

Palladium Books® Presents:

THE

RIFFTER®

Your Guide to the Megaverse®



Inside this Issue...

Mystic Knights

The Court of Tarot

Of Bows and Arrows

Dead Reign Alternate Setting

Plus Hammer of the Forge™, and more!

Warning!

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 45

Your guide to the Palladium Megaverse®!

First Printing – January 2009

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Palladium Books® Presents:

THE RIFTER #45



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, 2009

Contents – The Rifter® #45 – January, 2009

Page 6 – Art

I asked *Mark Dudley* to do a special illustration of “Baby New Year” to ring in the New Year. Instead, Mark gave us a “babe” and friends. I love the piece. It’s fun and funny, but it also represents the coming New Year for Palladium Books wonderfully.

The angel represents the good, the hope and the big plans we have for a *great* New Year and getting Palladium completely on its feet.

The devil represents some of our fears about the economy (which are looking like they might be unfounded), our current cash flow crunch, and the challenges ahead.

The wrapped gift symbolizes all the new books we want to give you in the coming year. Boy oh boy do we have one great sourcebook planned after another. We are very excited and we think you will be too.

The hot babe represents, of course, the New Year, and since she is *hot*, it means Palladium is going to *sizzle* with excitement and new product all year long! Product and fun that will get the hearts of gamers everywhere pumping with excitement.

The teddy bear is Palladium’s commitment to make 2009 the best year ever! (Or it could be that Mark Dudley has a thing for teddy bears, but we aren’t brave enough to ask him. Maybe you can ask him at the *2009 Palladium Open House* this May 1-3, 2009.)

And may all of you enjoy a happy and prosperous New Year.

Page 7 – From the Desk of Kevin Siembieda

The Boss Man talks about our optimism and plans for 2009, the people who helped get us this far, Erick Wujcik, the good, the bad, and high hopes.

Page 8 – 2009 State of Palladium Books®

It has been no picnic since the Crisis of Treachery. We’ve been working hard, dealing with whatever new problems came our way, faced disappointments and new challenges, had many small and spectacular triumphs, made great headway, and have high hopes for the New Year. You can read all about it in these pages.

We just hope you are as excited about 2009 and the future of Palladium Books as we are. There are still issues and challenges ahead of us, but we are pumped up and full of ideas for new product.

Page 10 – News & Coming Attractions

As Kevin Siembieda states, we hope to make 2009 Palladium’s year to shine. We’re going to do that with a multitude of new product, many of which are already in some stage of development.

And we plan to support as many game lines as we can, with books for **Rifts®**, **Robotech®**, **Palladium Fantasy RPG®**, **Dead Reign™**, **Minion War™** series, **Nightbane®**, **Heroes Unlimited™**, and much more on the schedule. Oh yeah, and the

new modern combat RPG, **Warpath™: Urban Jungle™** too. Get your first glimpse right here.

Page 15 – 2009 Palladium Open House

It’s fun. It’s intimate. It’s three days of *role playing games*. And it is your chance to game with and chat with Kevin Siembieda, Jason Marker, Julius Rosenstein, Carmen Bellaire, Carl Gleba, and a host of other Palladium creators ONE-ON-ONE!

Yep, you get to meet Kevin, the Palladium staff and dozens of Palladium writers and artists. Best of all, you get to *game with them*. The entire event is ALL Palladium role-playing games and you are treated like a long-time friend. Oh yeah, it is held at the Palladium warehouse!

You should think about attending. How to do so is all on this page.

Page 16 – The Rifter® Special Subscription Offer

We encourage people to buy *The Rifter®* and other Palladium products at their favorite retail stores. However, if you have trouble finding *The Rifter®* in stores, or want the convenience of having it delivered right to your door, then you’ll want to check this out.

Page 17 – Another World of Zombies

Optional alternative setting for the **Dead Reign™** RPG

The Dead Reign™ RPG that saw publication is very different from what Josh Hilden and Joshua Sanford had envisioned. The sneak peek of the game in progress back in **The Rifter® #40** with secret cults, conspiracy, betrayal of the human race, an Alien Intelligence who uses the risen dead and demons were all part of their storyline. Kevin Siembieda explains why he decided to take **Dead Reign™** in a different direction, and presents some of Josh and Josh’s original material as an alternative time-line setting. This can be easily combined with the material in **The Rifter #40** and the **Dead Reign™** RPG to play a different kind of Zombie Apocalypse. The monsters could also be used in **BTS™**, **Heroes Unlimited™** and **Palladium Fantasy®**. Enjoy.

Introduction – Page 18

Brulyx Invasion Time Line – Page 20

Cult of Brulyx & The Benford Group – Page 22

The Supernatural – Page 25

Art by newcomer *Stephen Fox*, who knocked the illustrations out of the park on this job. Nice work.

Page 32 – Of Bows & Arrows

Optional source material for **Palladium Fantasy RPG®**

Newcomer *Travis Guerrero* takes an in-depth look at the art of Archery in the Fantasy setting as well as three new Archer O.C.C.s: the Psi-Archer, Demon Archer, and Circus Bowman, each with special abilities and/or bows and arrows. Plus Hand to

Hand: Performance Archery, Hand to Hand: Bow Combat, Archery Proficiencies Table, and Archery Combat. Easily adapted to **Rifts®** or **Heroes unlimited™**.

Art by the irrepressible *Chuck Walton*.

Page 45 – The Order of the Mystic Knights™

Optional source material for Rifts®

Ian Schroen and *Brian Weber* present a tour de force about Mystic Knights, their history, their hierarchy, ranks, houses of the order, off-shoot groups and their plans of villainy. There is also an expanded and revised take on the Mystic Knight O.C.C.

House Sigil – Page 55

House Brujo – Page 57

House Bregdan – Page 59

House Hiredmann – Page 60

House Isen – Page 62

House Isceald – Page 63

House Despeiren – Page 65

Wandering House – Page 67

Forbidden House – Page 68

Mystic Knight O.C.C. Revised – Page 69

Art by the indomitable *Kent Burles*.

Page 72 – The Court of Tarot

Optional material for Beyond the Supernatural™

First time contributor *Scott Gastineau* presents a very interesting group of investigators into the unknown, the *Court of Tarot*. More than that, they are rivals and competitors of the *Lazlo Society*. The organization, notable NPCs, and history are all here for your enjoyment.

Art by *Nick “the Brick” Bradshaw* – cooler than a love child between Elvis and Fonzie conceived during an ice storm!

Page 93 – The Hammer of the Forge™

Chapter 45: Montage – the latest installment of *James M.G. Cannon’s* epic tale set in the Three Galaxies.

Art by *Apollo Okamura*.

The Theme for Issue 45

This issue the theme is one of secret organizations, secrets and villainy. You have the orders and houses of the *Mystic Knights* for Rifts®; the *Cult of Brulyx* and the Benford Group for the alternative Dead Reign™ world setting and time-line; and though they aren’t really villains, you have the secretive *Court of Tarot* for BTS-2. Heck, you even get a glimpse at the secret plans Palladium Books has for 2009!

We think this is another fun-filled issue that provokes your imagination and inspires you to try new ideas and expand your gaming Megaverse®.

Fledgling writers and long-time gamers who think they are decent 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 *E.M. Gist*, and presents a Crawler zombie unleashing its moan to summon other zombies. We love the twisted artistry of E.M. Gist and you can expect to see more his work on Dead Reign™ sourcebooks.

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® #46

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.**
- **Latest news, coming attractions and fun.**

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



From the Desk of Kevin Siembieda

Christmas time and the New Year are, by tradition and nature, a time for reflection and review.

It has been another crazy year for Palladium Books, with a lot of highs (getting out new product in August, October & November, and the excitement over **Dead Reign**) and lows, illness and deaths.

The 2009 State of Palladium Books Report covers a lot about the business of Palladium Books, where we've been, how we are faring and where we see ourselves going in the New Year.

Like most everyone, we are worried about the economy and how the economic woes of our nation and the world might affect Palladium Books, our sales, and our future.

Palladium has survived a great many losses and challenges. Many more than most people are aware of. That has hampered our ability to release new product and recover completely from the Crisis of Treachery. Still, we made great strides, survived and weathered a number of storms that came our way, including illness, the deaths of numerous people close to us, and a whole range of things we'd rather forget than list anywhere.

I'm glad to say we are feeling very optimistic about 2009. Maybe it's because we've gone through so much together, but the Palladium staff feels closer than ever. In a way, we are like a band of brothers who have gone through war together. Not a life and death war with guns, bullets, and bombs like so many of our fans have endured, but an economic war with the life or death of Palladium Books, the company, hanging in the balance. It's made us tough, strong, compassionate, caring, resilient and humble. All good things.

Wayne Smith came into my office the other day and said something with such complete authority and knowledge that it made me realize how much he has grown since he first came to Palladium 11 years ago. He's a savvy, seasoned veteran who knows his stuff. It made me smile and proud. All of "My Guys" (and that includes Kathy, who is obviously, um, not a guy) have gone through so much for me, for Palladium, and in their lives. Some people might have become bitter, callous and cold-hearted, or just plain given up, but not these warriors. You might not know it by looking at these gentle, often soft spoken people, but they have the courage of a lion, the unrelenting tenacity of a bull, the heart of a warrior and the soul of an artist. There is no quit in them. No sacrifice they won't consider. Without them, there would be no Palladium today. They were vital in Palladium's survival and are vital in our continuing recovery. They are the warriors, heroes and bedrock of Palladium Books® and you should know their names:

Alex Marciniszyn

Julius Rosenstein

Kathy Simmons

Wayne Smith

Jason Marker (our most recent addition).

Henry Siembieda (retired this March).

There are other Palladium stalwarts, *Thom Bartold, Kay Kozora, Paul Deckert, Joe Bergmans, Carl Gleba, Nick Bradshaw*, and a host of investors, freelancers, friends and fans who have also played key roles in Palladium's surviving the Crisis of Treachery and/or Palladium's recovery. All of whom I consider part of "My Guys" and our bigger army at large. But its was **Alex, Hank, Julius, Kathy** and **Wayne** on the front line and in the trenches *every day*, and doing battle *every step* of the way.

There is one more person who was in the trenches fighting the good fight with us, **Erick Wujcik**.

Erick Wujcik lent me his strength when I ran out of my own. Erick was a shoulder to lean on, a sounding board for ideas, an ear to vent into, a voice of calm and encouragement, and a means of raising capital to get us through the worst of times. Erick was also Palladium's *greatest cheerleader* and one of my dearest friends. As most of you probably know by now, Erick Wujcik passed away in June, 2008, from terminal pancreatic cancer. He was a giant in the industry and joy in my life. He is missed on so many levels. Erick never got the opportunity to see Palladium make a full recovery in life, but he will from heaven. His valiant efforts and the heroic work of "My Guys" will not be in vain.

Palladium Books will do more than survive. We will stand strong again, and soon, if we have anything to say about it. We are not going to let the economy, hard times, hard work, or fear slow us down or stop our complete and total recovery. We do not believe role-playing games will go the way of the dinosaurs. We believe Palladium will lead the way to a new renaissance for role-playing games and we invite you to be part of that journey.

Palladium has weathered terrible times and we've lost some of our heroes and loved ones over the last few years. These losses, challenges and setbacks slowed our recovery and prevented us from releasing new product in the volume *we needed* and *you wanted*. For that I apologize to you – our fans – but as heroic and tenacious as "My Guys" and I may be, we are *only human*. We can only handle so much and accomplish so much. Well, we've weathered the recent storms, caught our collective breaths, brought in some new talent, and we are ready to do what is necessary to begin a new generation of role-playing game excitement. We still have some debt, bills and issues we need to deal with, but we are primed and ready to take things to the next stage.

