlings. It has 16 legs, eight on each side. The front six legs are not critical for balance, and each one is tipped with a giant, 10 to 20 foot (3-6 m) long, scythe-like claw. Two of the larger real legs have massive, gripping hands that can tear, pry and shovel groups of victims into its deadly innards. Two sets of curved, saw-like mandibles add to its arsenal. It attacks by rushing onto its enemies, bearing them down with weight and mass. It attempts to hold them in place with the larger, hand-like appendages while slashing repeatedly with its front arm blades. It will also try to bite and tear at any exposed portions.

Most militaries and cities of any size with any significant military power will send out a force to destroy one of these beasts the moment it is sighted. However, smaller towns and villages usually do not have the firepower to repel these monsters, and just evacuate until it has passed them by.

The most accepted method of attack is by air, since the creature has no ranged attack capabilities. However, it does understand when it is overmatched, and will hide under massive overhangs, burrow into the earth (it can tear through bedrock), or submerge itself in a lake or other large body of water.

Even when you succeed in destroying the main creature, you’ve likely released an even bigger nightmare for the surrounding area. On death, the egg sac bursts and the hatchlings inside run wild, each seeking to kill and kill and kill. Because

they were not released as they should have been, they do not understand their purpose, and keep killing for a biological function that can never be filled. Each hatchling must be hunted down and destroyed before they render an entire area devoid of life.

Philly Brood Gulper

Alignment: Considered Miscreant; while not truly evil, this is a vicious, nasty predator that destroys all life.

Attributes: I.Q. 2D4 (high animal intelligence), M.E. 2D6, M.A. 1D4, P.S. 40+2D6 (10+3D6 for hatchlings), P.P. 3D6, P.E. 4D6+10 (4D6 for hatchlings), P.B. 1 (it doesn’t get much uglier than these things), Spd 2D4x10 (1D4x10 for hatchlings). Strength and Endurance are Supernatural for both hatchlings and adults.

M.D.C.(adult): Main Body: 2D6x1,000, Egg Sac: 3D6x1,000, Inner Walls of Egg Sac: 200 per 10 feet (3 m) of wall.

M.D.C.(hatchling): 3D6x10 M.D.

Horror Factor: 17 for the adult, 13 for the hatchlings.

P.P.E.: 1D4x10

Size: 200 to 300 feet tall (61 to 91.4 m). (4 to 7 feet/1.2-2.1 m tall for hatchlings).

Weight: 400 tons (300 lbs/135 kg for hatchlings).

Average Life Span: Unknown, grows to maturity in about 2 years.

Natural Abilities: Nightvision 300 feet (91.4 m), superior vision (can spot a human-sized target at 2 miles/3.2 km range), impervious to mind control, Climb 65%, Prowl 40%, track by sight 70%, burrow 100 feet (30.5 m) per melee round. (Same for hatchling, except reduce Nightvision to 90 feet/27.4 m and burrowing to 10 feet/3 m per melee round.)

Attacks per Melee: Eight! (Four for hatchlings.)

Bonuses: +4 to strike and parry, +4 to save vs psychic attack, +6 to save vs poison, and +10 to save vs Horror Factor, all in addition to attribute bonuses. (Hatchlings are more agile than adults, and have an additional +2 to initiative and +4 to dodge.)

Damage (adult): Killing bite does 2D6x10 M.D., scythe claw attack does 1D4x10 M.D., kick does 6D6 M.D. plus 70% chance of knockdown on any target under 40 feet (12.2 m) tall (loses one attack and initiative), tearing attacks with larger hands do 6D6 M.D.

Special: Swallowing bite takes two attacks, and can swallow 2D6 human-sized targets or one robot or medium-sized vehicle. The bite attack receives a +6 to strike, cannot be dodged, but only does 2 M.D. This ensures that the creature’s hatchlings only fight worthy opponents, as no S.D.C. creature can survive the attack unless they are wearing armor or are otherwise protected. Those who are swallowed are deposited inside the egg sac, where they must fight for their lives against the creature’s hatchlings until they can obtain a severed egg sac (which requires a Demon and Monster Lore skill check to know) or blast their way out (which elicits an attack by a swarm of 2D4 hatchlings instead of just one).

Note: Anyone who fails their save vs Horror Factor against this creature and is swallowed must make a save vs insanity to avoid a permanent phobia (roll on the random chart in **Rifts® Ultimate Edition**).

Damage (hatchling): Killing bite does 4D6 M.D., scythe claw attack, kick and tearing attacks all do 3D6 M.D. When using scythe claws, treat as if the hatchlings have the skill Paired Weapons.

Magic: None.

Psionics: None.

Habitats: Cool climates to temperate climates, mostly found along the Eastern Seaboard, from Madhaven to Detroit. Native to an alien dimension, usually coming through Rifts as a hatchling.

Enemies: All life.

Note: There are some adventurers, mostly Crazies, who specifically try to get swallowed. Armed with explosives, they collect any valuable loot, and then blow their way out of the wall and escape with jet packs and small flying vehicles. Obviously, most people think that's insane.

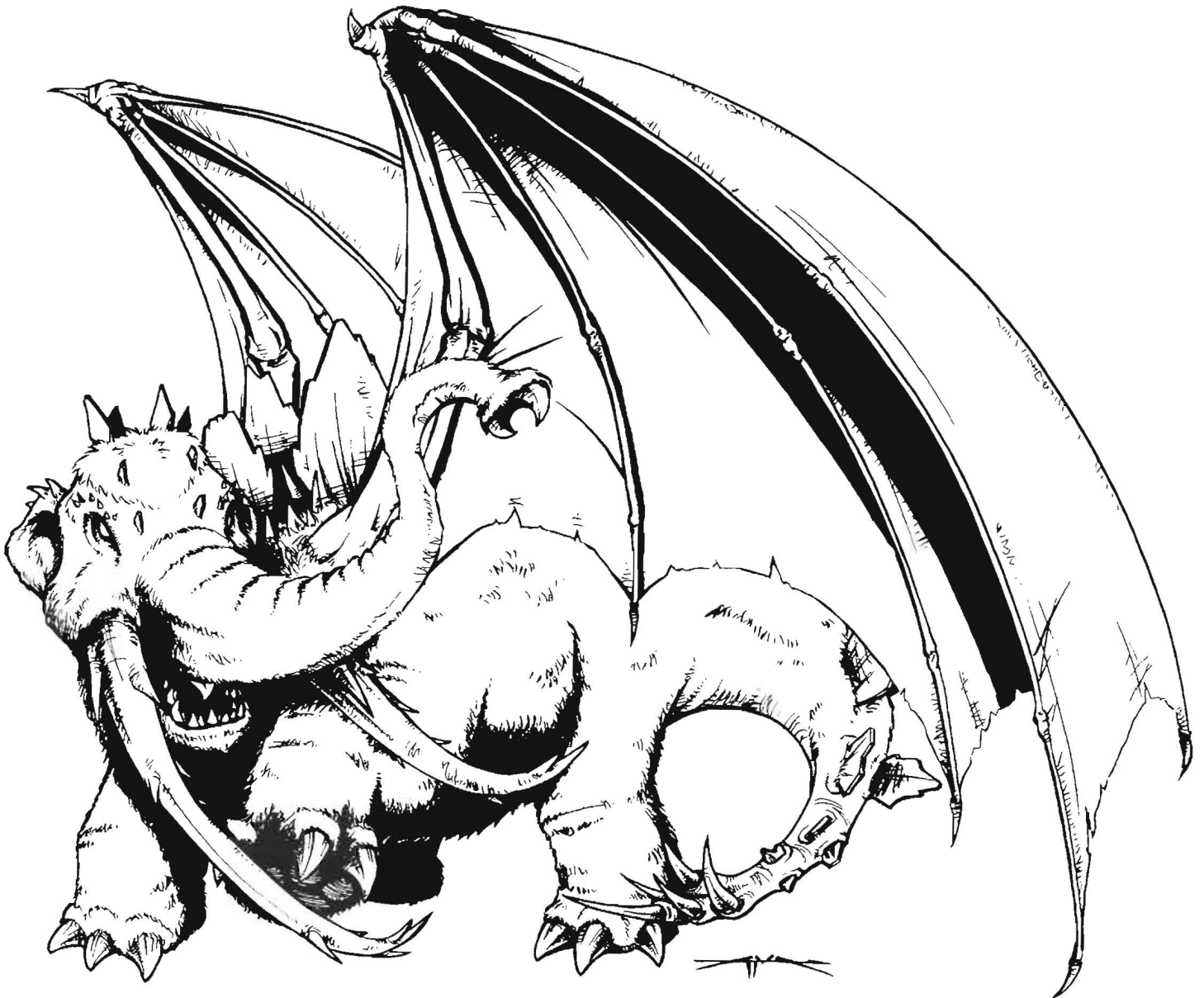
Sauradon

Optional Material for Rifts®

By Jeffrey Scott Hansen and Brandon K. Aten

Illustrated by Allen Manning

The Sauradon come from an alien world in another dimension, which is in a "figure eight" orbit around two stars in a binary star system. The massive gravity and exposure to radiation has allowed the Sauradon to develop into a strong predator and scavenger. On their home planet the Sauradon lived in small herds of 6 to 8 members and would often strategize with the members of their herd to bring down much larger prey (yes, MUCH larger than the Sauradon). They would lay in wait in the acidic pools which covered the equatorial regions of their planet, and when larger animals would come by, the Sauradon would attack with the pincers on their trunks and would drag the prey into the acidic pools.



The Sauradon can most easily be described as a mix between a woolly mammoth and a stegosaurus from the past of Rifts Earth. Thick hair covers the body and sharp spikes and armored plates run the length of the spine. The tail ends in a club-like set of four to eight spikes used to protect and defend the creature from almost all sides. Four eyes allow the creature to see in a variety of light spectrums, and the tusks and trunk allow the Sauradon to cause massive amounts of damage to whatever is foolish enough to stand in the way. The Sauradon also has a large pair of wings which grant it limited flight, and which it can pull in close to the body when trying to stalk prey. Currently, the Sauradon can be found in small herds throughout the Great Lakes region of North America and further south in the Dinosaur Swamp.

The Sauradon came to Rifts Earth through a Rift near Lake Superior, where they were first encountered by a Coalition reconnaissance group. The group attacked a lone Sauradon at first, but by the time they realized that they had attacked and killed one of the young, it was too late. The recon group was attacked by seven more Sauradon and completely destroyed, with only a single video disc recovered from the battle site to serve as evidence of what happened.

While on routine patrol in an area just west of Lake Superior, the Coalition Recon Task Force observed a very large Rift materialize several hundred yards away from their base camp. With special equipment and sensors, they monitored and documented these creatures as they entered our world. This team was full of veterans who had seen just about every type of D-Bee and monster known to mankind. When the Rift grew larger than anyone had ever seen, the shocked faces and shrieks recorded on video told the story. What you are about to read is the actual transcript from what survived of the video transmission. Major Frank Moore, Sergeant Alex Grimes, and Lieutenant Jason Meddles are noted by their rank and their initials. The other task force members' voices were inaudible due to the shrieks of terror coming from their personal microphones.

Major F.M.: *Men, there's the noise again. Meddles, turn on your sensor-track.*

Lieutenant J.M.: *Major, my equipment is showing an extremely large disturbance coming from the north-northwest. Not even two-hundred meters away. It measures almost a quarter-mile wide and eight-hundred feet tall.*

Major F.M.: *And only two hundred meters away? Great, whatever's coming out of it will be right on top of us. Tele-comm operator, I need you to relay a message to HQ, let them know our POS and situation. I got a bad feeling this is going to get ugly quick.*

Sergeant A.G.: *Sir, look out just beyond that tree line, at zero point two five on your viewfinder.*

Major F.M.: *Okay, zero point two... Uh, tele-com, call for immediate support, tell them to bring everything...*

Lieutenant J.M.: *Sir! A Rift this size has never been documented. Uh, what are those large brown things spilling out of it?*

Major F.M.: *Everyone listen up, I want my rail gun to start firing in the direction of the Rift at my command. Do not, I re-*

peat DO NOT stop firing until everything in front of you stops moving. Squads one and two, begin launching your missiles to the left and right of the rail gun's targets. Launch all ordnance until supplies run out. Tele-comm, what is the response from HQ?

Several extremely loud roars heard at this point on video.

Major F.M.: *What do you mean nearest support is sixty minutes out? This is going to be over in sixty seconds. Okay, hold on men... FIRE!*

Inaudible screams, rail gun blasts, missiles launch and hit several roars and more inaudible human shrieks.

Sergeant A.G.: *HQ! HQ! HELP! Thousands of giant monsters coming from Rift at coordinates...*

Sauradon, NPC Monster

Alignment: Anarchist.

Attributes: I.Q. 1D6+8 (very high animal intelligence), M.E. 2D4+12, M.A. 2D6+4, P.S. 2D6+44, P.P. 1D6+15, P.E. 2D6+12, P.B. 2D6+2, Spd 3D6+20 or 5D6+40 while flying. Attributes are considered Supernatural.

Average Size: 400 to 600 feet (122-183 m) tall, 800 to 900 feet (244-274 m) long.

Weight: 23,000 to 30,000 tons.

M.D.C.: 3D6x1,000 + 1,430

Horror Factor: 17

P.P.E.: 5D6

Natural Abilities: Impervious to toxic gases and poisons, half damage from fire, bio-regenerates 4D6 M.D. per melee, see the invisible, see in infrared and ultraviolet spectrums.

Tail Attack: The Sauradon mainly uses its tail to attack targets on the side and behind the creature.

Magic: None.

Psionics: None.

I.S.P.: 1D6

Attacks per Melee: 8

Combat Bonuses (in addition to attribute bonuses): +4 on initiative, +3 to strike, +4 to parry, +2 to dodge, +3 to roll with punch, fall, or impact, +4 to Perception Rolls.

Damage:

Tail Attack: As per Supernatural Strength full strength punch.

Trunk Pincer: 4D6 M.D.

Tusk Attack: 6D6 M.D.

Head Butt: 5D6 M.D.

Ram: As per Supernatural Strength full strength punch damage +1D6x10.

Allies: None, other than other Sauradon.

Enemies: Just about everything, but especially humans, Splugorth, and Simvan. The Sauradon do not wish to be controlled or used as mounts, but will allow it on their terms.

Habitat: Originally found in the acidic pools and swamps of their home planet, but can be found near almost any swamp or bog on Rifts Earth.



The Nayk Star Spiders

Optional Material for Rifts® & Other Games

By Josh Hilden

Illustration and Inspiration By Mike Mumah

The Nayk Star Spiders are creatures of primal nightmares that have haunted the races of the Three Galaxies, and the races of the dimensions adjacent the Three Galaxies, for thousands of years. Legends of the dreaded spiders reach back into the earliest myths of the younger denizens of the Three Galaxies. The facts regarding the origins of the Star Spiders are thin on the ground, but there are a few things that are believed to be without reproach. According to the records of the Pre-Consortium Human Alliance, and a handful of Cosmo-Knights still living from that era, a now extinct race of sentient arachnids, whose name is now forgotten, created the Nayk Star Spiders for use in war and colonization. The now forgotten race of Spider Makers would seed a target world with eggs, and wait till their hellish servants hatched. When the spiders had hatched and decimated the sentient races of the target worlds, the Spider Makers would neutralize the spiders, through an unknown process that has never been successfully replicated, and settle onto the now pacified world.

After more than five hundred years of this style of expansion within the Corkscrew Galaxy, the influential powers of the day decided to put an end to them. For decades, diplomats from the more powerful governments of the time (Human, Wulfen, Noro, and the Golgan Republik), backed by the history and power of the Cosmo-Knights, petitioned the Spider Makers to stop destroying the younger races and unleashing these “Demons of Science” upon the Three Galaxies. Finally, after being ignored and following the destruction of a Noro colony world by half a dozen Nayks, a coalition of the younger nations and more than one hundred Cosmo-Knights assaulted the realm of the Spider Makers and wiped them out as an affront to the Cosmic Forge and the free peoples of the Three Galaxies. The home world of

the Spider Makers and more than two hundred of their colony worlds were wiped clean by the avenging force.

The victorious heroes, who had lost more than 85% of their effective fighting forces, thought that they had exterminated the Nayk Star Spiders along with their dark masters . . . but they were mistaken. In the final days of the war with the Spider Makers, a group of scientists and fleet personnel from Spider Maker high command, using a holdout arsenal of converted trans-dimensional (TD) and faster than light (FTL) shuttles and probes, unleashed more than a hundred Nayk eggs across the span of the Megaverse that was adjacent to the Three Galaxies. These dimensions included the home dimension of a minor habitable world, Earth.

Over the thousands of years since the end of the war against the Spider Makers, more than a hundred worlds in the Three Galaxies and across the rest of the Megaverse have been rendered lifeless by the Nayk Star Spiders. One such Spider arrived upon the planet Earth on December 23, 2098 via a Rift that opened within the middle of the downtown area of the city of Detroit, Michigan. During the rampage of the Nayk, a film crew caught footage of the monster as it destroyed part of the city’s People Mover transit system. This footage and accompanying television reports were archived by the NEMA forces in Chicagoland, and still rest in the Great Chi-Town Library.

Nayk Star Spider

Attributes: I.Q. 8 (essentially an animal), M.E. 29, M.A. 2, P.S. 50, P.P. 27, P.E. 39, P.B. 1, Spd 110.

Alignment: Diabolic.

M.D.C. by Location: (Rifts®, Splicers®, Phase World®, and Chaos Earth™.)

Main Body – 22,500

Head – 3,200

Eyes (8) – 925 each

Legs (8) – 5,400 each

Mandibles (2) – 2,100 each

Fangs (2) – 2,900 each

Bio Plasma Ejector – 75 (-5 to strike.)

Spinnerets (2) – 850 each (The spinnerets are small, concealed targets and are -2 to strike. If one spinneret is disabled, the Nayk loses her ability to spin silk.)

S.D.C. by Location: (Heroes Unlimited™, Ninjas & Superspies™/Mystic China™, Nightbane®, After the Bomb®, Systems Failure™, and Beyond the Supernatural™.)

Main Body – 18,750

Head – 2,700

Eyes (8) – 785 each

Legs (8) – 4,100 each

Mandibles (2) – 1,950 each

Fangs (2) – 2,200 each

Bio Plasma Ejector – 400 (-5 to strike.)

Spinnerets (2) – 700 each (The spinnerets are small, concealed targets and are -2 to strike. If one spinneret is disabled, the Nayk loses her ability to spin silk.)

Hit Points: 3,275

P.P.E.: 1,015 (applicable only as a source of P.P.E.).

Height: 235 feet (71.6 m).

Length: 500 feet (152 m).

Width: 375 feet (114.3 m).

Weight: 40 tons (80,000 pounds, 36,000 kg).

Age: Unknown.

Life Span: Unknown, speculation by scientists in the Three Galaxies hypothesizes a life span of several thousand years.

Disposition: The Nayk Star Spiders are motivated only by two desires: to eat and to reproduce. All other life forms are seen as enemies or as food.

Description: The Spider from hell!

Horror Factor: 20

Natural Abilities: Run – 75 mph (120 km), Jump – 500 feet (152 m) across and 250 feet (76 m) high, Track by scent – 25 miles (40 km), Track by sound – 30 miles (48 km), nightvision – 5 miles (8 km), Regeneration – 1D6x20 M.D.C. or 2D4x20 S.D.C. per melee round.

Skills of Note: Climbing 85%/75%, Running, Prowl 45%, Swimming 98%.

Attacks per Melee: 12

Bonuses: +10 to strike, +8 to dodge, +12 to parry, -5 to save vs magic (Nayk Star Spiders are unusually vulnerable to mystic attack), +18 to save vs psionics (Nayk Star Spiders are highly resistant to psionic attack).

Magical Knowledge: None.

Psionic Knowledge: None.

Allies: None.

Minions: None.

Enemies: All life, even other Star Spiders. After all, why share the food?

Weapons:

Legs (8) – The eight powerful legs are the most devastating weapons in the spider's arsenal.

Damage: 1D6x200 M.D.C. or 1D4x500 S.D.C. per strike. (Up to four legs can strike one target the size of an automobile or larger so long as four legs remain for her to stand on, multiply damage by the number of legs used. Counts as one attack regardless of the number of legs attacking.)

Range: Touch.

Mandibles(2) – The spider's mandibles are normally used for grasping and holding prey, but function as good close-in weapons in a pinch.

Damage: 1D4x25 M.D.C. or 1D6x50 S.D.C. (If one mandible is destroyed, the other is unable to attack.)

Range: Touch.

Fangs (8) – The fangs of the spider are used to incapacitate its prey.

Damage: 2D6x30 M.D.C. or 3D6x25 S.D.C. per fang (multiply by 2 if both fangs are engaged). Any victim pierced by the fangs must roll to save vs poison or they will be rendered paralyzed for 1D4 days.

Range: Touch.

Bio-Plasma Spray – Concealed beneath a flap below the spider's mouth is the Bio-Plasma ejector. The plasma is the only ranged attack in the spider's arsenal.

Damage: 1D4x100 M.D.C. or 1D6x100 S.D.C.

Range: 1,200 feet (360 meters)

Rate of Fire: Equal to the Nayk's number of attacks per melee.

Quiserraica

Optional Material for Rifts® Phase World®

By Chris Kluge

Illustration by Chuck Walton

Located on the inner surface of the Thundercloud Galaxy's Biosphere is the seemingly unremarkable binary star system known as Janus. The system was explored and mapped centuries ago by the CCW, and they did not see anything that they felt was even worth a second look. According to official records, the system does not contain any planetary bodies, but in actuality, the high-tech sensors found on the Explorer Class Cruiser were simply unable to peer through the bizarre anomalies created by the magic-rich world of Maelstrom, which was located dead center between the two stars. The CCW may not know of its existence, but a handful of magic-using cultures like the Splugorth are not only aware of this world, but brave its turbulent surface on a regular basis to mine the powerful magic ores like Gantrium that are locked beneath its tortured soil.

Maelstrom contains more magic energy than nearly any planet in the Megaverse. Its P.P.E. levels even surpass those found on Rifts Earth during the Great Cataclysm. As a result, this world is constantly battered by the same kinds of apocalyptic storms and freak supernatural occurrences that nearly ended life on Rifts Earth so long ago. By all rights, nothing should be able to survive on Maelstrom for long (other than the millions of Entities Rifted there on a regular basis), but against all odds, life not only formed on this world, but thrived. The planet is contin-



uously embroiled in chaos, and the creatures that live there reflect that environment. For whatever reason, it seems that the ones best suited to thrive and evolve on Maelstrom were monstrous predators that towered dozens, even hundreds of feet into the air. The magic-rich environment gave nearly any species that sprouted on this planet (or that was Rifted there) the strength and power to brave the harsh storms for awhile, but only the largest creatures had skin thick enough to survive and propagate for generations. This seemed to be the case with the

towering reptilian monstrosities known as the Voracious Absorbers.

Whether these enormous predators evolved on this planet “naturally” or were Rifted there from another world is unknown. Whatever their origins, the powerful magic energies of Maelstrom imbued them with strange adaptations that quickly put them on the top of the food chain. Of course, it is easy to see why they were such successful predators just by looking at them. Voracious Absorbers are absolutely built for fighting.

These enormous bipedal lizards are covered in thick bone plating that protects their entire body from the harsh environment and ferocious beasts that roam the planet. An extra thick ridge of bone spikes runs along its back from the crest of its head to the end of its two muscular, spiked tails. These razor-sharp protrusions provide extra protection against surprise attacks from behind, and make formidable weapons. Its massive arms end in thick-clawed hands that are strong enough to rip through a starship's hull, and the same bony spikes and spines found on the back also grow on the forearms and knees. Its mouthful of razor sharp teeth and pair of serrated tusks found along the lower jaw would suggest that Voracious Absorbers are carnivores. While this is true in a sense, the thing that makes these creatures so dangerous is their unique method of consuming prey.

Instead of killing its prey and then slowly stripping the meat from its bones like a normal predator, this massive lizard magically absorbs its struggling victim through its skin while it is still alive. The prey not only sustains the creature as food, but its P.P.E. rich body (like most of Maelstrom's typical inhabitants) actually causes the Voracious Absorber to grow in size. Not only does the Absorber's size, strength, and power all increase while the victim is stored, but the Absorber can also tap into the natural powers and abilities of its victims and can even release its victims as minions and control them like puppets. This means that at any moment, a single Voracious Absorber can transform into a swarming horde of creatures all under the Absorber's control. This is typically done to capture and consume numerous smaller-sized victims simultaneously or to defend the Absorber against overwhelming odds. The controlled minions can be released directly from the Absorber's skin or they can be launched at prey via a breath attack. It does not perform this action lightly, since every victim released causes the Voracious Absorber to revert to a smaller size.

Instead of living minions, the Absorber can also choose to launch a Soul Blast breath attack. This is one of the Voracious Absorber's deadliest attacks and one that most will only use as a last resort. While it can devastate large groups of attackers with a single breath, it also uses up a large amount of the Absorber's stored captives each time it is used. Instead of spitting out absorbed creatures as attacking minions, the Absorber can partially digest its devoured prey and spit them out as a destructive blast of spiritual energy and gore that tears targets apart both physically and spiritually. This attack completely destroys the devoured prey, which means it cannot be absorbed again. The energized gore inflicts a great deal of physical damage, but it is the twisted and tormented souls of the victims that wreak the most havoc. They become horrific wraiths that seek out living targets within the "splash" area of the breath attack and soar directly through living targets again and again until their energy dissipates after a few seconds and they finally find peace. They can fly unhindered through armor or obstacles and inflict damage not only to the target's Hit Points (when applicable), but to their P.P.E. and I.S.P. as well. This attack leaves targets severely weakened and easy pickings for the hungry Absorber. The only effective defenses against these tortured souls are magical or phase barriers and protection circles.

The reason these beasts are called voracious is because their prey cannot be stored indefinitely, and eventually any absorbed

victims will be digested, which causes the creature to shrink. This means they must keep devouring more and more victims in order to maintain their increased size and power level. Fortunately, as the Voracious Absorber gets larger, it is able to absorb larger prey, which allows it to more easily maintain its steady growth rate. Of course, the larger it gets, the faster it digests its consumed prey, so even the most effective predator can only grow so large, with the exception of Quiserraica.