Watch and see as we release one dynamic new RPG product after another throughout 2009. Keep those imaginations burning bright and game on!

– Kevin Siembieda, December 22, 2008



2009 State of Palladium Books®

By Kevin Siembieda

Palladium received a great many well wishes this holiday season from hundreds upon hundreds of fans expressing how glad they are Palladium Books has “survived the **Crisis of Treachery**” and is “back on its feet.”

We appreciate the sentiment and warm regards, but while Palladium survived the initial onslaught of the *Crisis of Treachery* (thanks in large part to heroic fan support), we are not entirely *back on our feet*.

The damage done to Palladium by the embezzlement and theft at the hands of a trusted friend and long-time employee was grievous. In addition to the money loss there was damage on many levels. *The Crisis of Treachery* was a devastating financial blow to Palladium. In April, 2006, when I made the public appeal to our fans for help (via buying product), it looked like the end for us. Bankruptcy – no more Palladium Books.

You, our wonderful fans, came to the rescue by buying the special limited edition print and all of our products like crazy. It was wonderful, humbling and amazing.

It was also just part of the story. There was a lot of work to do, much more than paying bills. We often had to spend long hours talking with creditors, investors and freelancers, explain-

ing our situation, making special arrangements, payment plans, filling out paperwork, submitting letters, writing appeals and explanations, and rebuilding Palladium from the ground up. These meetings, discussions, strategy sessions, and implementation of the plans involved more of the same. Remember too, that Palladium is *not* a big company. At our peak there were 14 or 15 of us. During the Crisis (and today) there were only *six* of us, and only three of us could handle any of the business matters. It was a huge amount of work.

On top of that, our stress levels were maxed out, our emotions were raw and frayed, and our minds raced at 1000 mph. It was an emotional roller coaster to say the least. It is hard to keep a clear head and focus when you are facing losing everything and buried under a veritable mountain of bills and problems to resolve. It's even harder to be creative. You have to battle a cascade of ever-changing emotions – anger, fear, hope, despair, small triumphs, betrayal, camaraderie, worry, love, disappointment, more hope, etc. – in an effort to stay positive and keep pressing forward. Finding time to be creative and putting words to paper under such stress is harder than you can imagine. The gazillion letters, calls and emails from you, our fans, filled with hope, faith, support and love helped more than you can imagine.

The continuing struggle

The Crisis wasn't a hiccup or cash flow problem, it was shock and devastation. The same as losing *everything* in a tornado, flood or fire. A great deal had already been lost – no, stolen – and now we faced losing it all. Use whatever analogy you'd like, but the treachery devastated, crushed, nuked, Palladium Books. We had to *rebuild from the ground up*, and not only that, we had to do it under a crushing emotional weight and a mountain of debt on our shoulders.

Furthermore, the *Crisis of Treachery* was not a singular event to overcome. The damage was immense and widespread. Worse, we faced a cavalcade of obstacles, challenges, loss and disappointment, both professionally and personally, to overcome. It seemed like one thing after another. The long hours of work (for years now) were exhausting, and every setback was a crushing disappointment for us all. You see, when you are so battered, in debt, fragile, and working so desperately hard to make it all right, every new problem – even the small ones – is a new, crushing blow. It was hard, but we did it. With your help we survived.

Beyond Survival . . .

Palladium Books survived and the rebuilding is well underway. *Surviving, escaping bankruptcy, and then restructuring and rebuilding* were all Herculean tasks we have accomplished.

I have had experts in business and emotional trauma tell me that most companies (as in 95%) in Palladium's situation would NEVER have survived the initial crisis let alone begin recovery and rebuilding. They would have gone under. Furthermore, recovery from such devastation, I'm told, would take most companies 5-7 years! We're getting there in three or four!

Moreover, Palladium Books has survived one trial and tribulation after another. In my original draft for this report I wrote a list of all the events and tragedies Palladium had to overcome just in these past two years. The list was two pages

long! While it explained our stalled recovery and inability to release new product, it was much too sad, depressing, and incredible, so I chucked it. I lived through it all and could hardly believe it.

Suffice it to say, that Palladium has faced many losses, disappointments, challenges and setbacks on our road to full recovery. Many were out of our control. Chief among them was a great deal of illness and deaths in recent years. Many of them unexpected and devastating to one or more people at Palladium Books. The short list includes the illnesses and deaths of Wayne's grandfather, Alex's beloved father, Kathy's sister, a quartet of my uncles and aunts, Keith Parkinson and, of course, *Erick Wujcik*. Each loss had a profound impact on our mental state and ability to work. Grief and loss are powerful emotions that rob us of joy, focus, clarity, and energy. We needed time to talk, time to be with family and friends, time to grieve, and time to regain our center.

I know from the *outside* looking in, it might seem as if Palladium was stalled or has even been sitting on its hands. Nothing could be further from the truth. Why wasn't more product coming out? Why were we sitting on a pile of manuscripts? Where was the action? Why weren't we doing more?

Behind the scenes, Palladium was constantly at work trying to build and get stronger. We have never stopped putting in long hours of work to get Palladium back on its feet. For the last several years now, I have worked, nonstop, six days a week, 12-18 hours a day. That's 72 to 108 hours a week on a regular basis, sometimes more. Julius is probably next in the long hours department, putting in 60-70 hours a week. The rest of the crew, Wayne, Alex, Jason and Kathy put in 50-60 hours a week (and Kathy has another full time job!), and there are periods where they put in hours that rival my own, as is necessary, sometimes for weeks at a time. Again, there are only *six* of us, so there is only so much we can do. Shipping, running the business, troubleshooting, legal issues, writing, coordinating art and production, licensing deals like *Robotech*®, and the day to day grind all compete for our creative energy.

Dead ends and disappointments also stole time, money and energy. I don't even want to think about all the promising, third party deals *that never happened*. Without naming names, we had three serious attempts to turn **Rifts**® into an **MMOG** – an online game like *World of Warcraft*. Each chewed up big chunks of time and burned through several thousand dollars in legal fees. We've also pursued other types of videogames, animation, another movie, toys, and other opportunities, but so far, *none* have panned out. Most die because the third party suffers an economic collapse, they can't get the financing or internal politics. Unfortunately, each effort costs Palladium dozens to hundreds of hours spent on discussions, meetings, and negotiations. Money goes to legal advice, review of contracts, contract negotiations, NDAs, and a host of other "basic business" operations. You have to do it, because the potential is huge, but the result is often time and resources spent on a project that goes nowhere or is stillborn.

Business takes time, costs money, and even when dealing with established, big companies, nothing is certain or easy. Heck, look at all the time that has passed with the *Rifts*® movie.

You haven't heard about most of these and many others, because we didn't want to get people's hopes up. A good thing too, because **NONE** of them have worked out. Palladium has a few things in motion right *now*, but will anything come of them? Only time will tell.

Nothing is as easy or simple as it may sound, especially to do it right. Handshake deals and friendly capital investors happy to help you out are *pure fiction*. Even a simple contract with someone you know and trust is going to cost \$400-\$1,200 in attorney fees to prepare and may involve several hours of discussion. It's part of that strong foundation we are building. It must be done right or there will be trouble in the future.

I'm tempted to say the road to rebuilding Palladium has been long and arduous, but really it will only be three years in April, 2009, since we went public with the *Crisis of Treachery* in 2006. We've accomplished a great deal in that time.

Yes, the challenges, losses, and disappointments that followed the *Crisis of Treachery* slowed our recovery and impaired our ability to create *new product*, but they didn't stop us. Through it all we made significant headway, including moving to a more cost efficient facility.

Palladium's staff is *united*. We are a *family* dedicated to each other, our work, and our fans. We have stuck together through thick and thin, fought every inch of the way, and have never given up regardless of the adversity we have faced. We are more united, pumped up and driven to succeed than ever!

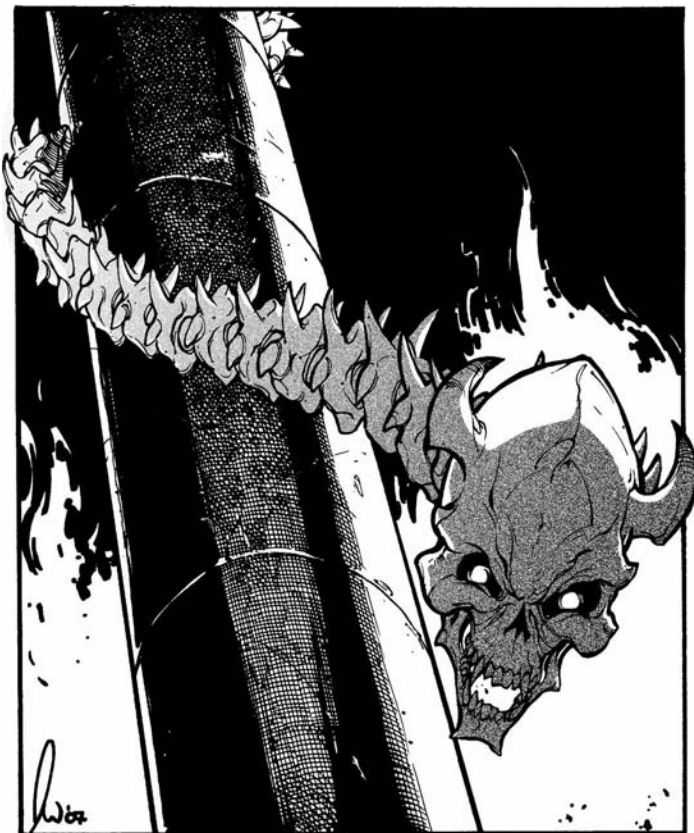
The Final Stage of Recovery

The final piece of Palladium's recovery plan is to produce *new product* on a frequent basis. Not junk, but quality product full of ideas, adventure and fun. This has been the most difficult part of the plan to put in place and maintain.

New product drives everything. For example, **Dead Reign**™ **RPG** has met with great excitement. Sales are solid and gamers everywhere are playing it. Awesome, but its impact doesn't stop there. Sales of other Palladium horror RPGs have increased as well. There is renewed interest in **Beyond the Supernatural**™ and the entire **Nightbane**® **RPG** line. That interest will increase further with **Dead Reign**™ sourcebooks and the **Nightbane**® **Survival Guide** sourcebook to be released in the months to come. It's called "momentum." Palladium has it and new products fuel it.

In 2009 we plan to release sourcebooks for **Robotech**®, **Rifts**® (**Earth**), **Rifts**® **Minion War**™, **Phase World**® & the **Three Galaxies**™, **Chaos Earth**™, **Nightbane**®, **Palladium Fantasy RPG**®, **Heroes Unlimited**™, **Dead Reign**™ and even quite possibly **Splicers**® and **Ninjas & Superspies**™. We are also hoping to release **Warpath**™: **Urban Jungle**™ as a new, modern combat RPG by Spring or Summer. We are full of ideas for new product.

I know what you are thinking: "I've heard this promise before." And it's true, you have. What makes this time different is that we feel like we have gone through hell and back, and come out stronger. It has been a crazy last three years, to say the least. Yet somehow we did more than survive. Somewhere along the line, we've been able to catch our creative breath and clear our heads. We have a new determination and passion to create great new sourcebooks and RPGs.



New challenges

1. The current economic climate is certainly an X factor. The news is full of financial gloom and doom. We don't know how all of that will affect *you*, and in turn, how that might affect Palladium's sales.

However, we are optimistic. You keep shouting for new product, telling us you love Palladium and you want more, more, more! And for all our game lines. Okay, you've got it. Palladium will give you the product you want (see *Coming At tractions*). And we think you *will* love them, buy them, rave about them, and want more. At least we hope so.