Quiserraica is basically the king of the Voracious Absorbers, and one of the deadliest predators on Maelstrom. His size changes frequently depending on the success of his hunts, but Quiserraica is usually around 250 feet (76.2 m) tall (although he has been documented as high as 300 feet/91.4 m). He is a living pestilence, scouring the planet for any living creature he can find, no matter how small. Over the years he has gorged on a steady stream of demons, dragons, and dimensional travelers deposited on Maelstrom from the various Rifts that open across the planet on a regular basis. He also preys on the Splugorth expeditions sent to mine the world for Gantrium and other rare magical ores. Even his fellow Voracious Absorbers are considered fair game. Few who have faced him are ever prepared for Quiserraica's surprising display of speed and tactics. They see this massive beast slowly plodding across the surface (in order to conserve its strength), and they mistakenly assume that it is as fast as it can move. However, once Quiserraica spots them, they quickly see how wrong they were.

Quiserraica has absorbed the abilities of many powerful beings and has learned to use them in rather creative ways to close in on his prey. Some of his favorite abilities are Invisibility, Teleportation, and Shadow Meld. He uses them to confuse his prey and keep them off balance until he is ready to pounce. He sometimes does this to toy with his prey, but it is usually done to test their abilities so he can determine if they will be any kind of threat.

Unlike other Absorbers, Quiserraica is not apprehensive about releasing stored victims as minions, and will usually flood an area with his puppets whenever he detects prey. He has learned over the years that overwhelming numbers is usually more beneficial than overwhelming size, which is why he has been so much more successful than his brethren. Quiserraica has also learned over the years that while magic users and psychics are some of the most empowering victims, they are also the most dangerous prey.

Until a victim is fully digested within a Voracious Absorber, he or she can still be freed by a simple Exorcism (either the spell or psionic power). This means mages and psychics can significantly weaken a Voracious Absorber in no time. If they are trying to save a particular victim, they can attempt a focused Exorcism, or they can just cast it randomly to weaken the Voracious Absorber. Quiserraica has learned to hate these beings and will send dozens of minions after psychics and mages whenever he detects them, and he can sense them from very far away. This has made Quiserraica one of the first and last things many visiting magic wielders ever see when exploring Maelstrom.

Quiserraica, a Viscious Absorber

The stats below are for Quiserraica when he is 250 feet (76.2 m) tall, and the stats for an average Voracious Absorber are listed in parenthesis for comparison.

Alignment: Considered Miscrrent.

Attributes: I.Q. 7 (1D4+3), M.E. 18 (3D6), M.A. 4 (1D6), P.S. 89 Supernatural (5D6+10), P.P. 18 (3D6), P.E. 32 (5D6+5), P.B. 9 (2D6), Spd 65 mph (104 km) running, 200 mph (320 km) flying (6D6+10 mph/26-74 km running, 2D4x100 mph/2D4x160 km flying).

M.D.C.: 120,100 (1D4x1000).

P.P.E.: 9000 (4D4x10).

I.S.P.: 850 (only what is absorbed from prey).

Horror Factor: 18 (15).

Size: 250 feet/76.2 m (2D4x10 feet/2D4x3 m).

Weight: 28,000 tons (1D4x1000 tons).

Natural Abilities: Nightvision 100 feet/30.5 m, see the invisible, bio-regenerate 1D4x100 M.D. per melee round (2D4x10 M.D. per minute).

Flight: It has two large pods on its back that provide it with a special kind of magical flight that can propel the beast through Maelstrom's turbulent storms at impressive speeds. A pair of bony, wing-like protrusions helps direct the creature's flight to some extent, but the mechanisms that make this flight system work are really a mystery.

Absorb Living Creatures: Voracious Absorbers get their name from their strange ability to consume living prey by absorbing it directly into their bodies. This attack can only be performed on targets that possess 10 percent as much M.D.C., or less, compared to the Absorber, so a Voracious Absorber with 10,000 M.D.C. can only devour targets with 1000 M.D.C. or less. To perform a devouring attack, the Absorber must first successfully pin/incapacitate or entangle its prey. Once ensnared, the victim must then make a save vs magic of 12 or higher or else be absorbed into the beast. The victim's M.D.C., I.S.P., and P.P.E. are added directly to the Voracious Absorber's totals. In addition, the Absorber gains any natural abilities and psionic powers possessed by the victim, and also receives additional benefits for crossing certain M.D.C. milestones (see below). All of these bonuses and powers remain in place as long as the victim is contained within the Absorber's body, but eventually the victim will be digested and all the benefits will be lost. Voracious Absorbers have some measure of control over which prey gets digested, so if there is a particularly powerful victim it would like to hold onto, then it had better be sure to eat enough lesser victims to prevent that victim from being fully consumed. Ten percent of the Absorber's stored P.P.E. and M.D.C. are permanently burned off every 12 hours, which is why Voracious Absorbers are always on the hunt. On worlds that are not as rich in magic energy as Maelstrom, Absorbers actually burn off twenty percent of their M.D.C. and P.P.E. every 12 hours, which is why few Absorbers ever leave this world (even if they gain the ability to do so).

- 1 additional foot (0.3 m) in height for every 500 M.D.C. absorbed.
- 100 additional tons of weight for every 500 M.D.C. absorbed.
- 1 additional point of Supernatural P.S. for every 2000 M.D.C. absorbed.

- 1 additional attack per melee round for every 50,000 M.D.C. absorbed.
- +1 on initiative, +1 to strike, parry, and entangle for every 20,000 M.D.C. absorbed, -1 to dodge for every 20,000 M.D.C. absorbed.
- Add 10 mph (16 km) to the Speed attribute for every 20,000 M.D.C. absorbed, -100 mph (160 km) to flight speed for every 20,000 M.D.C. absorbed (minimum flight speed is 50 mph/80 km).
- Increased Bio-Regeneration: 4D4x10 M.D. per minute when M.D.C. is between 4000 and 10,000, 2D4x10 M.D. per melee round when M.D.C. is between 10,000 and 25,000, 4D4x10 M.D. per melee round when M.D.C. is between 25,000 and 50,000, 4D6x10 M.D. per melee round when M.D.C. is between 50,000 and 100,000, 1D4x100 M.D. per melee round when M.D.C. is between 100,000 and 150,000, 1D6x100 M.D. per melee round when M.D.C. is between 150,000 and 200,000, and 2D4x100 M.D. per melee round when M.D.C. is above 200,000.

Release and Control Stored Minions: Voracious Absorbers can release any consumed victims at any time and control them like puppets. The Absorber can release as many minions at a single time as he wants (no matter the number, the act of releasing them only uses one melee attack). Minions can be released directly through the Absorber's skin or they can be projected at the enemy in a massive breath attack. The breath attack can propel minions up to 1000 feet (305 m) away. This sudden assault catches victims off guard, resulting in penalties of -2 on initiative and -1 to strike, parry, and dodge during the first melee round while combating the minions. They can attack any threats to the Absorber, or round up victims for consumption, using their full range of natural abilities (damage, M.D.C., and available powers are not diminished in any way). However, since they are being controlled by the Absorber, their reflexes are not quite as fast as they were previously. Controlled minions only have 3 attacks per melee round and have no combat bonuses of any kind. In addition, while the Voracious Absorber is controlling minions, he loses 2 attacks per melee round (the penalty is the same whether he is controlling one minion or 100). Controlled minions cannot travel further than 1500 feet (457 m) away from the Voracious Absorber. Remember, once the minion leaves the Absorber's body, the beast no longer possesses the minion's M.D.C., P.P.E., I.S.P., or natural abilities and they are subtracted from the Absorber's totals. G.M.s can select from any number of demons, dragons, or D-Bees to determine what minions are released, or simply use the following generic stats: Possesses 400 M.D.C. and inflicts 6D6 M.D. from attacks.

Soul Blast Breath Attack: This is one of the Voracious Absorber's deadliest attacks and one that most will only use as a last resort. While it can devastate large groups of attackers with a single breath, it also uses up a large amount of the Absorber's stored captives each time it is used. Instead of spitting out absorbed creatures as attacking minions, the Absorber can partially digest its devoured prey and spit them out as a destructive blast of spiritual energy and gore that

tears apart the target both physically and spiritually. This attack completely destroys the devoured prey, which means it cannot be absorbed again. The energized gore inflicts a great deal of physical damage, but it is the twisted and tormented souls of the victims that wreak the most havoc. They become horrific wraiths that seek out living targets within the “splash” area of the breath attack and soar directly through living targets again and again until their energy dissipates after a few seconds and they finally find peace. They can fly unhindered through armor or obstacles and inflict damage not only to the target’s Hit Points (when applicable), but to their P.P.E. and I.S.P. as well. This attack leaves targets severely weakened and easy pickings for the hungry Absorber. The only effective defenses against these tortured souls are magical or phase barriers and protection circles. The physical component of this breath attack inflicts 2D4x10 M.D.C. to everything within a 40 foot (12.2 m) radius, and the spiritual component inflicts 1D4x10 damage to M.D.C. (or Hit Points when applicable), I.S.P., and P.P.E. to every living creature within a 60 foot (18.3 m) radius. When used against enormous living targets, the Soul Blast inflicts 4D6x10 M.D.C. from the physical strike and 1D4x100 damage to M.D.C., I.S.P., and P.P.E. Each breath attack depletes 1000 M.D.C. and 500 P.P.E. from the Voracious Absorber. The larger the Absorber gets, the less harmful this attack becomes to it, which is why Quiserraica does not fear using this devastating assault on a regular basis. Range: 1000 feet (305 m).

Absorbed Abilities: Turn invisible at will, teleport self 98%, dimensional teleport 80% (Quiserraica rarely leaves Maelstrom because the magic level on other worlds is painfully low), metamorphosis at will (never uses it), Shadow Meld, impervious to heat and fire, impervious to toxic gases, cold does half damage, magically understands all languages. Also see Psionics.

Dragon Breath Attacks: Fire: 1D6x10 M.D., range 300 feet (91.4 m). Ice: 6D6 M.D., range 100 feet (30.5 m). Poisonous Vapors: Paralyzes victims for 2D6 melee rounds with a range of 100 feet (30.5 m). Breath of Death: 6D6 direct to Hit Points, range 30 feet (9.1 m). Corrosive Spray: 1D6x10 M.D., range 30 feet (9.1 m). Cloud of Slumber: Victim sleeps for 2D6 melee rounds, range 30 feet (9.1 m).

Petrification Beam: Quiserraica can fire a beam of light from his eyes that turns victims to stone for 1D6 minutes. Victims struck by the beam must attempt a save vs magic of 13 or higher. Range: 1000 feet (305 m).

Weaknesses: Stored victims can be freed by an Exorcism. The chance of success is 75% when attempting to free a random target (the G.M. chooses what type of demon, dragon or D-Bee is released), or 45% when attempting to free a specific individual. However, if the mage or psychic is attempting an Exorcism on a released minion, then the chance of success is 85%.

Combat: 7 attacks per melee round (5 attacks per melee round).

Bonuses: +7 on initiative, +9 to strike and parry, +8 to entangle, +10 to save vs magic, +4 to save vs psionics, pin/incapacitate on a roll of 18-20, and impervious to Horror Factor. (In addition to attribute bonuses, +2 on initiative, +2 to strike, parry, and dodge, +3 to entangle, +2 to save vs magic and psionics,

pin/incapacitate on a roll of 18-20, and impervious to Horror Factor.)

Damage: 2D6x10 M.D. per punch, 4D6x10 per power punch (counts as two melee attacks), 3D6x10 M.D. for a bite attack, 2D6x10+30 M.D. per claw strike, 5D6x10 M.D. per forearm blade strike, 2D6x10+30 M.D. per power claw strike or forearm slash, or 3D6x10 M.D. for a tail swipe (punch damage as per Supernatural Strength, punch damage +50% per bite, punch damage +25% per claw strike, punch damage +25% per forearm blade strike, power punch damage +25% per power claw strike or forearm slash, or punch damage +50% per tail swipe).

Magic: See Absorbed Abilities for Quiserraica’s current list of stolen magical abilities.

Psionics: Can only access the natural magic abilities of victims. Quiserraica currently possesses all Healing, Physical, Sensitive, and Super Psionics.

Age: Quiserraica is 350 years old.

Average Life Span: Can live as long as 1000 years, but most will succumb to the harsh environment of Maelstrom within 2D4x10 years.

Enemies: Any living creature with at least one point of P.P.E. is prey.

Mora

Optional Material for Heroes Unlimited™

By Carl Gleba

Illustration by Mike Mumah

Sea serpents have long been creatures of legend. Sailors often feared that they roamed the ocean depths and would attack their simple wooden vessels if they ventured too far out to sea. Such serpents are even depicted battling the gods of old. Legend tells of the Midgard Serpent who fought Thor and that they would fight their final battle during Ragnarok!

Mora is no myth or legend. She is a giant sea serpent that has been terrorizing coastal cities and sea vessels for as long as man has been at sea. She’ll go on a rampage, attacking ships and coastal cities for months at a time, and then the attacks will cease altogether. Then, years later, the attacks start again.

There are certain signs that Mora is about to attack. First is the timing of the attacks. They start either in early morning or twilight. During both occasions a thick fog bank rolls in off the coast. The fog is thick, like pea soup, and often covers several miles of coastline. When the area is paralyzed from the fog, eerie lightning and the smell of ozone begins to permeate the air. Soon after is when the destruction begins! The rending of metal or wood is often the first thing heard, followed by the screams of men as they are thrown into the water or devoured by Mora.

The serpent is rarely seen because of the thick fog, and she leaves few witnesses behind. In the early 1900s these attacks often took place along the Japanese and Chinese coastlines. For nearly a decade the entire coast was demolished with attack after attack and then she disappeared not to be seen again until World War II. In the 1940s, during the battles in the Pacific, whole ships would disappear into the depths without so much as



getting an SOS off. Records after World War II would often indicate that there were no enemy ships or submarines in the area. The only sketchy records ever found were from one ship that barely survived. The U.S.S. Slater, a destroyer escort on duty in the Pacific theater, was attacked by Mora. The crew was quick to respond and managed to inflict enough damage to send the sea serpent plunging to the depths. Records even indicate that the Slater dumped several rounds of depth charges to finish the creature off. The sea serpent was never seen again during the rest of World War II, and the incident was classified as top secret.

Mora would make several more appearances during the latter half of the 20th Century, especially during naval formations and in some instances, where nuclear testing was being done. She would often make attack runs, especially at nuclear vessels. Many submarines and other vessels would be dragged to the murky depths. She would also attack different navies, especially those of the United States and the former Soviet Union. Since both countries were very secretive about their naval operations, the information would never be made public, so no effort could be coordinated to stop Mora. The sea serpent's attacks would only last for a few months and then she would disappear for years, making her sighting all the more mysterious.

Today Mora is back, and attacking ships and coastal cities of the United States with a vengeance. Her attacks are deadly and catastrophic, and seemingly planned! She has caused billions of dollars in damage and has taken thousands of lives. If her pattern continues, she will eventually make her way towards Century Station. The damage she could cause to the city would be catastrophic, or worse, she could damage the super penitentiary of Gramercy Island. If this were to happen, dozens of super criminals would be released, making an already dangerous situation worse.

Mora

Alignment: Equivalent to Miscreant.

Attributes: I.Q. 8 (high animal intelligence), M.E. 12, M.A. 12, P.S. 75, P.P. 20, P.E. 24, P.B. 18, Spd 220 (150 mph/240 km).

Size: Mora is a huge monster measuring over 1000 feet (305 m) long from the tip of her tail to the end of her snout.

Weight: 200 tons.

M.D.C.: 6000. (On S.D.C. worlds, Mora has 2000 Hit Points, 3000 S.D.C., and an of A.R. 15.)

Horror Factor: 18 just due to her sheer size!

P.P.E.: 120

Average Life Span: Unknown, but legends of sea serpents go back hundreds of years. Pictures of Mora can be dated back to around the 1600s, suggesting she is at least 400 plus years old. Some scholars suggest that she is even older than that and could indeed be the origin of the legendary Midgard Serpent.

Natural Abilities: Supernatural Strength and Endurance, bio-regenerates 1D4x100 per hour, can breathe underwater indefinitely and can breathe normal air for up to 15 minutes. Mora also has an advanced sense of smell and can detect blood in the water up to 10 miles (16 km) away. Underwater she has excellent vision and is able to see well even in murky water. Mora can sense electricity and energy from nuclear vessels, which is very intoxicating to the creature as she can feed off of the energy. This will increase her bio-regeneration to 1D4x100 per minute of contact, however the vessel being attacked is often crushed and dragged below the water. Mora is impervious to ocean depths, and impervious to all cold and electrical based attacks (she takes half damage from magical cold and electrical attacks). She can create an electrical field, breathe lightning bolts, and twice per day she can create a

thick fog bank (same as the spell Summon Fog at 10th level). The fog dissipates when Mora leaves the area.

Attacks per Melee: 6

Damage: A restrained flipper swat does 1D6x10+60, a full flipper hit does 3D6x10+60, a bite does 4D6x10, a body block (basically her crushing weight coming down on a vessel) does 1D4x100 and if she coils around large vehicles she can inflict 1D6x100 per attack. Her electrical field can be created once every 5 minutes, and damage is 6D6 per melee for four melees. The damage, however, is to everything in a 500 foot (152 m) area around Mora. This includes anything (or anyone) who may be touching her at the time. Finally, her lightning breath does 1D10x10 per attack. It has a range of one mile (1.6 km) and spreads out to hit all targets in a 100 foot (30.5 m) area. All damage listed is S.D.C. (In Mega-Damage worlds, a restrained flipper swat does 1D6x10 M.D., a full flipper hit does 4D6x10 M.D., a bite does 2D10x10 M.D., a body block does 4D6x10 M.D. and if she coils around large vehicles she can inflict 4D6x10 M.D. per attack. Her electrical field can be created once every 5 minutes and damage is 6D6 M.D. per melee for four melees. Finally, her lightning breath does 2D6x10 M.D. per attack.)

Bonuses (in addition to attributes): +4 to initiative, +8 to strike with the lightning breath, +6 on physical attacks, +6 to parry with the tail, +3 to parry with a flipper, +4 to dodge when on the water's surface but +8 when completely submerged, +3 to pull punch, +6 to roll with fall/impact, +8 to save vs Horror Factor, +7 to save vs magic, +5 to save vs poison, and +6 to save vs psionics and saves as a Major Psychic.

Vulnerabilities/Penalties: Out of water she is totally vulnerable, with her combat bonuses reduced by one half, and she loses two attacks. Finally, she takes double damage from all fire-based attacks and triple damage from plasma.

Magic: None, although many of her abilities seem magical in nature and she has a higher than normal base P.P.E., suggesting she may be akin to a creature of magic.

Psionics: None, although she has all the same abilities as Electrokinesis at no I.S.P. cost.

Enemies: Man is her mortal enemy, only because we are seen as food as well as a "playthings." She is also extremely territorial when it comes to "her waters." She will attack anything that enters her domain, including ships, submarines and other giant monsters.

Allies: None, and she seems to be one of a kind.

Habitat: Mora can only live in the water; however she is not restricted to just saltwater. She could travel inland using any of the major waterways, and she has in the past. Sightings have occurred all around the world, with her latest sightings placing her closer and closer to Century Station!

Note: Mora tends to be active for 4D6 months at a time before she grows weary and hibernates for 2D4x10 years at a time. She hibernates in the deepest parts of the ocean, often out of reach of conventional means.

M.D.C. stats provided for those who might want to use Mora in **Rifts**® or some other M.D.C. setting. I specifically

see her being most effective in the **Heroes Unlimited**™ setting.

Special Thanks: Thanks to Palladium message board member DtMK for his "Giant Monsters in Palladium" thread. Nice way to fire up the imaginations of artists and writers alike! I also want to thank Mike Mumah for creating an inspirational super monster. It was a nice change of pace from the usual writing. Usually the writers need to describe their monsters and the artists draw their interpretation. Well, this fun little project pitting the artists against each other allowed the writers to have the artwork to inspire them and give them ideas. This was fun, thanks to all who participated!

Hook, Line and Sinkers

Hook: Sightings of Mora have increased. Every few days, she is getting closer and closer to Century Station. Many lives are at stake and government officials are calling for the help of any heroes.

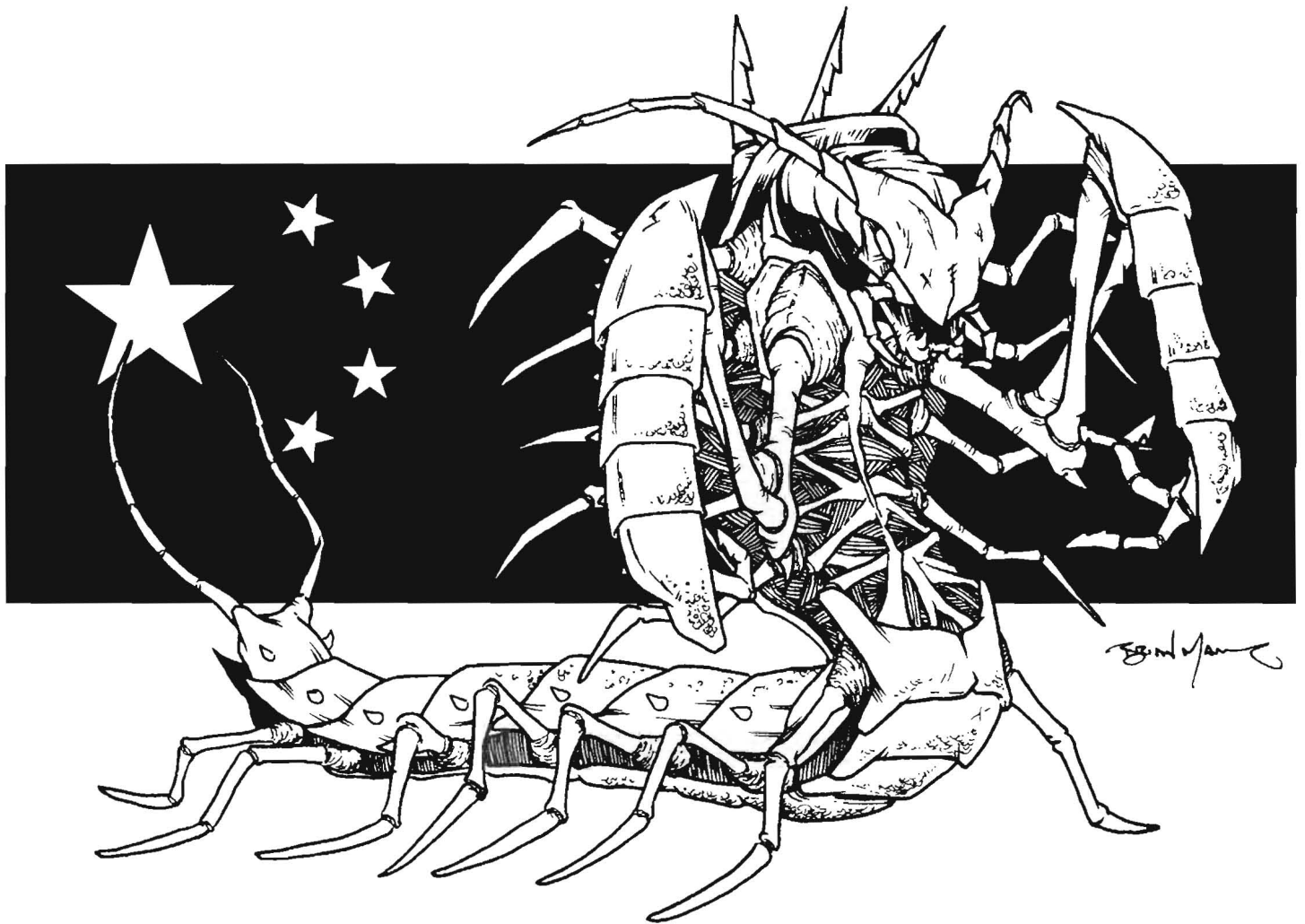
Line: A thick fog rolls in, enveloping all of Century Station, and Mora begins her deadly attack.

Sinker: While fighting Mora, at times the creature seems dazed and confused. Furthermore, she is moving inland where she is most vulnerable. Finally, the heroes notice a dozen electronic devices implanted around her head. Destroying these devices seems to restore the creature and she quickly makes for the sea. However, word has arrived that Gramercy Island was attacked while Mora was on a rampage. Analysis of the electronic devices suggests that only one individual could be behind this. The heroes' arch-nemesis was somehow able to control Mora, and now he has increased his henchmen to include a dozen supers from Gramercy Island.

Hook: The heroes have been contacted by a mega-corporation known as Global Petrol. G.P. is one of the leading companies in the area of extracting petroleum and natural gas from underwater wells. They have asked the heroes to help as one of their major refineries, located about 30 miles (48 km) off the coast of Century Station, is being attacked by a giant sea serpent. They have evacuated what personnel are left so the heroes can investigate.

Line: During the characters' investigation they are attacked by Mora! Strangely, she will not attack the refinery directly, only ships or vehicles in the area. She also doesn't use her tell-tale fog attack.

Sinker: Mora is protecting her breeding grounds! The refinery is built right over her nest, where a handful of eggs can be found. The thing is, G.P. won't give up this refinery for some stupid sea serpent. They have hit a very rich deposit of natural gas and they will do anything to protect their investment. This includes using whatever means are necessary to get rid of the heroes, should they decide that the refinery has to go. How do the characters deal with this dilemma? Do they destroy Mora and her offspring (tests on the eggs suggest that they "may" grow to Mora's size in several hundred years) or do they try and convince G.P. to move the refinery?



Scolopendra-Ginamo!

Optional Material for Heroes Unlimited™

By John Philpott

Illustration by Brian Manning

Ahh! Great devils take me for my foolish pride! I have wrought destruction beyond my control! I have wrought terror beyond comprehension! In my hubris I have doomed my beloved nation! Scolopendra, my greatest creation! My mightiest of bio-machines! Take me! Devour me such that like Icarus my pride shall be my undoing!