Palladium's sales slumped in June, July, September and October 2008 largely due to a profound *lack* of new product. Then **Robotech® The Macross® Sourcebook** came out and was quickly followed by our zombie RPG, **Dead Reign™** and **The Rifter® #44**, and sales shot up. These rapid releases combined with Palladium's annual Christmas Surprise Package offer saw November and December sales recover nicely. Right now, sales are only down 18% compared to 2007. Eighteen percent in an economy where many other businesses and retailer are reporting sale drops of 40-65% is GREAT! This shows our fans *are* solidly behind us. And with more *new product* coming out, starting January 2009, we think Palladium will be back to normal sales levels by Springtime.

Times are tough right now and Palladium is feeling a bit of a pinch, but I think we'll be okay in the long run.

(Side Note: Our hearts go out to those of you who are suffering hardship due to the current economic crisis. Stay strong, stay positive and do the best you can. Don't lose hope. And if you have to rebuild . . . it could be worse. You can do it. Take a deep breath and hang in there. Focus on what's truly important, loved ones and family. You will survive. You'll rebuild. You'll be okay. It just takes time.)

2. We need our distributors to stay in business and pay Palladium on time. A major games distributor has recently closed its doors, owing Palladium and other companies money. We are sorry to see them go. They were good people. Thankfully, the remaining distributors "seem" to be holding their own. In fact, until this September, distributor sales had been inching upward every month, at least for Palladium Books. We hope that continues in 2009.

3. We need YOU to remain patient, understanding and supportive. We understand that many fans are frustrated and disappointed by so little new product until the end of 2008. New product is coming. Many **freelance writers** whose submissions have sat on Palladium's shelves for a year or longer can expect to finally see their work published.

Furthermore, I hope this 2009 State of Palladium helps you *understand* what has been going on and why we had been unable to release more product these past couple of years.

4. NEW product is the Final Stage to recovery! Releasing new product is more difficult and time consuming than you might imagine, but we must do it and will. *New product* is the key to everything.

A bright future

Maybe we are punch drunk or pushed to the brink of madness, but we are exuberant about Palladium's future.

We feel like the worst of the *bad stuff* is done and over, and blue skies are just ahead.

The groundwork has been laid and it is now time to build. New products are our building blocks.

Barring a severe drop in sales, money woes or unexpected crisis, 2009 is going to see one great new product after another, hopefully on a monthly basis. We have a dozen freelancer manuscripts we *are* going to turn into sourcebooks, plus a zillion ideas of our own. We plan to start with many of the delayed books we've promised, and slip in new stuff along the way.

Signs of progress

With the release of **Robotech® Macross®** and **Dead Reign™**, we can already see excitement and feel momentum building. **Robotech® Masters** is going to surprise and wow people. **Dyval™** is going to please and impress people. **Dimensional Outbreak™** is pure fun and more surprises. **Heroes of the Megaverse®** fulfills a promise, unites our fan base and builds adventure. **Mysteries of Magic™** is just the new beginning for the *Palladium Fantasy RPG® line*. Other titles in the planning stages will keep that sense of fun, adventure and wow you've come to expect from Palladium.

Momentum means more sourcebooks and RPGs to come, and more word of mouth excitement. That spells new customers, the satisfaction of longtime customers, increased sales, and the money we need to pay bills, pay down debt and get Palladium Books *truly back on its feet!*

With continuing support from you, our fans, we can make 2009 the best year any of us have seen in a long while!

Please keep the faith, keep an eye on Palladium, and help us make these plans a reality.

– Kevin Siembieda, Publisher & Game Designer

News & Coming Attractions

By Kevin Siembieda, the guy who should know

Let's cut to the chase: We hope to make the *New Year* Palladium Books' time to shine, with an array of *new* role-playing game products that we think will knock your socks off.

New Product for 2009

The following titles are all tentatively scheduled for release in 2009. We have not yet reviewed and assessed all the manuscripts in our hands, nor have we determined the exact release schedule, but most of the books listed should appear on store shelves in 2009.

Other titles for Palladium's various game lines are also in development. We may add or change some of the titles to be released, but the following list should be pretty accurate.

Listed in no particular order:

New for the Palladium Fantasy RPG®

Mysteries of Magic – a series of books for the *Palladium Fantasy RPG®*, with at least three coming out in 2009.

Plus at least one other sourcebook for the fantasy line.

Horror RPG Lines

Nightbane® Survival Guide – the first sourcebook in years. Hopefully, there will be another.

Dead Reign™ Sourcebooks – the Zombie Apocalypse continues with 2-4 sourcebooks planned. Two are already in the works.

Beyond the Supernatural™ – you never know.

Rifts® Minion War™ series – Completed in 2009!

Dimension Book 11: Dyval™ – January 2009.

Dimension Book 12: Dimensional Outbreak™ – March, 2009.

Rifts® Heroes of the Megaverse® – April or May, 2009.

Dimension Book 13: Armageddon Unlimited™ – HU2 crossover; Summer, 2009.

Rifts® Megaverse® in Flames™ (the final chapter) – Fall, 2009.

Rifts®

Rifts® Shemarrian Nation™

Rifts® Delta Blues/Deep South™

Rifts® Dark Woods™

Rifts® Voodoo

Rifts® Triax™ 2

Rifts® Lemuria

Fleets of the Three Galaxies™

And there are others under consideration.

Robotech®

The Masters Saga – February, 2009

New Generation Sourcebook™

Spacecraft of Robotech®

Other Robotech® sourcebooks are in development.

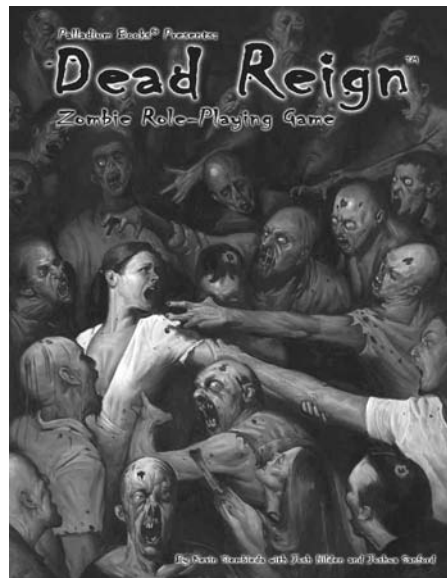
Other titles

Warpath™: Urban Jungle™ – a new role-playing game – Spring or Summer, 2009.

More? There are other books that have been submitted or are being finished by the freelance writer, so we may add some titles or replace one with another.

Palladium to support most game lines

Assuming sales stay strong or even grow, Palladium expects to support ALL its major game lines with new sourcebooks. That will include **Rifts®**, **Palladium Fantasy RPG®**, **Nightbane®**, **Dead Reign™**, **Robotech®** and **Heroes Unlimited™**.



Dead Reign™ Role-Playing Game

Dead Reign™ is a hit. Gamers everywhere are enjoying playing on the grim killing grounds of the *Zombie Apocalypse*.

The game is fun, scary, exciting and intense to play. 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, the players are there for each other, shooting, bashing in skulls and saving each other from the Creeping Doom. It is awesome and you can be part of it.

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. Available now.**

Dead Reign™ Sourcebooks

The Zombie Apocalypse will be fleshed out further in future sourcebooks coming in 2009.

One of Palladium's new freelance writers is working on an adventure sourcebook right now, and Kevin Siembieda has ideas for 4-5 of his own. These will probably be 64-96 page books with adventure source material.

- **Written by Kevin Siembieda and others.**
- **Art:** They will feature more great art by *Nick Bradshaw*, *Amy Ashbaugh* and other Palladium artists.
- **Covers:** Hopefully each will sport a new E.M. Gist cover.
- **64-96 page zombie sourcebook – \$12.95 to \$15.95 retail.**

Rifts® Minion War™ series to be completed in 2009

We apologize for the delay in publishing this wonderful series by Carl Gleba. If all goes as planned, all five of the remaining books in the series will be released throughout 2009.

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®. Suit-

able 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. Ships end of January.**



Rifts® Dimension Book™ 12:

Dimensional Outbreak™ – March 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. March, 2009.**

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® is back

In addition to the Minion War series and other sourcebooks in the Phase World/Three Galaxies setting, you can expect to see several books set back on **Rifts Earth**.

Those should include:

Rifts® Shemarrian Nation™ – est. 96 pages, \$15.95 retail.

Rifts® Delta Blues/Deep South™ – est. 160 pages, \$19.95 retail.

Rifts® Dark Woods™ – est. 160 pages, \$19.95 retail.

Rifts® Voodoo – est. 128 pages, \$15.95 retail.

Rifts® Triax™ 2 – est. 192 pages, \$22.95 retail.

Rifts® Lemuria – est. 160 pages, \$19.95 retail.

And possibly others; more about them next issue.

Realms of Fantasy

Mysteries of Magic™ Series

The Palladium Fantasy RPG® line has been ignored far too long. That ends with *Mysteries of Magic*. The series is inspired by the work of freelance writer Mark Hall. The first book or two of *Mysteries of Magic* are by Mark Hall, but future editions will be written by Kevin Siembieda and others. The Palladium World has eons of history involving magic, both good and evil. It reached its pinnacle during the *Time of a Thousand Magicks*. This series will reveal some of those half-forgotten and rare mystic arts – at least the ones still practiced in secret and among strange cults. The series will also offer new bits of history, forbidden and secret cults, magic artifacts, the occasional living horror, and adventure ideas for your fantasy campaigns.

This is just the beginning as there are plans to breathe new life into the Palladium Fantasy RPG® line throughout 2009 and 2010.

Size and price yet to be determined.

Warpath™: Urban Jungle

As I have said elsewhere, Palladium creators are brimming over with ideas, not just for sourcebooks, but new RPGs.

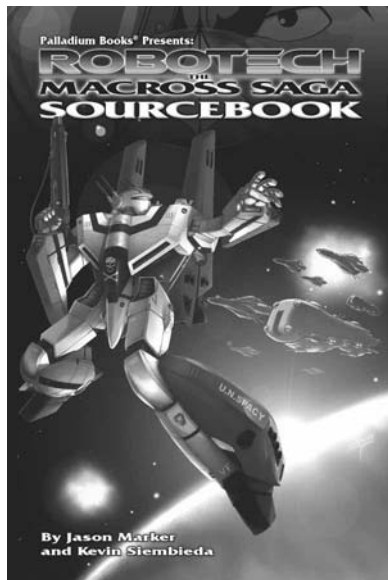
Warpath™ is a hard-boiled spy-adventure novel in the vein of **24** written by Jeffrey Scott Hansen.

Warpath™: Urban Jungle™ is the role-playing game inspired by that novel and written and designed by the novel's author, Jeffrey Scott Hansen, with Kevin Siembieda and Jason Marker. We've been talking about this modern combat RPG for 2-3 years now, but we are committed to getting it done in 2009. Maybe even in time for the **2009 Palladium Open House**. No promises, but that is our target release!

Size and price yet to be determined.

More Robotech®

The **Macross®** and **Robotech Masters®** sourcebooks are just the beginning. Many more are coming. What are they? All we are willing to tell you at this time is **Robotech® New Generation** and **Robotech® Spacecraft** are only two that Marker and Siembieda have in mind.



Robotech® 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.