*- Last words of Dr. Jah Hua Wong,
seconds before being devoured.*

Bio-Engineer Jah Hua Wong was the architect of his own downfall in the form of his greatest triumph: Scolopendra-Ginamo! This massive, venomous, centipede-like monster was his most audacious experiment, an unstoppable weapon to bring glory and power to his beloved China... and prove to those "foolish bureaucrats" that he was indeed the salvation of their nation!

Dr. Wong was a most extraordinary bio-engineer, an international master of biochemistry, genetics, and zoology. For years he devised various biological machines for his nation:

nano-spies, birdlike automata for reconnaissance, killer bio-engineered warrior-monsters. But his dreams were always grander, always bigger! He pleaded for funding to build his most audacious creation: a monster of such epic size and power that all would tremble before it! But funding never came. "Fools!" he thought. "How can they not see what my creations could be?"

Finally, his career a joke, his budget slashed to chicken feed, Dr. Wong took action to fund his research in secret. He made underworld contacts with the Triads and borrowed huge amounts of money. Working at night in his lab he engineered his greatest creation: Scolopendra-Ginamo! It was three hundred feet long, forty feet around. Its massive mandibles could crush buildings. Its tethered kill-spines could fly thousands of feet and sink battleships. This bio-robot had armor that could withstand missiles. Its feet oozed poison. Its body shot entangling silk. It was the ultimate killing machine!

And it was fully under Wong's mental control... or so he thought!

When he turned his creation loose his aim was to frighten, but not harm. It was to be an ultimate show of power and potential that those tight-pursed bureaucrats could not ignore! But as he led Scolopendra-Ginamo to the center of Shanghai, something went wrong. His carefully-constructed telepathic control bio-circuit stopped working. His mental commands went unheeded. And "Skolo," as the creation came to be called, went ballistic!

Jets and tanks fought to contain the beast! Rockets exploded harmlessly on the thick carapace! The mighty skyscrapers, so symbolic of China's phoenix-like rise, fell to its horrible mandibles, mighty claws, and terrible spines. As Shanghai burned around him, Dr. Wong repented the foolish error of his hubris and stood before his amok creation... and let it devour him.

But then something happened. Reunited with the mind-control bio-circuit, Wong's dying energy seemed to bring a new awareness to the mindless killing machine that was Skolo. Skolo paused and looked upon the desolation it had wrought... and then walked into the ocean. The last contact was made by a Chinese attack submarine. It fired two torpedoes to no effect and fled.

But where is Skolo? Does it live? Does it think? Does it feel? Will it attack again, or will it be content to slumber in the abyssal deep?

The Taoist and Buddhist monks of the nation hold constant prayer vigils hoping never to find out.

“Oops”

Dr. Wong's creation was, indeed, the ultimate culmination of his knowledge as a bio-weapons specialist. Designed with genius to a scale unprecedented, his idea was spurned as a “fool's dream” by the PLA management. Few realized that such a project was even theoretically possible. As a result, Dr. Wong's ever more persistent pleas were ignored and eventually led to lost faith in his abilities. Eventually, the promising genius was ignored, shelved, and shoved off to a corner, where he grew ever more frustrated and desperate to be taken seriously again.

Soon, this frustration led to anger and finally to madness. He *would* be noticed for his abilities! They *would* see him for the genius he was! Madness led to obsession that led to insubordination. His plan was to secretly fund and produce his ultimate design, Scolopendra-Ginamo, and show them exactly what he could do! Melding the DNA from the Vietnamese centipede (*scolopendra subspinipes*) with that of silkworms, varieties of spiders, and finally, the praying mantis, and ultimately with his “stock” supergenes from earlier weaponization, telepathic control, and biomorphic experiments, he added the final super-growth genes and let his creation grow.

Eventually, after several failed experiments, the creation proved a shattering success! Scolopendra-Ginamo was everything he ever envisioned and more! It was monstrous and all-powerful! It was deadly and quick and versatile! It was truly a weapon that could not be matched. There were only two flaws: One was that its fore-underbelly plating was, due to a slight flaw in the centipede-mantis gene splice, grafted to the mantis-like fore-claws, opening up a “gap” in the plating when the beast reared. The other flaw went unnoticed until it was too late.

When Dr. Wong finally decided to display his creation to the “public,” a massive show of force meant (insanely) to “prove” his ability to his superiors, the “hidden flaw” appeared. Dr. Wong's proven telepathic control bio-circuit, a genetically-modified brain lobe that allowed select users (in this case, Dr. Wong) to mentally control a bio-creation, malfunctioned due to a slight genetic flaw. Halfway through his “demonstration,” the telepathic link was broken and lost forever. Skolo was loose!

The mayhem was unmatched: Skolo devastated Shanghai, smashing buildings, devouring vehicles and bystanders, and sinking warships sent to defeat the beast. Nothing they or an increasingly desperate Dr. Wong did could stop the mindless killing machine. Half of Shanghai was devastated and thousands of people killed before Dr. Wong made a fateful choice: in his guilt he decided to sacrifice himself to his amok creation. It was suicide rather than a conscious act to defeat the beast, but something happened once the monster swallowed its creator. Perhaps it was a psionic resonance between Dr. Wong's dying mind and the bio-control circuit, but the instant Dr. Wong was consumed, the beast gained some ethereal sense of self. It had... awareness.

In a sudden moment of realization, Skolo quit its mindless destruction and retreated into the sea, never to be seen again.

Skolo Sleeps(?)

It is assumed that Skolo has built itself an underwater “lair” where it sleeps, hopefully for centuries. This hypothetical lair has never been found, and honestly no one wants to look too hard. There perhaps it dreams, or broods, or thinks with whatever possible mind it has. Many speculate that some semblance of a guilt-ridden Dr. Wong remains, leading to hope for reconciliation or at least peace as “he” broods alone.

What would happen if Skolo were to reappear or “awaken” is unknown, but a frightening consideration. Nothing has much hope of fighting it if the Shanghai encounter is any indication. The sudden apparent “awareness” gives some hope that there's a conscience averse to the mindless destruction of the past, but all assume that Skolo will need to “feed” at some point. The People's Army and Navy have made several official “mutual defense pacts” with other nations, even their rivals in the U.S., India, and Japan, should Skolo awaken, as all realize that Skolo is “everyone's problem.”

Scolopendra-Ginamo

Also known as: Skolo, The Megapede, “Doc Wong's Monster,” and “The Hundred Horrors of Dr. Wong.”

Alignment: Anarchist, but reevaluating its life; considered Miscreant or Diabolic by the outside world.

Attributes: I.Q. 13 (Dr. Wong's original I.Q. was 24). M.E. 14, M.A. 5 (27 for Intimidation purposes), Supernatural P.S. 52!, P.P. 19, Supernatural P.E. 27, P.B. 4, Spd 26 on dry land, 17 in the water. P.S. and P.E. are considered Supernatural.

Natural A.R. (S.D.C. Worlds): 18 (exceedingly tough outer carapace).

Hit Points (S.D.C. Worlds): 200,000; starts losing Hit Points from Main Body once all Main Body S.D.C. has been depleted. Treat as 5,000 M.D.C. “extra” in Mega-Damage worlds. **Note:** Destroying the head will not “kill” Skolo (will not damage or bypass Hit Points), but will merely leave a mindless killing machine; see Damage Capacity below.

Damage Capacity by Location:

* Head – 100,000 S.D.C. (2,600 M.D.C. in Mega-Damage settings.)

* Antennae (2) – 10,000 S.D.C. each (260 M.D.C. in Mega-Damage settings.)

Mantis Claws (2) – 20,000 S.D.C. each (520 M.D.C. in Mega-Damage settings.)

* Tail Spines (2) – 6,000 S.D.C. each (140 M.D.C. in Mega-Damage settings.)

* Retractable Spines (3) – 8,000 S.D.C. each (200 M.D.C. in Mega-Damage settings); silk tethers are 1,000 S.D.C. (260 M.D.C.) per 100 feet (30 m).

* Legs (24) – 4,000 S.D.C. each (100 M.D.C. each in Mega-Damage settings.)

** Main Body – 400,000 S.D.C. (10,000 M.D.C. in Mega-Damage settings; plus “Hit Points,” see above.)

* A single asterisk indicates a relatively small or difficult target to hit and requires a “Called Shot” at -3 to strike. **Note:** Destroying the head will blind Skolo and destroy the last shreds of intelligence and sentience, but, frighteningly, the body will live on in a thrashing, kill-everything rage!

** Depleting the Main Body will kill Scolopendra. **Note:** When reared, the mantis claws are opened, exposing the underbelly to attack (see artwork and Vulnerabilities). This lowers the A.R. to 13 and allows damage to bypass straight to Hit Points!

Horror Factor: 16 prone or 19 reared-up (it’s a super-giant Kaiju centipede!).

Size: 300 feet (91 m) long, 40 feet (12 m) diameter (main body); can rear up to a height of about 150 feet (46 m).

Weight: 3 to 4 megatons.

Appearance: Appears as a horrific, jet-black, impossibly large Vietnamese centipede with 24 insect-like legs, armored mantis-like forearms and bright red eyes. There are three barbed spikes on the upper back near the head that can launch and retract on silk lines. It normally crawls along “head down” like a normal centipede, mantis claws retracted, but when threatened it will rear-up on its aft 12-14 legs and shriek/threaten with the mantis claws. The legs on the upper half will splay out to make it appear larger (much like the hood of a cobra or the wings of a praying mantis).

Disposition: Apparently just a mindless killing machine. However, a guilt-laden, melancholy remnant of the mad Doctor Wong *may* reside somewhere in that misfiring mind. Perhaps, just maybe, a remorseful, gentle soul could be found within if anyone looked deep enough.

O.C.C.: None, though the subsumed “Dr. Wong” aspect *might* retain some muddled knowledge of his former skills as a genetic engineer at half their original level (he was a 10th level Scientist).

Natural Abilities: A number of bio-engineered super-abilities!

Can rear to a semi-standing position or drop to a crawling position as an automatic instantaneous action. At home in the water and on dry land. Skolo has a natural Swimming ability of 90%. Extraordinary endurance. Bio-recycling of its own breath or waste; can hold its breath underwater for an indefinite amount of time (can “live” underwater) and can go without food or drink for 3D6 months. Also, can effectively “eat” or “drink” anything, including stone, coral, brick, or metal! Also, the creature has the equivalent skills of Blend 60% and Camouflage (self) 55% when in or underwater. Furthermore, Skolo can damage M.D.C. targets even in an S.D.C. environment (treat as A.R. 18)!

Super-Regeneration: Regenerates 100 S.D.C. (10 M.D.C. in Mega-Damage worlds) per melee action! That’s 40 S.D.C. (4 M.D.C.) per second! Can completely regenerate lost limbs, spines, mantis claws, mandibles, eyes, and body at a rate equivalent to this regeneration. Note that a lost limb, etc., remains “lost” until at least 50% regenerated. If the head is destroyed, all but the brain will regenerate, leaving a mindless killing machine! If Skolo is reduced to zero Hit Points or less (down to negative half Hit Points) it will completely regenerate, being “resurrected” after 50% of its Hit Points are regenerated! Skolo will theoretically only “die” if reduced to -100,000 Hit Points (-2,500 M.D.C. in Mega-Damage worlds)! Even then, it may be advisable to break out the flame throwers and destroy everything, just in case!

Antennae (“Sensors”): These act as bio-sensors, allowing the detection of faint chemicals & scents and detection of heat and motion disturbances. Equates to an excellent sense of smell (can track prey by scent at 50%, can track the scent of blood at 70%), infrared heat detection (5 mile/8 km range) and motion detection up to 1 mile/1.6 km (cannot be surprised, bonus to Perception Rolls, see Bonuses). If both of Skolo’s antennae are destroyed, these abilities (and the bonuses) will be lost.

Climb on Walls: Skolo’s feet excrete a small amount of a sticky silk substance that allows it (despite its ludicrously gigantic size) to climb up vertical walls, most notably buildings and skyscrapers, or even climb along the ceiling of a large stadium or similar superstructure! Skolo can climb over mountains and buildings like they were flat ground (treat as an “Automatic Climb” skill). It has the ability to balance and distribute its weight evenly so that it will not collapse buildings despite its immense weight.

Silk Stream (Entangle): Careful use of spider and silkworm genes gave Skolo the ability to launch adhesive strands of super-strong, super-sticky silk. This silk can be “fired” in order to entangle a specific target or slowly used to wrap up a target. Takes a called shot by Skolo (must be dodged by a target since parrying will just guarantee entanglement) and, if successful, will “hold” the struck point as if gripped with a Supernatural P.S. of 40. Multiple strands (1 melee attack each) will increase the Supernatural P.S. by 50% more with each strike (rounding down; +20 P.S. for the second strand, +10 P.S. for the third, etc., so maximum of P.S. 78 at six strands). These strands can be tethered to another object for one melee action by Skolo. Note that Skolo is “programmed” to defensively release the strand if great force is exerted (e.g. if a vehicle or bound Kaiju “pulls back”); in this case the released strand will “sling” at the pulling target, requiring them to dodge or be bound up as if by a Magic Net spell. Alternately, Skolo can “build” nests, nets, traps, or trip wires out of the silk (takes 1 minute per 10,000 square feet (900 m²) for nets and other porous constructs or 5 minutes per 10,000 square feet (900 m²) for dense nest/cocoon-like structures). The silk strands are quite strong: 500 S.D.C. (130 M.D.C. in Mega-Damage settings) per 100 feet (30 m). “Nets” and “structures” made up of multiple strands will be even stronger: 1,000 S.D.C. (260 M.D.C. in Mega-Damage settings) per 10,000 square feet (900 m²) for porous constructs or 3,000 S.D.C. (780 M.D.C. in Mega-Damage settings) per

10,000 square feet (900 m²) for dense structures. This can be used to completely tie up a subdued vehicle or Kaiju in a nearly inescapable cocoon (must slowly cut their way out, if possible, requiring a roll of 18 or higher on 1D20 (P.P. bonuses added) where a failed roll will mean the blade is stuck in the cocoon as well).

Venomous Legs and Tail Spines (Poison): The legs and tail spines can (if Skolo wills) automatically excrete a toxic, caustic substance that slowly damages structures or victims that directly or indirectly come in contact with the slimy substance (1 S.D.C. per minute (2 M.D. per minute in Mega-Damage settings) until washed off). Furthermore, the substance is poisonous to biological organisms: 3D6 S.D.C. per minute (5D6 M.D. per minute in Mega-damage settings) for 1D6 minutes or until washed off; save vs Lethal Poison for half damage.

Shriek Attack (Stun): Skolo can, for one melee action, emit a high-pitched, high decibel shriek-scream that will shatter windows and other fragile objects (save at 16 or higher) and will stun and temporarily deafen victims who do not save (14 or higher; penalties are deafness if applicable and -4 to all combat actions for 1D4 melees). Victims without hearing are still affected by the vibrations (i.e. still affected by this attack), but get a +3 to save.

Attacks per Melee: 6

Damage:

Bite: 5D6x100 S.D.C. (or 1D4x10 M.D.).

Mantis Claws: 1D4x1000 S.D.C. (or 2D6x10 M.D.); +3 on initiative and +2 to strike with this attack due to its mantis-like speed. **Note:** Cannot use this attack when in prone crawling position (claws are “stowed”).

Tail Spines: 4D6x100 S.D.C. (or 7D6 M.D.) + possible venom.

Stomp (single leg): 1D6x100 S.D.C. (or 3D6 M.D.) + possible venom.

Trample/Crush (multi-leg run-over or belly-flop): 1D6x1000 S.D.C. (or 3D6x10 M.D.) + possible venom.

Body Smash: 6D6x100 S.D.C. (or 1D6x10 M.D.) with a 01-35% chance of knocking down an equivalent-sized target (loses initiative and one melee attack/action) or toppling a building.

Head Butt: 4D6x100 S.D.C. (or 7D6 M.D.).

Retractable Spines (3; ranged attack): Skolo’s main ranged weapons are its three “kill spines” on its back just behind the head. These spines launch with rocket force doing 5D6x100 S.D.C. (or 1D4x10 M.D.) in penetrating damage (treat target A.R. as 3 points lower; will damage M.D.C. targets!), and are “tethered” to Skolo by long, retractable strands of his “super silk.” Spines have 8,000 S.D.C. each (200 M.D.C. in Mega-Damage settings). The silk tethers have 1,000 S.D.C. (260 M.D.C. in Mega-Damage settings) per 100 feet (30 m), and if broken, the spine is lost, but will later be replaced by regeneration.

Constriction Attack (Main Body): Skolo has the ability to perform a Constriction attack against large targets like buildings, ships, or other Kaiju. This does 1D6x1000 S.D.C. (or 3D6x10 M.D.) per melee action and requires a successful

strike roll on the first round to initiate. This attack will be “held” from that point forward until a victim attempts to disentangle (opposing D20 rolls adding P.S. and P.P. bonuses). Obviously, buildings and vehicles cannot oppose and are in deep trouble if Constricted. In the case of other Kaiju, the constriction attack has a 25% chance per limb of entangling the victim’s limbs on the initial attack, pinning them.

Bonuses (in addition to attribute bonuses): Immune to poisons, toxins, and disease, immune to possession or bio-manipulation, immune to Horror Factor, +10 to Perception Rolls (from Antennae), +2 to save vs magic, +5 to save vs psionics, and +7 to save vs pain. **On Land:** +4 to strike/parry and +6 to dodge. **In Water:** +3 on initiative, +4 to strike/parry and +4 to dodge (amazingly adept at dodging despite its massive size).

Vulnerabilities: *Design flaw!* A minor error in Dr. Wong’s calculations caused the underbelly carapace to be permanently bonded to the mantis claw “forearms.” When Skolo is “reared up” for combat, the underbelly armor pulls out with the mantis claws, exposing the underbelly (see artwork)! This lowers the A.R. for the underbelly to 13 (but requires a Called Shot) and allows damage to bypass the S.D.C. and go straight to Hit Points! Note that Skolo may attempt an Automatic Parry (with bonuses) with the mantis claws to protect this vulnerability (damage goes to the mantis claws if successful).

Magic: None, unless you count the supernatural existence of such an impossibly large creature! **P.P.E.:** 22.

Psionics: Unknown; presumably some remnant of Dr. Wong’s Telepathic bio-circuit remains, and some other hidden psionic powers may yet manifest (55 I.S.P.). Treat as an “alien mind” for psionic purposes.

Enemies: Virtually everything and everyone!

Allies: None.

Value: Unknown. Theoretically, its remains would be a treasure-trove of recyclable super-strong parts and chemicals, unless Dr. Wong has included a “self-destruct” feature that would destroy any remains upon death, assuming death is possible!

Habitat: Currently resides underneath the western Pacific Ocean in solace or slumber. Originally created in southeastern China.

Tyrannus

Optional Material for Heroes Unlimited™

By Mark Oberle

Illustration by Daniel Krus

Craig Mabry, the anchorman for channel 23 news at noon, sat nonchalantly in his seat behind the large, faux-wood desk, conjuring as much false enthusiasm as possible as he finished what was supposed to be the last story of the broadcast.

“So folks, don’t forget to get out and enjoy the art-walk in Downtown Square this weekend and support our local artists.”



As he disposed of his last page of notes and prepared to rise from his seat, he simultaneously noticed two things. First, the red light above the camera hadn't gone off as usual to indicate it was no longer filming. Second, there was an assistant running toward him with another note page.

The young man stooped, handed the page to Craig, and said quietly, "This is big!"

The middle-aged anchor's eyes lit up and his posture straightened as he read the page and looked back at the camera.

"Ladies and gentlemen, we're following a developing story from the Portside's business sector. It seems there have been reports of some kind of giant creature attacking multiple buildings. No injuries have been reported as of yet and S.C.R.E.T. teams are en route to the area. Wait... my producer is telling me that we have a team standing by near the scene to bring us the latest. Kelly, can you hear me?"

The visage of the pretentious anchor was suddenly replaced by that of a beautiful young female reporter with vibrant green eyes and long, dark hair that would have framed her well-tanned face if it hadn't been for the steady sea breeze that caused her to have to brush it out of her eyes every few seconds. Behind her the business district of Portside could be seen clearly. Dark smoke was trailing into the sky in several places, and small groups of panic-stricken pedestrians could be seen fleeing from the direction of the smoke.

"Yes I can, Craig!" the woman practically shouted into her microphone.

"Can you tell us what is going on down there? Can you see any of the damage?"

"Well, as you can see behind me, several fires have broken out due to the destruction caused by the yet-unidentified attacker. People all over are attempting to get as far as they can

from the area, and I've been told the authorities have started evacuating entire blocks that may be in the path of this assailant's rampage."

"Are you and your crew in any danger, has anyone told you to evacuate?"

"Not yet, Craig, most of the action seems to be happening several blocks to the northeast, in that small cluster of multi-story office buildings."

"Has this thing tried to communicate at all? Do you know if it is intelligent or not?"

"No, we haven't heard anything about the creature as of yet. We tried to get a few of the witnesses to stop and talk to us but all of them seem too frightened to do anything but get as far away from here as they can."

"Have you at least gotten a glimpse of it yet, or can you tell us anything more about it?"

"Well, we have overheard the conversations between a few groups of evacuees and they have mentioned that it is huge, green, four-armed, and powerful enough to demolish buildings with its bare hands. Other than that, I don't think any of them stopped to draw a sketch, Craig."

"Thanks, Kelly, we'll check back..."

Before he could finish his sentence, the anchor's words were cut off by the live audio feed from the news crew on the scene. Distant pops and an approaching siren caused the young reporter to have to speak up even more. She began to move away from the street as she spoke.

"I'm sorry, Craig, I didn't quite catch that, there seems to be something more going on just a short ways down the street. I can hear gunfire and there are several local police cars headed toward us!"

For several seconds, the blaring sirens obscured her words as the caravan of police cruisers careened past the parking lot she and the cameraman were standing in and turned the corner three blocks down. The last in the line skidded to a halt in the middle of the road and the officer inside yelled to them. His words were relatively audible even at the distance the uniformed man was from the mic.

"You gotta get outta here! That thing is headed this way!"

A split-second after the warning, an explosion rippled through one of the older high-rises within view of the camera. The flames had engulfed the building in a matter of moments, causing the reporter and the officer both to stop and stare. As they did so, the cameraman turned the camera to the intersection near the building as one of the police cruisers went barrel-rolling through it twenty feet off the ground, with its flashing lights making it appear more like an effect at a nightclub rather than a tool of the law.

"Holy crap," exclaimed the cameraman "let's get the hell out of here, Kelly!"

The patrol car had already started backing up rapidly as the news crew started to head towards their van. The camera kept rolling despite the shaky footage it was getting as its operator moved quickly away from the explosions and airborne police cars. That's when the monster stepped around the side of the large burning office building.

The four-armed, reptilian behemoth was nearly twenty stories tall and left massive depressions in the road surface wherever it tread. As it turned south toward the news crew, it reached out with one massive, clawed hand and tore a chunk out of the corner of another building across the way, spraying bits of metal, steel, and concrete into the parking lot where the news van sat waiting.

"GO, GO, GO, MOVE!" the cameraman screamed as he and Kelly climbed into the back of the van.

The thundering footsteps of the snarling creature could be heard bearing down on the crew as the van started up and jolted into reverse, swinging out of the parking space it had been parked in and allowing the cameraman a shot through the open rear door as the driver did his best to turn the multi-ton van into a drag racer.

Unfortunately for Kelly and her crew, much like drag racers news vans are not made to take tight turns. So when the driver had to veer to avoid a few retreating office workers, the van tipped on its side. The lens of the camera cracked, but the battered cameraman managed to retrieve it amid the chaotic tangle of displaced equipment. When the sound kicked back in, Kelly could be heard screaming fearfully. As the camera was pointed out one of the shattered back windows, the reason became apparent. The van was moving rapidly upwards, lifted by a massive thumb and forefinger.

The horrific monster placed the van in its open palm and raised it to face level, its dark, slanted eyes staring intently at the battered vehicle. After a few seconds that felt more like a heart-stopping eternity, it addressed the news crew with a booming voice.

"Humans, come out here, I have need of you."

Inside the van, there was a long, tense pause as Kelly and her cameraman stared at each other, both mortified and puzzled. The enormous terror didn't give them long before letting out an obviously annoyed sigh.

"Come out now or I will squeeze you out like toothpaste in a can."

That was all the convincing it took to force the terrified duo from the relative safety of their vehicle. It was all the cameraman could do to keep his focus on the other-worldly visage that stared back at him.

"Good, now, I want to send a message to this nation and every other on this pitiful little rock you call Earth."

Cradling her broken arm, Kelly finally managed to work up the courage to yell out, "What is it, what could you want, you monster?!"

Flashing a maliciously toothy grin, the beast replied, "Your world, you miserable little cockroach. I will rule it like I did the last."

"It'll never happen, you freak, there are more than enough heroes out there to stop an army of you! S.C.R.E.T. will take you down before you make it out of this city!" the injured reporter screamed defiantly.

Bringing its palm close enough to its face for the news crew to feel its warm breath, the alien creature shot back sinisterly, "I am Tyrannus, and I will flatten every city before me. Nothing can withstand my might, and I will destroy city after city and

any opposition I face until your kind submit to my will. However, exceptionally strong members of your race might find places as my lieutenants if they are worthy. As for you, you irritating speck of dirt, you have fulfilled your purpose."

With that, Tyrannus tilted his hand and laughed as the crew tumbled to their doom. The screen went static as they plummeted and then switched back over to a shocked and horrified Craig Mabry. The bewildered anchorman sat in silence before choking out a single line.

"We've got to go to a break, folks, we'll be back."

The Reptirox are a race of reptilian humanoids native to another dimension. In that dimension, this space-faring culture expanded to conquer several galaxies in the span of five-hundred years. It was on a routine subjugation mission that the invasion force Tyrannus led encountered a freak dimensional storm upon entering the atmosphere. The alien overlord barely managed to eject safely from his craft. He was the only one of the force to survive.