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 statted 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.**

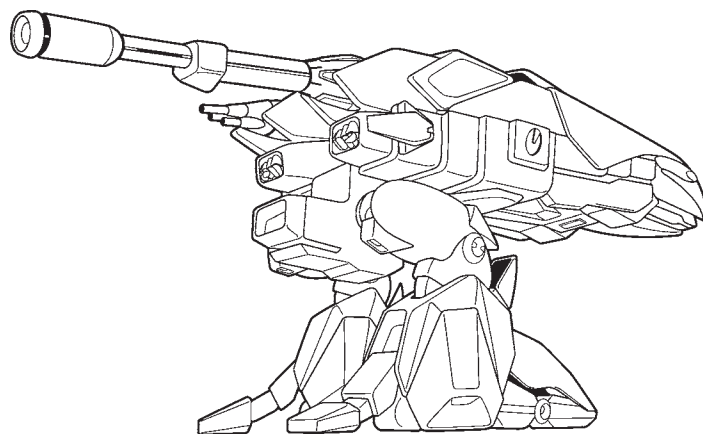


Robotech®: The Masters Saga™ Sourcebook

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 February 2009. In final production.**



2009 Palladium Open House

- **Three days of Role-Playing . . .**

Rifts®

Heroes Unlimited™

Palladium Fantasy®

Nightbane®

Dead Reign™

Ninjas & Superspies™

After the Bomb®

Beyond the Supernatural™ and more . . .

- **Games with *Kevin Siembieda* & other Palladium creators.**
- **Panel Talks & special events.**
- **Auctions of Palladium art & collectibles.**
- **Costume Contest & Prizes.**
- **Erick Wujcik Tribute.**
- **Meet dozens of Palladium writers & artists.**
- **Meet fellow gamers from around the country.**
- **Game in the Palladium Warehouse!**
- **Get autographs.**
- **Chat with writers and artists.**
- **Store area – books, prints, T-shirts, art & more.**
- **Three days of fun.**

More info online at
www.palladiumbooks.com

– or call – (734) 721-2903 for more info

There is too much to tell and describe about the *Open House* in these pages, but you do NOT want to miss it, especially if you love Palladium's games and live in Michigan or a neighboring state.

The Palladium Open House is unlike anything you've ever experienced.

Why?

Because you play games run by the very people who *created* them!

Because you get to meet, talk with and get autographs from Kevin Siembieda and dozens of Palladium's artists, writers, staff and contributors (we've had as many as 45 guests last Open House).

Because you get to do all this at the Palladium office and warehouse.

Because you are greeted and treated like a friend or family member, not a number or nameless conventioneer.

Because the surroundings are intimate and you get to spend time talking with Kevin and Palladium creators *ONE ON ONE!* And these creators don't just make an appearance for an hour or two, Kevin and the Palladium staff are there the ENTIRE three days! So are most of the Palladium artists and writers.

Because Kevin Siembieda will be running 8-12 games! *Julius Rosenstein* (writer, proofreader) will be running 5-6, *Carmen Bellaire*, *Carl Gleba*, *Jason Marker* and many, many others will all be running games! How often do you get to game with the creators?! Not often!

Start saving up your money now to join the fun, May 1, 2, & 3, 2009, here at the Palladium warehouse for nonstop gaming action.

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

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

Attendance: Limited to around 300 or so gamers.

Cost: \$40 per person for the three-day 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 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. Your credit card will NOT be charged till the date of the event.

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.
- **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.

2009 Palladium Open House – May 1, 2 & 3 – 39074 Webb Court – Westland, MI 48185

The Rifter[®]

Special Subscription Offer

- **Free gift**
- **Free shipping in the USA**
- **Delivered to your door**
- **A Megaverse[®] of Fun!**

The Rifter[®] is a quarterly sourcebook series for the entire Palladium Megaverse[®]. It is written by fans and up and coming writers, for fans. Some, like #4, #8, #21, #22, #23, #24, #25, #26, #29, #30, #32, #34, and others have even become coveted *collector's items* that command big bucks! (For a while, people were reportedly paying as much as \$70 online for #21.)

Each issue of **The Rifter[®]** presents official and unofficial adventures, characters, powers, weapons, equipment and fiction for *Rifts[®]*, *Heroes Unlimited[™]*, *Palladium Fantasy RPG[®]*, *Chaos Earth[™]*, *Splicers[®]*, *Nightbane[®]*, *Beyond the Supernatural[™]*, *Dead Reign[™]*, and/or any variety of other Palladium games and world settings. It's also a place to get the latest news, product release info, and see new games, like **Warpath: Urban Jungle[™]**, showcased.

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

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

Super-Subscription Offer

The cover price of **The Rifter[®]** is **\$11.95** – a steal for 96 pages of RPG source material and adventures – but a subscription gets you **The Rifter[®]** delivered to your doorstep, plus you get a *free gift worth \$13-\$23* (available only during this special offer, for the cost of shipping and handling). All prices are in U.S. dollars.

- **\$39.80 – USA.** That's only **\$8.95 each**, a savings of \$8.00, and Palladium pays the shipping! Plus you get to select a FREE subscriber's gift worth \$13-\$23 (please include \$5.00 to cover shipping and handling). That's **\$44.80 total** including the gift. **Note:** This rate and gift is *limited* to subscribers in the *USA only*. Sorry.
- **\$61.80 – Canada.** That's **\$15.45** for each issue of **The Rifter[®]**, plus you get to select the FREE subscriber's gift

(please include \$8.00 to cover shipping and handling). That's **\$69.80** including the gift item. That's still not a bad price for a 96 page sourcebook. Our apologies on the higher cost, but Palladium Books can no longer cover the increased cost of postage to other countries. We hope you understand.

- **\$73.80 – Overseas.** That's **\$19.95** for each 96 page issue, plus you get to select a FREE subscriber's gift (please include \$13.00 to cover shipping and handling). That's **\$86.80** including the gift item. We are only passing along the additional postage cost, but it is hefty. Our apologies. Postal rates are out of our hands.

Note: Please indicate if the gift item is NOT wanted. You may decline the gift and get your subscription for the regular price of \$39.80 (USA), \$61.80 (Canada) or \$73.80 (other country).

A FREE gift worth \$13-\$23

You pay only the cost of shipping and handling.

Gift choice #1: Rifts[®] Anthology: Tales of the Chi-Town 'Burbs (\$12.95 value; soft cover edition, signed by Kevin Siembieda).

Gift choice #2: After the Bomb[®] Sourcebook Package 2: Mutants of the Yucatan[™] (\$7.95) and **Mutants in Avalon[™]** (\$9.95) sourcebooks, for a total value of \$17.90; suitable for use with the *After the Bomb[®] RPG* and *Heroes Unlimited*.

Gift choice #3: Rifts[®] Machinations of Doom[™] graphic novel & sourcebook (\$18.95 value).

Gift choice #4: Rifts[®] Adventure Guide (\$22.95 value; a 192 page adventure sourcebook by Siembieda, Wujcik and others).

Gift choice #5: The Rifter[®] #16 and #17. (\$15.90 value).

- **IMPORTANT NOTE:** Please enclose shipping and handling to receive your FREE gift: \$5.00 in the USA, \$8.00 Canada, \$13.00 overseas. Thank you. You can decline the free gift and pay only the subscription price.
- **Indicate what issue number you'd like your new subscription to start at #44** (last issue), #45 (this current issue), #46 (next issue, April 2009), or when your subscription ends.
- **How to order.** *Send mail orders* with a check or money order (for **\$44.80** – including handling & shipping of free gift in the *USA*) to:

The Rifter[®] Subscription Dept.

39074 Webb Court, Westland, MI 48185-7606

Credit Card orders can be made on our official website (www.palladiumbooks.com) or by telephone 734-721-2903 (this is an order line *only*). Order today! And tell a friend! Tell lots of friends!!

Offer good only thru March, 2009



Another World of Zombies

Optional & Alternative Setting
for Use with *Dead Reign*™

By Josh Hilden and Joshua Sanford

What is this?

Hi, Kevin Siembieda here. The following material is the setting and select source material originally conceived by *Josh Hilden* and *Joshua Sanford* for their vision of the *Dead Reign*™ RPG. It is presented here as an entirely “OPTIONAL” zombie world setting and source material.

When we published the *Dead Reign* advanced look at the developing game in *The Rifter*® #40, we never imagined it would end up so dramatically changed. When a few fans said they wished they could see what Josh and Joshua had turned in for a *Dead Reign* setting with magic, psionics and demons, I thought we could publish some of the major elements as Josh/Joshua had written them as an optional and *alternative* setting in *The Rifter*®. I contacted Josh Hilden to see if he would like me to do so or not, he said he spoke to Joshua Sanford and they both approved the idea. So here you go. Key portions of the original

manuscript for your enjoyment that embrace magic, psionics, demons and a decidedly magical and supernatural approach to the *Zombie Apocalypse*.

In some ways, you might consider this a *behind the scenes look* or a “*cutting room floor*” presentation – the ideas that didn’t get used. This entire storyline was removed from the published *Dead Reign* RPG for a number of reasons. Here are some of the most notable just to provide some perspective and a better glimpse behind the scenes.

One, as Publisher and Game Designer, I felt the including a conquering Alien Intelligence, demons, magic, psionics and a global conspiracy to invade and conquer the Earth took away from what *Dead Reign* was at its very core – a game about the *Zombie Apocalypse*, *fighting zombies* and *human survival*. The conspiracy, invasion and supernatural elements seemed to take the emphasis away from the zombies themselves and the horror they represented. To me, *Dead Reign* was always a *horror* game about *zombies*.

Two, our independent research showed gamers and fans of the zombie genre wanted a zombie game with *broad appeal* and *classic elements*. Based on our own research, demons, magic, psionics, highly intelligent zombies, and an Alien Intelligence invader were NOT what the majority of zombie fans wanted.

Three, we’ve been down this road before. For me, the conspiracy of magic and demons led by an Alien Intelligence and his human henchmen, made the game feel too much like other Palladium RPGs and sourcebooks: *Systems Failure*™, *Nightbane*®, *Beyond the Supernatural*™, and many of the

storylines in **Rifts**®, various Rifts® sourcebooks (*Vampire Kingdoms*, for one), and storylines planned for **Rifts**® **Chaos Earth**™ (including a couple about zombie hordes), where such stories seem much more appropriate. **Dead Reign**™ needed to be a *horror game* that would make fans of zombies salivate with delight, and this didn't feel like it.

Four, I felt many of the cool ideas the two Joshes presented were not taken far enough and there was not enough environmental data about the setting or about zombies. The long introduction by Brad Ashley, Resources, Fighting Zombies, and 90% of the *Zombie* section that appears in the RPG weren't part of the original manuscript. What you see in **The Rifter**® #40 sneak peak of the game in development, is pretty much it when it came to zombies. I just felt zombies got short-changed and lost in the invasion conspiracy, magic, and world conquest storyline. Player characters with magic powers and psionics also took away the "every man" aspect of the zombie genre. The Brulyx invasion storyline had its cool and interesting ideas, but it didn't feel like zombies or the zombie apocalypse to me, nor did it to the zombie fanatics I spoke with.

Ultimately, I felt the spirit of the games I saw Josh G.M. and heard so many players ranting about afterward was missing. I couldn't help noticing the games Josh ran at the Palladium Open House, Gen Con and elsewhere focused on *ordinary people, fighting zombies, the horror of it all* and people trying to survive in a world dominated by zombies! There was horror, suspense, and fast action. The focus was on *zombies* and *humanity*. I saw the same thing in my own play tests. This was the heart and soul of **Dead Reign**. This is what made the game GREAT! And it was what Josh, himself, exhibited in his tournament games. Yet somehow, I felt the alien intelligence and extraordinary elements of magic and psionics took away from the *humanity* and *horror* of the game. It took away the idea of *ordinary people* just like you and me having to struggle against monsters that only yesterday, were also people like you and me! I love that. You love that! I think most fans of the zombie genre love that! This was the core element needed in **Dead Reign**. All the other fantastic aspects, as cool as they were, took away from that. Ironically, the **Dead Reign RPG**, as rewritten by me, was an attempt to capture the very magic I saw in the games Josh ran so beautifully. And I think I achieved that.