Stranded on a backwater planet with little hope of immediate rescue, Tyrannus set out to accomplish his directive despite his lack of manpower and resources. With his natural abilities, he was more than formidable enough to subjugate the primitive native races within less than a decade, brutally crushing any resistance.

Tyrannus was worshiped as a god until a band of intergalactic heroes, survivors of other conquered races living in exile, stumbled across his proxy kingdom. They managed to use their normal-sized ship as bait to trick Tyrannus into assuming his minimum size. Just as the change was complete, they ambushed him with a newly learned spell that was supposed to remove him from existence. The heroes were triumphant, the spell worked just as it was supposed to, but it had consequences they didn't realize. Instead of destroying the ruthless alien dictator, it transported him to another planet on an entirely different plane of existence... Earth.

Luckily for the twice-stranded villain, he arrived on the farm of James and Emma Peterson. They had recently lost their only son in a tragic car accident, so the appearance of a bewildered and confused alien being didn't frighten them, but rather lifted their spirits. It was a sign; they were to help this poor, misunderstood creature to survive in an unjust world that would fear and attack him. Perhaps he had even been sent to take the place of their lost son.

Tyrannus wasn't stupid. He took the chance to gather information on this new planet while James and Emma sheltered him from a world that would obviously fear and misunderstand him. Once he had sufficient command of the language and suitable knowledge of what this world of super beings had to offer, he unceremoniously slaughtered his benefactors and set about putting his plan for world domination into action. He now intends to hold entire towns and cities hostage in order to force national governments to submit to his rule. He will do everything he can to make Portside the first conquest (or the first ruin) of his reign.

Tyrannus

Real Name: Xer Suru-t'asonnary.

Race/R.C.C.: Reptirox Military Specialist.

Alignment: Diabolic.

Attributes: I.Q. 15, M.E. 11, M.A. 12, P.S. 35 (215), P.P. 22, P.E. 60, P.B. 8, Spd 13 (26). The Attributes in parentheses are for Tyrannus at max height.

Height: 11 feet, 6 inches (3.5 m) minimum, 191 feet, 6 inches (58.4 m) max.

Weight: 600 lbs (270 kg) at minimum height, 41,600 lbs (18,720 kg) at full height.

Hit Points: 176

S.D.C.: 476 (5,876).

Age: 34

Sex: Male.

Horror/Awe Factor: 18 when full-sized.

P.P.E.: 27

Experience Level: Twelfth.

Disposition: Megalomaniacal in every sense of the word, Tyrannus already conquered one world and won't be satisfied until he conquers Earth. Currently, he greatly underestimates the threat that Earth's super being population poses to his plans. However, the reptilian overlord is far from stupid. Therefore, if he isn't taken down early in his bid for global domination, then he will quickly adapt to (and even relish) the challenge that super-powered opponents represent.

Tyrannus is ruthless, disciplined, and dangerous in the extreme; he gives his foes no quarter and expects none from them. Tyrannus is more than willing to do whatever it takes to win an engagement, including recruiting other villains as his lieutenants.

Description: A tall to enormous reptilian humanoid with a dark, grayish-green skin tone, thickly muscled frame with bulging veins, four arms, wicked claws, a prehensile tail, nose slits in the center of his face, and elongated eyes that are solid black in color.

Primary Skills: Language: English 80%, Literacy: English 80%, Armorer 98%, Basic Mechanics 98%, Demolitions 98%, Demolitions Disposal 98%, Recognize Weapon Quality 90%, Trap/Mine Detection 85%, Detect Ambush 95%, Detect Concealment 90%, Intelligence 86%, Interrogation 98%, Tracking 90%, Acrobatics, Gymnastics, Running, Wrestling, W.P. Energy Pistol, W.P. Energy Rifle, W.P. Blunt, and W.P. Targeting. Can also pilot his antigravity suit at 98%.

Secondary Skills: Basic Electronics 85%, Swimming 98%, Basic Mathematics 98%, and Computer Operation 95%.

Special Abilities: Supernatural Strength, regenerates 10 S.D.C. and 2 Hit Points per minute, and can instantly regenerate 1D6x100 Hit Points/S.D.C. twice per day. Can carry an incredible 780,450 lbs (351,203 kg) and lift a mind-boggling 1,300,750 lbs (585,338 kg) when at maximum height, +30 feet (9.1 m) to throwing range at minimum height, +1110 feet (338 m) to throwing range at max height. Immune to all but the most virulent of diseases, resistant to drugs and poisons (1/3 effects and damage on a failed save), resistant to fire (takes half damage), and does not fatigue whatsoever. Additionally, all of the powers that Tyrannus possesses are the natural abilities of his race. Thus, they cannot be neutralized by the Negate Super Powers ability or by any other method that specifically targets super abilities.

Combat Training: Hand to Hand: Martial Arts.

Attacks per Melee: Seven.

Damage: Minimum Height: Restrained Punch 2D6+2, Full Strength Punch 5D6, Claw Strike 6D6, Power Punch 1D6x10, Power Strike 2D4x10, Tail Strike 5D6. Max Height: Restrained Punch 1D4x100, Full Strength Punch 3D6x100, Claw Strike 4D6x100 Power Punch 5D6x100, Power Strike 6D6x100, Tail Strike 3D6x100.

Combat Bonuses: +3 to initiative, +6 (+8) to strike, +10 (+12) to parry, +9 (+5) to dodge, +3 to pull punch, +8 to roll, +4 to disarm, pin/incapacitate on 18-20, Critical Strike on 18-20, Death Blow on 16-20! Bonuses in parentheses are for heights of 20 feet (6.1 m) or more.

Other Combat Information: Tyrannus is the equivalent of an alien Special Forces commander, so he is well versed in the ways of combat. If that weren't enough, he was trained from a young age by his empire in how to best apply his natural abilities to all forms of combat (especially when it comes to demoralizing his enemies). His standard tactic is to enter a densely populated or critical urban area at his minimum height to avoid detection if at all possible. Then, he explodes to full height and wipes out any nearby resistance while doing his best to limit travel into and out of the area (blocking roads with debris, destroying bridges and tunnels, etc.). Once these objectives are accomplished, it is as simple as making his demands known.

In full combat situations, Tyrannus is quite fond of causing massive amounts of collateral damage to discourage his opponents from pressing the attack. He has also been known to use large objects such as rubble, vehicles, and the like as thrown weapons, especially when dealing with airborne opponents!

Other Bonuses: +12 to save vs magic, +3 to save vs psionics, +11 to save vs toxins/poisons, +2 to save vs possession, +12 to save vs Horror Factor (it's hard to scare something that can shot-put main battle tanks!), +80% to save vs coma/death.

Vulnerabilities: When at heights of 20 feet (6.1 m) or larger, Tyrannus becomes a relatively easy target to hit. Even at full height, he wouldn't be able to last long against combined fire from multiple opponents, not to mention heavy artillery such as tank rounds, missiles, and mortars. This is yet another reason he targets dense urban areas, as they not only give him physical cover from several angles but also limit the amount of firepower his opponents can bring to bear for fear of collateral damage.

At temperatures at or below the freezing point (32 degrees Fahrenheit or 0 degrees Celsius), Tyrannus weakens drastically. After a mere 30 seconds of exposure, the effectiveness of his super abilities, speed, number of attacks, combat bonuses, lift/carry weight, and hand to hand damage are cut in half! No one has discovered this as of yet because Tyrannus sticks to southern climes in the winter months.

Magic: None.

Psionics: None.

Weapons and Equipment: When Tyrannus was banished, he only had his antigravity suit and a large Vibro-Knife (3D6 damage). He will steal any equipment he feels he needs,

though he intends to find a way of obtaining weapons he can use at his full height!

Money: Only \$9,000 in precious gems currently.

Allies: None to date. However, if his reign of terror isn't stopped decisively in its early stages, he may attract a variety of villains looking to get in on the mayhem.

Enemies: Anyone that has the gall to get in his way, especially law enforcement agencies, military personnel, and super beings (whether they are heroes or rival villains). What Tyrannus doesn't realize is that even if he was successful in carving out a small empire on Earth, the intergalactic society known as the Covenant probably wouldn't look kindly on this inter-dimensional conqueror wreaking havoc on Earth. The question is, how much damage will he cause in the meantime, and will it be necessary for the Covenant to return to Earth and deal with this new threat?

The Hammer of the Forge

Chapter Forty-Four

“Back in Black”

By James M.G. Cannon

Night came quickly on Hurin IV, a small world orbiting a dying star. With night came a severe drop in temperature. The star's meager rays did little to warm up the fourth planet in the system.

The cold did not bother Elias Harkonnen. A former member of the Transgalactic Empire's Invincible Guard, Harkonnen was blessed not only with supernatural strength and the ability to fly, but almost total invulnerability to harm. Discomfort was foreign to him as well. Yet he hated Hurin IV all the same.

He and his ally Starkad, a Wolfen, had been deposited on Hurin IV by Blue Bennie and his gang. Blue Bennie, a powerful four-dimensional being and a pirate, recently busted out of the Consortium penitentiary on Hala, the same chunk of ice and rock on which Harkonnen and Starkad were so recently incarcerated. Blue Bennie, newly freed and feeling magnanimous, agreed to give Harkonnen and Starkad a lift to the nearest non-Consortium system. Harkonnen had hoped to join up with the gang, but Blue Bennie wasn't holding tryouts.

So Hurin IV was where Harkonnen and Starkad ended up.

It was a relatively remote world, small, with a tiny population. The entire planet only had three cities on it, and while they possessed massive skyscrapers and traffic jams and organized crime, that still left an awful lot of barren wasteland beyond the city limits. Each of the cities was built around a mining concern; Hurin IV was almost entirely composed of iron. True, iron was one of the most common elements in the Three Galaxies, but iron planets were a rarity, and the Issea Thrim Mining Concern

had been boring into Hurin IV's crust for nearly five hundred years now.

All that mining and all those miners meant shipping, smuggling, corruption, and graft. But it was local, penny ante stuff, and none of it interested Harkonnen. He considered himself a master criminal – he was a wanted Elf throughout the Transgalactic Empire for desertion, and throughout the Consortium of Civilized Worlds for terrorism. In a few systems, for piracy. Hurin IV was too small a pond for a shark like Harkonnen.

But for the time being, he was stuck. Neither he nor Starkad had access to a ship. Public transportation was out of the question, because it followed civilized trade routes that would only draw unwanted attention from the authorities. The local criminal element, particularly the smugglers, offered a way off world, but the prices they demanded were outrageous. Harkonnen and Starkad, newly escaped from prison, simply did not have the funds necessary. Not yet, at any rate.

Their first “caper” consisted of Harkonnen tearing an automated credit dispenser from its mooring and flying off before the police arrived. He and Starkad divvied the spoils in a back alley, and Harkonnen left the ACD on a roof. Harkonnen wasn't particularly proud of that maneuver, but it netted them enough ready cash to fit themselves out in decent body armor, obtain some weapons, and find a place to crash while they scouted out the city and schemed. Harkonnen sent a few drop-messages to his informant on Phase World and his former employer, Thraxus, but didn't expect any help to materialize from either of them.

Then a band of In'Valian Robo-Jockeys hit town, and things began to look up.

* * *

The In'Valians were a cursed race. Ages ago, their highly advanced technological society had sought to create a Rift, and when they succeeded, they panicked and killed the first extradimensional monstrosity that oozed through their doorway. But the monstrosity's mother had looked through the gate and cursed the entire In'Valian species with a congenital wasting disease that, in the thousands of years since, had largely eradicated them. Only a few million In'Valians still survived, expatriates who had fled a dead world, slowly wasting away and only able to interact with the physical world using their state-of-the-art exoskeletons. The Three Galaxies derisively referred to them as “Robo-Jockeys,” because they lumbered around in cumbersome robotic frames, breaking china and crushing furniture and not fitting into taxi cabs. As a side effect of their curse, it seemed that every In'Valian left alive had also become a complete and utter bastard.

Harkonnen and Starkad were sitting in a mob-owned pub in one of the seedier sections of town when the In'Valians made their presence known. Most of the clientele was made up of other criminals, mobsters and their wives and mistresses; Harkonnen and Starkad were welcome only because of their reputations as off-world troublemakers. Harkonnen was not one to go carousing, but Starkad had convinced him to come along in an effort to introduce and ingratiate themselves to the local crime lords. So they ordered some drinks, found a table, and Harkonnen immediately began to wonder how long he had to stay.

A human with a bad haircut and a handlebar mustache approached their table not long after they sat down. “You're Elias Harkonnen, right?” he said, gesturing at the Elf with the hand that held his drink.

Harkonnen allowed that he was. His white eyes surveyed the human, noting that he wore light armor under his clothes and kept a blast pistol secreted under his left armpit. “You were on Malthus-IV when Quajinn Huo killed Lothar of Motherhome, weren't you?” the human said. When Harkonnen replied in the affirmative, the human laughed. “Let me buy you a drink!”

Harkonnen looked at his barely touched beverage, but knowing how the game was meant to be played and hating every poorly rehearsed line, allowed the human to buy him a drink. His name was Sully, and he wanted to hear all about Harkonnen's adventures with Quajinn Huo, and whether he knew that Huo had managed to die two hundred cycles before killing Lothar and how that might have happened. Harkonnen had not heard anything about Huo's activities after Malthus IV – it was on that caper that Harkonnen himself had been captured, and since then he had been incarcerated on Hala. Harkonnen felt mild irritation that he would not be able to revenge himself on Huo for abandoning him, but was glad to learn that the Draconid wizard was dead.

A few of Sully's buddies migrated over to Harkonnen and Starkad's table, intrigued by the possibility of hearing Harkonnen's tale. Starkad rose to gather more chairs, silently urging Harkonnen to play along. He wanted off world just as much as Elias did, and believed that the only way they would get anywhere was to make themselves friendly and popular with the local crime lords. Harkonnen wasn't much for pleasantries. He was a soldier, born and bred, a blunt instrument of terror unleashed on the Transgalactic Empire's foes when mass destruction was called for. He had left the employ of the TGE because they weren't giving him enough opportunity to vent his passion for devastation; his superiors preferred to hold Harkonnen in reserve until something spectacular was needed. But here he was, stranded, and with limited options. He was now forced to play the kind of games he particularly hated.

So Harkonnen forced himself to play along. As the evening progressed, his audience grew more inebriated and interested, but the alcohol had no effect on Harkonnen's super-charged metabolism. He was just getting to the climax of his tale, to the wonderment and appreciation of Sully and his boys, when the front door of the pub was thrown open, and a body sailed through the air to crash across one of the tables. Immediately behind the body came three hulking figures in heavy armor, sauntering cockily.

These were the In'Valians, all gleaming chrome and megasteel, like combat 'bots in miniature, bristling with weapons and armored plates. Each chassis had a transparent dome that showed the pilot's face. The In'Valians had once been a handsome, blue-skinned species, but now they were afflicted with a pinkish rash and their features appeared desiccated and drawn. The dome looked vulnerable, but Harkonnen knew it would be hard as megasteel, and then wondered why he even cared. These beings weren't his problem.

The Robo-Jockeys marched into the room, exoskeletons whirring and clanking, and they scattered tables, chairs, and patrons as they moved. Sully and his boys tensed around

Harkonnen, and Sully began to reach for the blaster in his arm-pit. The Elf noticed Starkad reaching for a weapon as well, but Harkonnen waved him off with an irritated gesture. They weren't getting involved, no matter how desperately Starkad wanted to impress these pathetic thugs.

Sully stood up, drawing his weapon. "You're making a real dumb mistake, Robo-Jockeys," he said. "You got no idea who owns this place."

"Oh, but we do," said the In'Valian in the middle. He raised his arm and a beam of light flashed across the room. Sully's head disintegrated and his body crumpled to the floor. His boys scrambled, grabbing for guns. "This is a message to Mr. Vartell, from Tox. We're taking over this town." Gunfire erupted in the middle of the pub. The In'Valians stood there and took the shots, hardly fazed, while Sully's boys and quite a number of bystanders withered under the barrage. Starkad hit the ground pretty hard and covered his head with his gauntlets, having left his helmet at the hotel. But Harkonnen sat still with a grim smile and sipped his drink. Only once did a stray beam hit him, caroming off his forehead and leaving nothing so much as a smudge.

When the brief battle was over and the smoke cleared, the In'Valians gave Harkonnen a wary look before approaching the bar. The apparent leader reached over the counter and lifted the landlord up into view. "You will see that our message reaches Vartell." It wasn't a question, and the landlord knew it. He nodded dumbly. The In'Valian dropped him with a thump, and then without another word the three left as casually as they had arrived. The leader gave Harkonnen a backward glance, prompting Harkonnen to raise his drink in salute. The In'Valian sneered, which drew one of Harkonnen's wicked grins.

Twelve other mob fronts were hit that same night, with similar results. Harkonnen was quietly amused when Starkad shared the news, but the Wolfen stormed around their hotel room, muttering and swearing. Seven of his informers, people he had been cultivating since their arrival on Hurin, had died in the raids, a serious setback to Starkad's machinations. Machinations which had, so far, borne no fruit.

"Wait and see," Harkonnen said. Starkad glowered.

But two days later, after the In'Valians had torn through another 40 million credits in mob assets, the computer screen in their hotel room chimed. A haggard human appeared on screen. "Mr. Vartell would like to talk to you."

Harkonnen smiled enigmatically at Starkad's surprised look. Within the hour the two of them stood in Vartell's richly furnished penthouse apartment in the heart of the city. Armored, but without their weapons, they waited by the wet bar for Vartell. He didn't keep them waiting long. A short, balding human in snappy clothes, he stalked into the room flanked by two full conversion 'Borgs. "Welcome, gentlemen," Vartell said, spreading his hands expansively, rings flashing in the light.

"You want me to take care of your infestation," Harkonnen said.

Vartell harrumphed. "Right to business, then. I'm not sure I like that."

Harkonnen smiled. "I don't have much patience for pleasantries, Mr. Vartell. I'm a hired gun, and if it's all the same to you, I'd rather be out there shooting than talking."

Vartell harrumphed again. "So be it. I suppose I shouldn't complain. The longer we chat, the more chance those creatures have of harming my people. I want them gone, Mr. Harkonnen. Eradicated. What will that cost me?"

"Four hundred thousand. And a fast ship."

The blood drained from Vartell's face. "You're serious."

"I never joke about money, Mr. Vartell."

There was a long silence. Finally, Vartell said, "Okay." They shook hands, ironed out the basic details, and Harkonnen and Starkad left the building.

Out on the street, Starkad checked his weapons and said, "How did you do that?"

"I have a reputation," Harkonnen said. "A very useful reputation."

* * *

The In'Valians weren't hard to find. They operated out of their ship, down at the space-docks. It was a massive battle cruiser, bristling with weaponry, designed for maximum intimidation and maximum firepower. Starkad wondered out loud why the mob didn't just move in on their own.

"They might, if we fail," Harkonnen said. "But that's a loud solution to the problem. Right now the authorities are looking the other way, because only criminals have been targeted. But if more bodies pile up, or a starship is destroyed here on the tarmac... well, then you might see City Security take a closer look at all the stuff going on. Vartell will avoid that as long as possible."

"So they hired us."

"No, Starkad, they hired me." Harkonnen flashed the Wolfen a cruel smile. Starkad grimaced, but didn't contradict the Elf.

A ramp lowered from the In'Valian ship's belly as they approached. Harkonnen and Starkad shared a look, but they walked up the ramp. Three In'Valians were waiting for them at the top of the ramp, in the ship's hold. They might have been the same three from the pub, but it was hard to tell. They all looked the same to Harkonnen.

"You look like you've been expecting me," Harkonnen said.

One of the In'Valians smiled coldly. "We've been expecting someone from Vartell's operation to come by and capitulate. Thought it would take him longer."

"Yes, well, I should really talk to Tox," Harkonnen said.

The In'Valian who spoke looked at his compatriots for a moment. Some kind of silent communication must have occurred, for when he turned back to Harkonnen and Starkad, he said, "Hand over your weapons and follow me."

Harkonnen gladly divested himself of his pistol, but Starkad was slightly more reluctant to give up his guns and grenades. They followed the lead In'Valian through the ship. The other two followed closely, and as the group left the hold, Harkonnen heard the *clang* of the ramp closing behind them. The In'Valians led them through a maze of passageways, consciously avoiding vital parts of the ship. The In'Valians had not searched them, simply assuming they had surrendered all their weapons, but they apparently did not want to take too many risks.

At last they reached their destination, some kind of briefing room. Six more In'Valians were already waiting for them there,

and another foursome came trundling down a corridor as Harkonnen and Starkad arrived. Harkonnen was a little surprised. He had never heard of so many In'Valians together in one place. This was interesting. What were they planning, and why was Hurin IV so important?

Harkonnen and Starkad were escorted into the room, and made to stand in the exact center. All the In'Valians stood as well, except for one in a sleek exoskeleton painted black and silver. "I am Tox," he said. "What news do you bring me?"

"Nothing good, I'm afraid," Harkonnen said. "Mr. Vartell has hired me to kill you all. But as I share no particular loyalty to him, I am inclined to see if you will make a better offer to keep your lives."

There were chuckles and sounds of indignation from the crowd. Starkad grew stiff and uncertain beside Harkonnen. Tox merely frowned. "What do you want?"

"A million creds and a P-61 Thunderbolt."

More laughter greeted this declaration, as well as a few cries of "kill them now." The laughter was beginning to annoy Harkonnen. His Invincible Guard armor had been taken from him in prison and never replaced, but he had kept it so long after desertion because of the intimidation factor inherent in its cold lines and rich red color. Most sapient beings looked at him and saw a thin, short Elf, but when they saw the armor they knew he was Invincible Guard and they knew to fear him. These In'Valians didn't know him, not as Vartell did.

Tox held up a mechanical hand. "You come here unarmed, surrounded, and make a demand which is sure to get you killed. Either you are an idiot, or you have something to offer us. Which is it?"

Harkonnen smiled. The thing about reputations like his, is that they must periodically be bolstered through acts of extreme violence. Without a word, Harkonnen kicked backwards, sweeping Starkad from his feet and knocking the Wolfen to the floor with a crash. Simultaneously, Harkonnen launched himself at Tox with a two-fisted slam that knocked the In'Valian off his chair and, most dramatically, cracked the dome protecting his head. A look of sheer terror crossed Tox's wasted face.

"Should have made a deal," Harkonnen said. He raised his fist to smash the dome and Tox's head, but something grabbed his hand. He looked up, saw an In'Valian holding him, and switched tactics. One sweep of his arm sent the In'Valian tumbling across the room. Another In'Valian opened panels in his exoskeleton and a barrage of energy beams slammed into Harkonnen. It shredded his armor, but did not harm him.

More In'Valians began to fire, as if they hoped to take him down through sheer numbers. But Harkonnen was invulnerable, and there was nothing they could do to stop him from killing each and every one of them. He picked up Tox, broke him in half like a child's toy, and then launched himself at the next In'Valian, roaring an old battle cry from the Invincible Guard.

* * *

Hours later, clad in a newly purchased suit of battle armor, Elias Harkonnen cruised through the air, navigating the lanes between the city's towering and brightly lit buildings. Down at the docks, a frazzled but still whole Starkad was giving their new ship, a K-7 Starscream, the once over.

When the smoke had cleared and the screams had died down, Starkad had shakily suggested taking the In'Valian ship, but Harkonnen had vetoed that. It was too much ship for their present operation. He didn't need a battle cruiser at this point, he just needed a fast ship to get them off world and to more lucrative markets. Starkad didn't argue, nor even ask about his reasoning, so the carnage Harkonnen had inflicted on the In'Valians had immediately paid off. Vartell was similarly terrified of him, after surveying the wreckage, and couldn't pay Harkonnen fast enough.

It felt good to be feared again. Harkonnen had lost so much to prison. He needed to recoup his losses. And some revenge would be nice, too.



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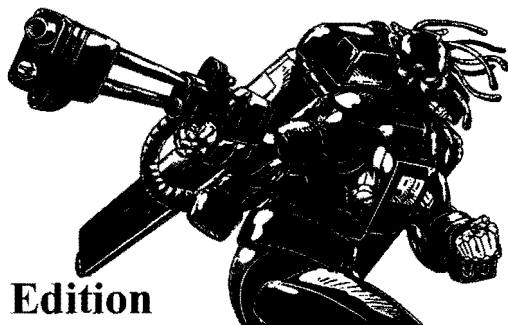
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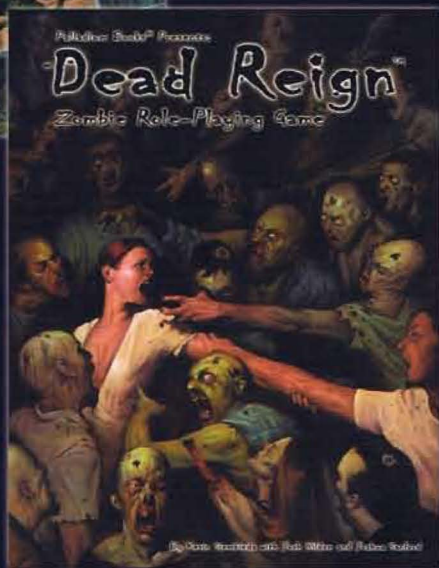
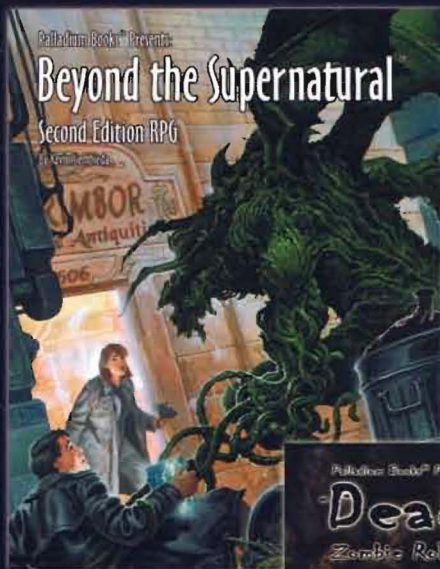
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