Whether you agree with my assessment and the direction taken for the published **Dead Reign RPG**, is unimportant. You now get the unique opportunity to see some of the original authors' concepts, ideas, and text presented in the pages that follow as an optional storyline and source material. The alternative material may be adapted to **Rifts**®, **Nightbane**®, **Dead Reign** and just about any of Palladium's RPGs.

Introduction

What was that sound?!?!?

We have all had that thought in the middle of the night as we lay in bed, the dark enveloping our home, and our loved ones sleeping next to us or in a room down the hall. What would you do if that noise was something more than the wind? What if that noise was a monster from the depths of your nightmares, a monster bent on devouring you and everything you hold dear? What if the living dead were breaking down your front door or crawl-

ing through your windows, and nobody was coming to save you?

Would you hide?

Would you race to confront the danger, and fight to protect the ones you love?

Or would you run away, leaving your loved ones to the not so tender mercies of the undead?

This is the world of **Dead Reign**, a world where law and order is a thing of the past and safety comes from the barrel of a gun and the end of a club. It is a vicious world, a world where nobody is going to look out for you and the people and things that you love except you.

Almost Tomorrow

The footage is over bright and slightly out of focus at first, suggesting an untrained cameraman. The view swings clumsily, showing a brief glimpse of afternoon sky scarred with a few columns of black smoke. The camera finally settles on a person; a young woman crouching beside a low wall. She's a striking woman, but shock and terror are unmistakable in her wide eyes. There's a baseball bat in her hands, and she clings to it with grim tenacity. The woman is peering over the wall. She and the cameraman appear to be on a rooftop.

"You get that thing working yet?" she asks, turning her attention to the camera. The shot tilts up and down as the camera man nods. The woman looks into the lens, appearing to gather her thoughts. After a moment she speaks into the camera. "My name is Naomi Winslow. I'm a waitress... I was a waitress. My friend Linc is working the camera. He's the cook. We... we thought... someone should record this." Naomi pauses, and shudders. "It's the end of the world. Show them, Linc."

The camera peers over the low wall, showing a typical street that could be any town at all. It's obvious right away that some thing is very wrong. The four lane street is littered with stalled cars, many of them mangled and smashed. A couple of cars are either burning or smoldering, and look as if their gas tanks exploded. The tail end of a small aircraft juts from a smashed, burning storefront down the street. There is a car alarm going off, and the faint sounds of screams and gunfire can be heard. A group of people make their way down the street, shambling and limping along. The camera zooms in on the mob, displaying a few faces. Their eyes are vacant, and their mouths hang slack. Many are wounded, some grievously. Nearly all of their mouths and hands are smeared with brownish red goo.

"They aren't people," Naomi says, and the camera turns to focus on her again. She's gazing down at the street below, still clutching her bat. "I mean, they were people, but now they're not. They're monsters." Her eyes look into the camera again, with a hunted, haunted expression. "They're zombies."

Naomi turns and sits with her back to the wall, and runs a hand through her disheveled hair. "There was no warning. Nothing. You're just going about your routine when the pain hits you like... like a wave, washing over you. It was like every hangover, headache, and stomach cramp you've ever had, all at once. It only lasted a moment, but it felt like a year in hell. And it got everyone. All of us. Right at the same time, twelve noon, June 12th, 2012. The day the world ended."

“A lot of people died,” Naomi continues, her eyes distant. “I’m not just talking about all the car crashes and planes dropping and all that, either. The pain... the Wave... just killed them. Men, women, old, young, black, white... no pattern at all.” She pauses, turning her head away from the camera. After a moment, she resumes. “We didn’t have long to mourn. We didn’t even have time to recover from the Wave. The ones who’d died started getting up. Then they started moaning. Then they started attacking.”

Naomi looks at the camera again, her expression grim. “If the zombies catch you, they kill you. They just bite and tear into you like animals. I’ve seen it. They kill you, and you become one of them, like it’s an infection. They’re slow and they’re stupid, but they’re everywhere. Before the power died, the TV news was showing reports and footage from all over the country, and it’s the same as here. Maybe the whole world...”

Naomi looks over the wall again, and the camera follows. There appear to be even more zombies shambling down the street. A group of them are gathered around a crashed car. Their fists hammer at the windows, finally shattering the windshield. The camera zooms in as the zombies drag a screaming man from the car, and drag him to the ground. The screams stop after a moment.

“The police aren’t coming,” Naomi says as the cluster of zombies begins to disperse. As she continues, the mangled body of the man they pulled from the car rises and joins their ranks. “The army isn’t coming. No one is coming to save you. If you want to live, you run, and you fight them when you have to. They’re monsters, but they aren’t invincible. Aim for their heads. Crack their skulls, and they stay down.”

“There’s more coming,” says a voice from off camera, presumably Linc. “We need to get out of here, out of the city. Now.”

“Right,” Naomi replies, as the camera turns to her again. She looks into the lens, appearing much more composed and resolved than before. “We’ll find more people. We’ll band together, and put these monsters in the ground where they belong. It may be the end of the world, but we’re not going without a fight.”

The Beginning of the End: June 12, 2012

At twelve noon, Eastern Time, an unprecedented global catastrophe occurs. Every living person in every corner of the world is suddenly struck by intense waves of overwhelming pain and nausea. There is no warning, just a sudden burst of unspeakable agony. The effect lasts only a minute, yet it kills untold millions of people. The survivors come to call this event “the Wave.”

The Wave causes incalculable chaos. Cars crash by the millions, choking the roads with mangled steel. Planes fall from the sky. Power grids and communication networks are disrupted across the world. The sounds of explosions, fires, sirens, and screams fill the air. The very core of modern civilization is shaken, perhaps never to recover. And that is just the beginning.

If that had been the end of the catastrophe, mankind surely would have been able to rise from the ashes. Unfortunately, the Wave is simply the catalyst for a much bigger disaster. The bodies of those who died in the Wave begin to rise, animated by

some unseen force. They have been transformed into zombies; mindless, fearless, relentless killing machines.

The zombies’ first assault catches most of the survivors off guard, and millions more are killed. Whatever is animating the zombies is infectious. Those first victims of the zombies soon rise as zombies themselves, and join the ranks of the walking dead. The remaining survivors are left with no choice but to fight or flee, but there is nowhere for them to run. The zombies are everywhere, and they are hungry.

In the hours following the Wave, the foundations of civilization continue to crumble. Power stations are abandoned or overrun, blacking out vast regions of the world. Satellite links and land lines are lost or destroyed, crippling local and global communications. Police, military, and other emergency forces are scattered and disorganized, their ranks devastated by desertions and death. Vital supplies such as food, water, fuel, medicine, and ammunition disappear rapidly. All the while, the zombies’ numbers continue to grow.

For the remaining survivors, it is the dawn of a new dark age. The relative safety and security of modern society is gone. There is no law and order as it was before the Wave. The only law left is the law of the jungle; kill or be killed. Their fight for survival has just begun, and things are going to get a lot worse before they get better.

The first couple of months after the Wave are a dark time for mankind. Survivors are scattered, scared, and forced to adapt to a lifestyle of constant danger and fear. They fight over territory and resources, turning against each other over petty disputes and grudges. Many seek someone to blame for the rise of the zombies. Some lay the blame on their rivals, using it as an excuse to attack them.

That changes on September 5th, 2012, when a group of people calling themselves the Survivor Information Network reveal a startling discovery. They have uncovered a myriad of evidence that the first wave of zombies all had one thing in common; they were all inoculated with the so-called “miracle vaccine” Unisane. The creators of Unisane, a multinational pharmaceutical company known as the Benford Group, are the ones responsible for the zombie plague.

The S.I.N. also warns people that there is an ongoing conspiracy against the remaining survivors. They claim that there is a tightly organized faction working to round up and capture survivors. The S.I.N. has gathered more evidence to support this claim, including footage of one of the “camps” where captured survivors are held. The most convincing piece of evidence is a recording of an interrogation of one of the captors. In it, the captive conspirator reveals that survivors are lured in with promises of safety and security, only to be imprisoned and put to work, or worse, put to death. He also reveals that they are worshipers of an entity known as Brulyx.

Word spreads quickly among the survivors about the S.I.N.’s discoveries. Unfortunately, the warning is a double-edged sword. It makes survivors more cautious and wary of other survivors, especially those offering the promise of protection. Many become overly paranoid, distrusting any and all other survivors they meet. Anyone could be an agent of the cult of Brulyx. This widespread paranoia drives a wedge between survivors, and cripples their efforts to unite against the cult.

All is not lost, though. There are still heroes out there, fighting for mankind's survival. Some do so by helping their fellow man, bringing them together in the new bastions of humanity. Others work to destroy the zombie hordes, the cult of Brulyx, and any other threats that arise. It is an uphill battle against seemingly impossible odds, but these heroes fight on regardless. It is more than just a struggle to survive to them. They are humanity's last hope, the last line of defense in the war between life and death.

Brulyx Invasion Time Line

10,000 B.C. – Brulyx makes his first bid for domination of the planet Earth. He is ultimately defeated by the Lost Civilization of Man and an alliance of elder gods and spirits of light. The mystical maelstrom that is released upon the globe causes a polar shift that devastates the planet and erases almost all signs of pre-shift civilization.

1500 B.C. – The home city and temple of Gregius Bonophat, a priest of Hades, is destroyed by barbarians from the north. In his pain and fury, Gregius agrees to a pact with Brulyx that allows the monster access to the planet Earth once more. The Cult of Brulyx is firmly established in the Balkans and Asia Minor within 30 years.

165-180 A.D. – The Antoine Plague; Imperial Rome is devastated by a smallpox pandemic engineered by Gregius and his master.

455-480 A.D. – Rome falls in the west.

1300s A.D. – The Bubonic Plague, a.k.a. the Black Death, rages through Asia and Europe, followed by a series of smaller although no less deadly outbreaks. Although they channel a huge amount of Potential Psychic Energy to their master, Gregius and his followers are unsuccessful in releasing Brulyx.

1571–1603 A.D. – A secret war is fought between the minions of Brulyx and the last descendants of the Lost Civilization in North America. Gregius leads his people to a victory that scours the last members of those forgotten warriors from the playing field.

1776 A.D. – The United States of America is born.

1914 A.D. – The First World War begins.

1918 A.D. – The Spanish Flu pandemic brings the western world almost to its knees. Engineered by Gregius, the outbreak channels an enormous amount of Potential Psychic Energy to Brulyx, setting the stage for the Wave almost one hundred years later.

1919 A.D. – The Benford Group is founded by the Cult of Brulyx.

1932 A.D. – Members of the Cult of Brulyx begin to occupy key positions within Germany's NAZI party. Although not a member of the cult, Adolph Hitler receives massive amounts of support from the organization.

1939-1945 A.D. – World War Two, Gregius and his followers revel in the madness and slaughter of the Second World War. The cult exits the war with a fortune in stolen gold, art, and scientific knowledge. Many members of the SS and the NAZI party are members of the Cult of Brulyx by the end of the war.

April 12, 1956 A.D. – The Benford Group reestablishes itself as a non-profit scientific and philanthropic organization. Much of the revenue from the Second World War is channeled into scientific research, primarily in the field of genetics.

2012 A.D.

January 1 – The development of Unisane is announced to the world.

January 14 – Distribution of Unisane begins across the globe. In the United States the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), along with several large pharmaceutical firms, attempt to block the usage of Unisane.

April 30 – A joint act of the United States Congress forces the FDA to allow the distribution of Unisane within the United States of America.

May 17 – The primary shipment of Unisane bound for the city of Winnipeg crashes seventy miles outside of the city, leaving more than 98% of the city's indigenous population unvaccinated.

June 21 – After decades of planning, the Wave is unleashed upon the world and the dead walk amongst the living to feed upon their flesh.

June 22 – The forces of Brulyx begin to sweep across the islands of the South Pacific.

June 23 – The beginning of the battle of Chicago; last contact between the International Space Station and Houston.

June 25 – The city government in Denver collapses, a ragtag group of soldiers and civilians take over the defense of the mile high city.

June 26 – The first broadcasts of what will become the Survivor Information Network (S.I.N.) are heard.

June 29 – The last remnants of the British SAS seal the Chunnel, cutting the British Isles off from continental Europe.

June 30 – The city of Winnipeg loses all communication with governmental officials; they are on their own.

July 4 (American Independence Day) – The citizens and defenders in Denver withdraw into Mile High Stadium and other fortified structures, beginning three months of siege warfare.

July 2 – The original Reapers arrive back in their home town of Chicago to help with the defense.

July 7 – The Australian Government retreats to the Island of Tasmania, the Formation of Free OZ begins.

July 9 – New Zealand is the first nation to gain the upper hand in the war with the undead.

July 17 – The Republic of Ireland launches more than a thousand ships across the Irish Sea to retrieve more than fifty thousand refugees from the western coasts of England, Wales, and Scotland.

July 22 – Russian General Sergei Lermontov leads the remnants of the Russian army across the Ural Mountains in an attempt to escape the hordes of the undead. It is rumored that they established a perimeter around the northern port city of Arkangel.

July 29 – The first overland swarm of the dead descends upon the city of Winnipeg, at the end of the battle the city stands triumphant.

August 1 – August 23 – The Wright Patterson Airlift, along with similar USAF efforts, results in more than three thousand survivors fleeing to Alaska and establishing what would become the Alaskan Freehold.

August 3 – General Rajah Kumar leads a significant portion of the Indian Government and military into the Himalayas, taking with them a substantial stock of industrial tools and knowhow.

September 5 - The Survivor Information Network broadcasts their findings about the cause of the Wave.

September 7 – The final battle is fought within the city of Denver, the living are victorious.

September 12 – Gregius launches his assault on continental Asia, unexpectedly fierce resistance is encountered.

September 23 – The hopes of survivors across the globe are dashed when the North Korean government launches their entire nuclear stockpile at major population centers across Eastern Asia. Resistance to the forces of Brulyx crumbles in that region, all communications from the area cease.

October 7 – The fleet of the Cult of Brulyx arrives in the Los Angeles area, establishing their North American beachhead.

2013 A.D.

April 30 – The base at Cape Town in South Africa is established through a joint effort of the Republic of Ireland and Free OZ/New Zealand Commonwealth.

May 17 – The secret alliance between the Hell Razors and the Cult of Brulyx is established.

July 29 – The Alaskan Freehold cuts off contact with the other survivor communities, and expels all war correspondents.

October 26 – Forces from Fortress Denver reoccupy the NORAD complex at Cheyenne Mountain.

November 14 – The first clash between the forces of Brulyx and the Mountain Warriors of the Indian Redoubt.

December 17 – A group of refugees from central Mexico speak of the Empire of Blood.

December 25 – A fleet of 17 warships from Free OZ and the New Zealand Commonwealth stop Brulyx forces attempting to land on the Australian southern coast. They await the counterattack because the forces of Brulyx now consider them a threat.

2014 A.D. – Now.

Unisane

Note: In the published RPG this is *Altrucure*.

“It is a wonderful day in the world of science and medicine. COB Pharmaceuticals have announced the development of the first universal antiviral treatment. COB Pharmaceuticals is a division of the Benford Group, an international conglomerate that specializes in research and development, and humanitarian aid around the world. According to Jacob Hanson, Head of COB public relations, Unisane is a miracle breakthrough in the world of viral medicine. Unisane actually rewrites key sections of our genetic code that cause our own immune systems to adapt to the different viruses that assault us every day, allowing them to be eliminated in the human body.

Unisane will be available around the world within the next few weeks. We will be providing it at rock bottom prices to the

nations of the developed world, and free of charge to the peoples of developing nations.”

– World Wide Television Broadcast, January 1, 2012

Unisane was hailed as a miracle when it was announced, and demand quickly outpaced the supply. Developed by a combination of genetic scientists and mystical pioneers, Unisane did indeed do what it claimed. It was, and still is, 96% effective against viral infections of all kinds. But hidden within the antiviral were the ingredients for the fall of the human race.

The Truth Behind the Zombie Apocalypse

The year is 2012, and mankind is celebrating the most significant discovery of the new millennium. A medical science think-tank called the Benford Group has engineered a powerful and highly effective antiviral medication. Dubbed “Unisane” by its creators, the antiviral was still being tested when word of it was leaked to the media. The world reverberated with a joyous chorus of approval as the Benford Group announced that they would be providing this antiviral for free to the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Red Cross, and dozens of other health organizations. In the developed regions of the planet they would be providing Unisane at cost.

The distribution of Unisane began the next week, with hundreds of thousands of doses of the medication shipped to the poverty stricken regions of the world, where there was little or no need to wait for government approval. By June of 2012, fully 65% of the populations of the Earth’s “third world” countries were vaccinated. The story in the rest of the world progressed a bit slower. In Europe, Canada, Australia/New Zealand and Asia it took only 2 months for the use of Unisane to be approved and for governments to begin inoculating their populations. By June of 2012, only 40% of the populations in those areas were inoculated.

In the United States of America things were a bit more complicated. The public clamored for the antiviral as soon as it was announced, but the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), along with the powerful and influential pharmaceuticals industry, attempted to delay the antiviral’s introduction. With the FDA the desire for the delay was a practical one. How were they supposed to approve a new drug without first enacting their own clinical trials to make sure that the drug would do what it was supposed to do? With the pharmaceuticals industry the concerns were profit driven. How were they to compete when the drug was going to be given away, allowing the entire world to be inoculated before the patent expired and they could create their own knock-offs of Unisane? Furthermore, what would happen to their revenues when high priced viral “treatment” drugs were rendered a thing of the past?

The American people got what they wanted in the end. On April 30, 2012, by an act of the combined houses of Congress, Unisane was officially cleared for usage in the United States. If they had waited two more months, things may have unfolded differently across the face of the world. But as it stood on June 20, 2012, over 25% of the population of the USA was inoculated with Unisane.

The die was cast.

The Benford Group was hailed as heroic saviors, when in truth their agenda was far more sinister than anyone could imagine. The organization is actually the modern incarnation of an ancient death cult, worshipers of a demonic entity known as Brulyx. The Unisane antiviral carried with it an evil enchantment, undetectable by the tools of science. *The Wave* was the result of the ritual needed to activate the *enchantment* which turned the *inoculated population* into *infectious zombies*.

The Cult of Brulyx & The Benford Group

Somewhere in the Pacific

The storm clouds were so thick and black that the priest couldn't tell if it was night or day. Thunder shook the very ground beneath his feet, and the wind felt as if it might blow him away like a leaf. Not a drop of rain had fallen, and although the clouds pulsed with flashes of energy, there was no lightning. It would come, the priest was certain of that. The storm was just beginning, and it would soon sweep the whole world. He smiled at the thought, his pale lips parting to show a glimpse of rotten, jagged teeth.

The priest's charcoal colored robes settled around his thin frame as he entered the shelter of the temple. From the surface, it looked like nothing more than another cluster of boulders on the side of the hill. The ancient stone stairs dove down into the earth, descending in a long, steep spiral. Torches lit the way as the stairs led the priest deeper and deeper underground. He could hear the chanting of his fellow priests growing louder as he neared the bottom.

Acolytes in white robes bowed to the priest as he reached the bottom of the spiral stair. The priest ignored them as he took in the sight of the cavern. He had never seen it so brightly lit, and was astonished by its actual size. Hundreds of torches had banished every shadow, illuminating the cavern all the way up to its domed stone ceiling. A sea of white robes surrounded a smaller inner ring of priests in gray. At the center was the altar, a giant skeletal hand of black crystal thrusting up from the floor, the Hand of Brulyx. It seemed to pulse with sallow inner light.

As the priest watched, a lone, gray robed figure stepped up onto the elevated base of the altar. The priest knew who it was, despite the hood covering the figure's face. Only one man was allowed to approach the altar; Gregius, the High Priest of Brulyx. The priest felt a surge of excitement at the sight of his master. After all the long years of preparation, the ultimate moment was nearly at hand. The will of Brulyx would be done.

The priest gazed up at his master, the man who had taken him from obscurity, and taught him both the secrets of magic and the glory of Brulyx. The priest had served Gregius loyally for nearly two hundred years, never doubting that his master was the source of his long lifespan. He often wondered how old Gregius truly was, but never dared to ask. Gregius sometimes spoke of the fall of ancient empires with such nostalgic familiarity...

The priest snapped out of his reverie, realizing that several other priests had joined him. They shared silent nods and grim smiles of anticipation. As the High Priest began to speak, the priest and his fellows began moving into position. The acolytes parted, making way as they approached the altar. As he came near, the priest could feel the mystic energy radiating from the Hand of Brulyx. At the apex of the Summer Solstice, that power would reach its peak and the ritual would be complete.

As the priest took his position before the altar, the High Priest began reciting the binding incantation. The words were in the language of the dead, taught to the High Priest by Brulyx himself. The guttural, alien speech caused a throb of pain in the priest's head, as it always did. The living were not meant to hear the language of the dead, and the priest could see many of the acolytes writhing in pain upon hearing it. The priest ignored the pain, closing his eyes and concentrating on the ritual. In a few moments he was lost in the spell.

The priest's eyes opened as the ritual neared its zenith. The chant had resumed, and the High Priest continued to weave the spell with practiced grace. Eerie lights danced at the edges of the priest's vision, and the altar's glow was much brighter. The priest felt an acolyte step up behind him, and knew that the moment had come. The acolyte's hand came into view, holding the silver bladed knife's point to his chest. The priest could feel the tip of the blade digging into his skin, directly over his heart.

"Let the will of Brulyx be done!" the High Priest commanded, switching back to the English language. "By the blood of our brothers, this world shall once again know his power!"

The High Priest screamed the final incantation, and the priest fulfilled his role in the ritual. He drove himself forward, driving the blade deep into his own chest and piercing his heart. All around the altar, the dozens of other priests were doing the same thing. The blade didn't hurt nearly as much as the ritual. The priest felt as if his very soul were being torn from him. With a gasped pledge of unending obedience, he surrendered himself to the ritual.

Total silence filled the temple as the ritual was finally completed. The glow of the altar dimmed for a moment, gathering in on itself, and then flashed back brighter than ever. The giant skeletal hand began to move, curling into a fist. The High Priest thrust his fists towards the heavens, screaming in triumph. All around him, the remaining priests and acolytes fell to the ground, screaming in agony.

The priest's vision grew dim as his heartbeat faded. Death settled over him like a shroud, numbing him to the world. With his last breath, the priest repeated his oath of eternal obedience to Brulyx. His last living sight was of his master Gregius, bathed in the sickly radiance of the altar. A weak smile of triumph curled the priest's lips, and then he died.

The priest's eyes opened onto darkness. The cavern temple was dark again, and silent as a tomb. The priest stood up slowly, hearing his tendons creak as he stretched. His body was completely numb. His vision seemed like he was looking through a warped sheet of hazy glass. Colors were muted, and shapes appeared slightly distorted. Although his senses felt dulled, the priest could feel the power of the altar beckoning him. The priest turned towards the altar, and saw Gregius standing there watching him with a smile.

“Master,” the priest croaked, approaching the altar. He sank to his knees, gazing up at Gregius with wide eyes.

“It is done,” Gregius said, smiling down at the priest. “After all these centuries, we have finally succeeded. The power of Brulyx is cleansing this world of life. All mankind is being remade in his glorious image, and soon he will walk among us.”

“What... what am I?” the priest asked.

“You are dead, dear boy,” Gregius laughed. “You are dead, yet you walk, and speak. Brulyx has remade you as his perfect, undying servant. Rejoice, my son. You are but the first of many to die and rise again.”

Gregius swept his hand out and the priest turned his head to see. All around the altar, the bodies of the dead were rising. Their eyes were lit with a red glow as they surrounded the altar. Most of them moved slowly, slouching along like badly animated puppets. Their expressions were mindless, vacant, and hungry. The High Priest laughed again as his undead servants gathered around him.

“All glory to our lord Brulyx!” Gregius cried. “All glory to the Lord of Death! His will is done, and the dead reign begins!”

The Past

The origins of the Cult of Brulyx/the Benford Group stretches back into the depths of time to pre-Roman Europe. In the years after the fall of the Hellenistic civilization that dominated the whole of Southern Europe and Northern Africa, thousands of cults and sects rose among the ruins. To go into the intricacies of these lost religions would be pointless due to the fact that 99% of them were crushed and relegated to the trash heap of history with the consolidation of the Roman Empire.

The original incarnation of the Benford Group was founded by Gregius Bonophat, a former priest of the Greek God Hades. During the burning and destruction of his temple by barbarians, Gregius was driven insane by the apparent abandonment by his god. Escaping to the hills while his followers were raped and murdered by the barbarians, Gregius swore vengeance on his enemies and beseeched the universe for the power to destroy them.

As he screamed and wailed, a voice spoke from the ether, telling him to hold his sniveling tongue and listen. Gregius fell to his knees, struck dumb by the power of the voice. The voice identified itself as Brulyx, a demon lord that had been cast from the realm millennia before. He needed an agent on Earth, and made Gregius an offer. Brulyx would convey tremendous power and long life to Gregius, and in return Gregius would be his High Priest. Together, they would breach the dimensional barriers that kept Brulyx from reaching the Earth.

In his hate and madness, Gregius quickly agreed to the pact. The fate of the world pivoted on his choice.

The next evening the barbarians who had sacked Gregius' temple and savaged his followers were encamped among the ruins of the village. Gregius fell upon them like a dark avenging spirit. Empowered by his pact with the demon, Gregius slaughtered them all without mercy. With his vengeance complete, Gregius set to work on fulfilling his master's agenda.

Gregius gathered new followers around him, promising them power and eternal life in the service of Brulyx. These converts

and their descendants became the core of the Brotherhood of the Eternal Flame (the first incarnation of the Cult of Brulyx/the Benford Group). As the centuries passed, the members of the Brotherhood became the most influential political and religious leaders throughout the Eurasian continent. The Priests and leaders of the Roman Empire made a valiant attempt at destroying the Brotherhood, but in the end the Brotherhood controlled the empire for all practical purposes.

To this very day, Gregius considers the destruction of the hated Roman Empire his crowning achievement.

Over the centuries, Gregius has made several attempts at bringing his master forth. During his orchestrated decline of the Roman Empire a cholera epidemic killed millions. While the sacrifices gave Brulyx more power, it failed to open a portal. The Black Death, or Black Plague, killed an estimated 75 million people across the world, 20 million of them in Europe alone. Yet dwindling P.P.E. available on Earth rendered the increased number of sacrifices insufficient for Gregius to bring forth his master. The advances in medical sciences that occurred at the beginning of the Renaissance seemed to crimp Gregius' plans for a juggernaut pandemic to supply the P.P.E. needed to open the portal.

After the last failed attempt to gather the mystic energy needed through natural means (via the Spanish Flu Pandemic of 1918), Gregius decided to rethink his strategy.

Throughout the centuries, Gregius had constantly changed his identity and kept himself out of the public eye. That changed in 1919 when Gregius became Louis David Benford the First, and founded the Benford Group as the modern day incarnation of the Brotherhood.

As the Benford Group delved into good works that endeared them to the general public, Gregius bided his time and watched for an opportunity to finally fulfill his pact with Brulyx. In the 1970s, Gregius finally found the tool he needed to bring about the apocalypse: genetic engineering. Using decades of genetics research, the keystone of which was the Human Genome Project, the Benford Group created Unisane, an extremely effective and powerful antiviral that would pass third party testing. It was the perfect instrument with which to strike at all mankind.

The terrible facet of Unisane was a unique enchantment, provided by Brulyx, which was placed on the antiviral before it was shipped across the world. This enchantment would lie dormant and undetected in the inoculated population. Another spell was required to activate the enchantment, a ritual also provided by Brulyx that would require the sacrifice of a significant number of his most powerful supporters. The effect of this ritual would come to be known as the Wave.

In order to cast a spell of such magnitude, the cult of Brulyx needed massive amounts of P.P.E. They waited for the Summer Solstice, when the Earth's levels of ambient P.P.E. were at their highest. Even that was insufficient, but the cult was prepared. Dozens of their priests were sacrificed, and the spell was cast. The Wave swept the planet, and the inoculated population were transformed into zombies.

The nature of the enchantment turned every zombie into a sort of P.P.E. relay. All of the magic energy released by the mass deaths in the Wave was siphoned to the temple of Brulyx. There, the P.P.E. was channeled into a spell to breach the di-

mensional barriers that kept Brulyx from physically reaching Earth. The massive flow of P.P.E. also served to increase the power of the planet's ley lines to a small degree.

Although the power released by the deaths of almost half of the world's population dwarfed all of the previous attempts to bring Brulyx to Earth, it was still a failure. Now, it is important to quantify the failure. While Brulyx was not brought bodily to the Earth, a permanent portal to his prison dimension was opened. Brulyx is still barred from entering our dimension, but it is possible for him to send small numbers of his demonic servants to Earth, where they serve as elite shock-troops and advisors to Gregius.

The Future

The next phase of the Cult of Brulyx/the Benford Group's plan is fairly straightforward and direct: use the new legions of the undead as an *army* (in conjunction with the Dark Priests, demonic servants, and human supporters) to *conquer the world*. Once the surviving population has been herded like cattle, they will be sacrificed in order to set Brulyx loose upon the Earth.

Gregius is no fool, and several millennia of experience has taught him that patience is a virtue. He has meticulously planned the next phase of the plan, and had all of the components ready months before the Wave. Using the island of Aurora as his central base of operations, Gregius commands a large human mercenary army that he plans on using as his technological hammer. The mercenaries will crush any organized resistance, allowing the hordes of the walking dead to feast on the defenseless survivors.

The first steps that will be taken by Gregius and his dark disciples will be the conquest and pacification of mainland Asia. Although Asia has the highest concentration of survivors, it also has the largest gathering of zombies. Gregius and his Dark Priests will use the millions of zombies as an undead tidal wave to overwhelm the survivors. Gregius believes that he should be able to overwhelm any organized resistance on the Asian landmass with little or no trouble. This will turn out to be an erroneous assumption that will set back the initial timetable by at least one year. The People's Republic of China (PRC) will mount an efficient, and in some cases, devastating, counterattack against the forces of Brulyx and the Benford Group, culminating with the simultaneous nuking of more than a dozen major Asian cities. Unfortunately, the PRC will ultimately be removed from the board as the country of North Korea will use its underestimated nuclear arsenal to devastate most of the population centers in Northeastern Asia.

Though Gregius is concentrating the bulk of his resources on the Asian continent, he has dispatched teams of priests, cultists and mercenaries to all the corners of the world. They intend to sort out the survivors into two distinct groups: the "sheep" that will be used as additional sacrifices to bring forth Brulyx or to work in the factories and fields to provide for the needs of the elite, and those special few that can be recruited to join them.

Also of special importance to Gregius and his minions are the "Points of Power" spread across the globe. Places such as Stonehenge, the Nazca Plains, and the former Mound City near St. Louis must be secured by his forces and used to help channel

as much power as possible to Brulyx. Within the first two years after the Wave, fortified complexes will be erected around more than fifty points of power worldwide. The bases are used to keep Brulyx and his undead minions fed with a constant supply of P.P.E., the flow of which is channeled and regulated at these places.

Goals and Tactics

The Cult of Brulyx/the Benford Group must gather more P.P.E. in order to break the magic barriers that keep Brulyx from reaching the Earth. The levels of ambient P.P.E. unleashed by the Wave are too weak to provide the necessary energy, so the cult must take the P.P.E. from living people. The most efficient method is through human sacrifice. Therefore, the cult tries to capture as many living victims as possible. They are herded to ley line nexus points, and held prisoner until moments when the magic energy is at its highest (full moons, equinox, etc.). The victims are mass-sacrificed, and their P.P.E. is channeled to the central Temple of Brulyx.

The Pens: Hundreds, sometimes thousands of survivors are rounded up daily by the minions of Brulyx, and they need to be stored until they can be used in the great plan. Imagine the worst of the Nazi death camps in World War Two and multiply it by ten, and then you come close to an accurate description of life within the Pens. The strong dominate the weak and the young and elderly perish by the bushel.

Channeling Centers: The final destinations of any of the unfortunate souls to be taken alive by the forces of Brulyx are the Channeling Centers. Built around the nexus points that are under the control of the Cult of Brulyx/Benford Group, Channeling Center is really just a clean way of saying Sacrificial Altar. Because the person's P.P.E. is doubled at the moment of death, sacrifices are conducted at the points of power (nexus points) in order to facilitate the most efficient transfer of power to Brulyx as possible.

Breeding Centers: The population of the world is large but not infinite. The available pool of potential sacrifices and slave labor would quickly be depleted, leaving only the free humans that are resisting the minions of Brulyx to harvest. This would be highly undesirable considering that in engagements with these feral humans, Brulyx's minions almost always come off the worst in terms of casualties. As soon as large tracts of land have been pacified, one of the first priorities will be the establishment of compounds for the perpetuation of the human species in subservient and cattle-like capacity.

Search & Infiltration Party: Typically 1-4 cultists who seek out survivor communities. Once they are located, the cultists attempt to join the survivors for the purpose of gathering intelligence. They often have to maintain their cover for years before the cult is ready to make a move on the community.

Salvage Party: A group of cultists traveling incognito, locating and securing stashes of pre-Wave resources (food, fuel, weaponry, etc.). Salvage parties work more on stealth than force, encounters with Player Characters should be minimal and the cultists will only engage in pitched battles if cornered and unable to flee.

War Party: A large group, consisting of mercenary forces, cultists, and at least one Death Priest, as well as a herd of zombies. These groups are typically sent out to assault specific targets, and will try to keep a low profile until their mission is complete.

The Supernatural

In the wake of the Wave, Earth's ley lines have grown quite a bit stronger. They aren't powerful enough to be seen with the naked eye, but the increased levels of ambient P.P.E. have triggered some supernatural abilities in mankind. As noted in the character generation section, 15% of the living population develops psionic powers. Furthermore, a smaller percentage of people find that they can manipulate and channel the raw powers of magic itself.

Handling magic in your campaign can be tricky. Bear in mind that magic lore is extremely rare in this world (most of it is in the hands of the Cult of Brulyx), and there is no one to provide the training necessary to master the art of spell casting. At best, characters with some innate magic ability might learn to cast a handful of low level spells. As time passes, mankind is bound to rediscover some of the secrets of greater magic.

But none of this means that magic is one hundred percent unknown in the world of Dead Reign. Throughout recent history, interest in the supernatural was always evident in human societies. But in the sunrise days of the Twenty-First Century the interest and, more importantly, belief in the supernatural world was growing exponentially. Several places throughout the world sported groups that claimed to be able to channel real magical and psionic abilities. Although none of the claims of these groups could be proven, they served to feed a public interest that culminated in the Salem Mystic Festival in the summers of 2010 and 2011.

While some of the public figures that claimed to be able to read minds and levitate pencils were in fact legitimate mages and psionics, most were not.

Magic and psionics can be one of the great equalizers in your game. You may run out of bullets to hurl at the undead, leaving you with a mishmash of blunt and bladed weapons to defend yourselves, but magic and psionics are powered by the individual. Is a Fast-Attack Zombie coming at you? Well, just telekinetically smash its rotted head in and then run for it. Is it a bright and sunny day outside and you really need the visibility reduced so you can get to the Wal-Mart and raid it for supplies? Your resident mage might be able to hook you up, a few words and gestures and, wow, a fog bank rolls right in.

And with a little sleep, your resident freaks can do it all again tomorrow.

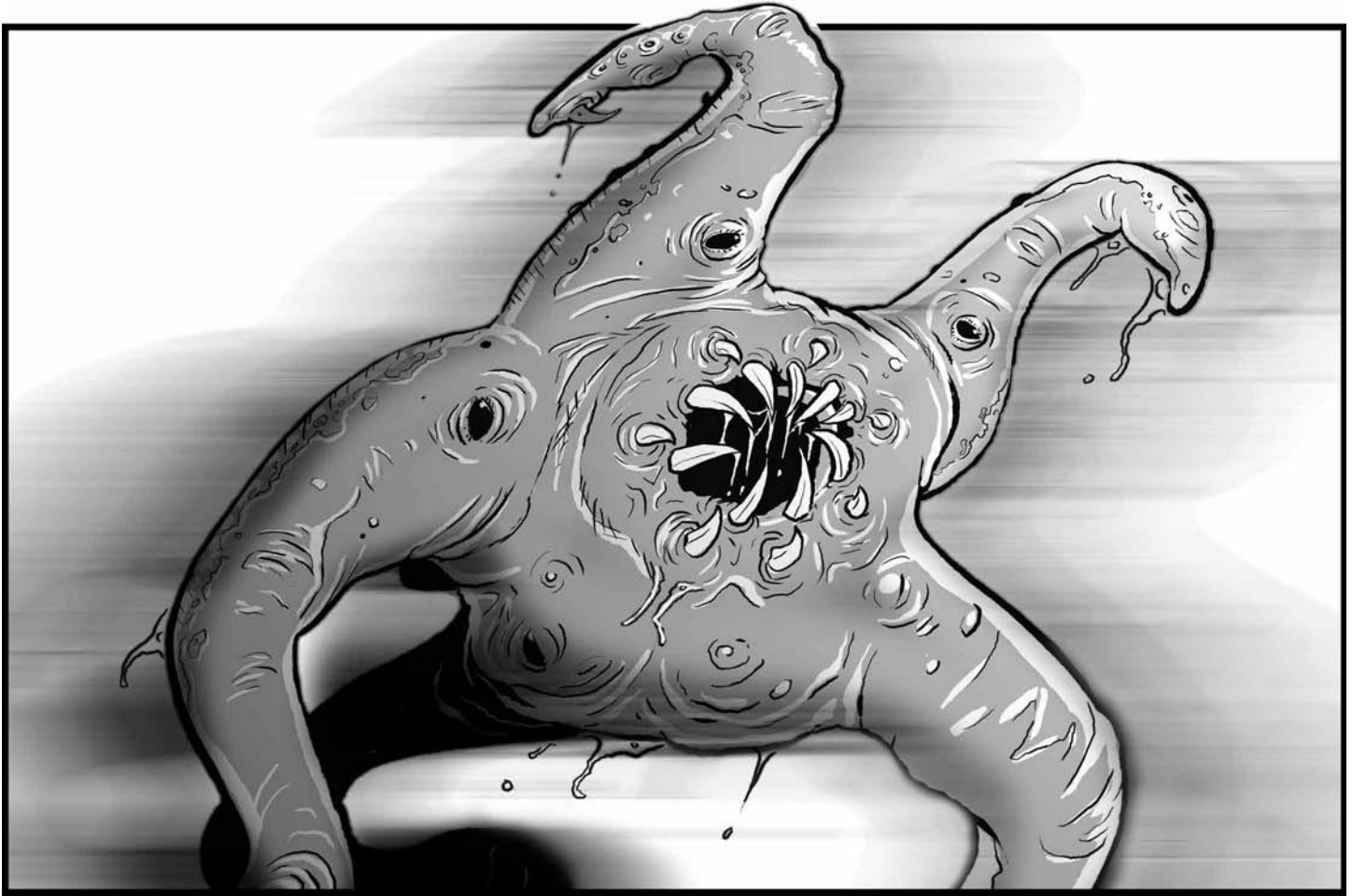
But there is a catch. When you use those psionic powers or cast those spells the dead seem to know. They are, in fact, attracted to the expenditures, and clustering, of P.P.E. and I.S.P. like moths to the flame. To them it equals lunch and you are the main course. So the mages and psionic characters will need to be able to defend themselves in other ways, or they need to be defended by folks without the talents they possess.

Then there are the demons. Brulyx, thankfully, has very few types of demons under his command. And of the types he does

have control over, their numbers are very limited. When the elder gods banished him to his dimensional prison he was able to bring a few of his demonic servants with him, and as the millennia passed, they bred. Brulyx and his Death Priests are unable to call more servants from other dimensions due to the fact that he is bound to his prison dimension and was only able to reestablish contact with Earth with tremendous expenditure of power. He is still unable to physically access the Earth dimension even with the sacrifice of over half the world's population.

Demons in Dead Reign. With the return of appreciable levels of magic to the world of Dead Reign it has become possible for demons to once again operate within the realm of Earth. Brulyx has a narrow assortment of demons at his command; they are the descendants of the demons that followed him into exile when he was imprisoned by the elder gods. The numbers of the individual demons that are present on Earth are limited due to the massive expenditure of power that needs to be used to bring them bodily from Brulyx's prison dimension. Very few, if any, of the demons have gone feral on Earth and the vast majority are under the direct control of Gregius and his Death Priests.





Crawling Maw – Lesser Demon

This demon resembles a starfish; it's really little more than a gaping, fang-filled mouth scurrying around on five tentacles. Crawling Maws are surprisingly quick, and can leap, crawl up walls, and even across ceilings. They are also excellent swimmers, and are found in both fresh and salt water. The demons' bite carries the dreaded Z-Virus. The Maw is a creature of high animal intelligence that follows the orders of any Priest of Brulyx.

The Crawling Maw may look like a starfish, but it can function easily on dry land, although when on land, they prefer a temperate forest and jungle/rainforest environment; they have an aversion to the cold and the dry. Any environment that has ample moisture and vegetation is a ready made land home for these demons. On the North American continent, the Crawling Maws have made their homes within the Cult of Brulyx beachhead in the Los Angeles basin. But as the cult expands its sphere of influence the Maws will find many areas to establish their dominance. Ideal locations include the rainforest of the Pacific Northwest, the jungles of the Yucatan and Central America, the temperate forests of the eastern United States, and, of course, the Great Lakes region.

Species: Lesser or Sub-Demon.

Type: Crawling Maw, *a.k.a. Satan's Starfish.*

Attributes: I.Q. 6, M.E. 11, M.A. 4, P.S. 24 Supernatural, P.P. 17 on land, 26 in water, P.E. 28, P.B. 1, Spd 19 on land, 28 in water.

Alignment: Essentially Diabolic.

S.D.C.: 4D6x10

Hit Points: 1D4x10+15

Height: 3 feet, 6 inches to 5 feet, 8 inches (1.0-1.7 m; depending on level of maturity).

Length: 10 to 15 feet (3-4.6 m; depending on level of maturity).

Weight: 200 to 450 lbs (90-202 kg; depending on level of maturity).

Disposition: The Crawling Maw is a savage monster that will attack anything and everything unless it is restrained or controlled by a handler. It is the demonic version of a rabid dog, but meaner and uglier.

Description: The Crawling Maw is a pink and black, slimy starfish from hell. It appears to be all tentacles and teeth to its victims. While in the water the Crawling Maw can swim in any direction with equal skill. On the land the demon is forced to move on its tentacles with its maw facing the ground, but it is surprisingly agile.

Horror Factor: 14

Skills of Note: None.

Natural Abilities: Sense P.P.E., range 328 feet (100 m).

Combat Skills: Bite 1D610, Tentacle Strike 4D6.

Number of Attacks: 8

Bonuses: +6 to strike on land, +8 in water, +5 to parry and dodge on land, +8 in water, +5% to Prowl on land, +30% in water, +2 to save vs psionics, +4 to save vs magic.

Magical Knowledge: None.

P.P.E.: 6D6+12

Psionic Knowledge: None.

I.S.P.: None.

Allies: Only obeys Brulyx and his Death Priests.

Minions: None.

Enemies: All living creatures.

Jigsaw Zombie – Lesser Demon

This is not a type of zombie, but is actually built by a Death Priest using body parts from destroyed zombies. Once the body is built, it is possessed and animated by an incorporeal demon. They are a little faster and smarter than Sloucher zombies, but not by much. They are also considerably stronger. Jigsaw Zombies have the ability to add more zombie flesh to their bodies to repair damage and replace lost limbs. Destroying the brain of the Jigsaw Zombie will NOT stop it. The only way to stop a Jigsaw Zombie is to destroy the physical body, thereby banishing the incorporeal demon.

Species: Lesser or Sub-Demon.

Type: Jigsaw Zombie.

Attributes: I.Q. 3, M.E. 5, M.A. 2, P.S. 8, P.P. 8, P.E. 16, P.B. 3, Spd 9.

Alignment: Any evil.

S.D.C.: 6D6+8

Hit Points: 1D4

Height: Varies.

Weight: Varies.

Disposition: Jigsaw Zombies act like your typical Sloucher zombie; they never seem to get angry or excited, they simply try to feed.

Description: Looks like a standard zombie, except its body parts don't always match.

Horror Factor: 10

Skills of Note: None.

Natural Abilities: Sense P.P.E. 164 feet (50 m), absorb dead flesh (add 2 S.D.C. for every pound of flesh absorbed, up to 10 points over the starting S.D.C.).

Combat Skills: Bite 1D6.

Number of Attacks: 2

Bonuses: +1 to strike, +2 to parry and dodge.

Magical Knowledge: None.

P.P.E.: 1D6

Psionic Knowledge: None.

I.S.P.: None.

Allies: Obeys Brulyx, Death Priests, and Organ Grinders.

Minions: None.

Enemies: All living creatures.





Necro-Golem – Lesser Demon

The Necro-Golem is a powerful variation of the Jigsaw Zombie; the Necro-Golem's body is a hulking, humanoid-shaped mass of decaying flesh. But unlike the Jigsaw Zombie, the Necro-Golem has a high level of intelligence (low human), making them even more deadly.

Species: Lesser or Sub-Demon.

Type: Necro-Golem.

Attributes: I.Q. 9, M.E. 5, M.A. 2, P.S. 16, P.P. 8, P.E. 20, P.B. 4, Spd 12.

Alignment: Any evil.

S.D.C.: 6D6+25

Hit Points: 1D4

Height: Varies.

Weight: Varies.

Disposition: Necro-Golems act like your typical Sloucher zombie; they never seem to get angry or excited, they simply try to feed.

Description: Looks like a hulking mass of dead flesh in humanoid shape.

Horror Factor: 12

Skills of Note: None.

Natural Abilities: Sense P.P.E. 164 feet (50 m), absorb dead flesh (add 2 S.D.C. for every pound of flesh absorbed, up to 50 points over the starting S.D.C.).

Combat Skills: Bite 1D8.

Number of Attacks: 4

Bonuses: +3 to strike, +5 to parry and dodge.

Magical Knowledge: None.

P.P.E.: 1D6+4

Psionic Knowledge: None.

I.S.P.: None.

Allies: Obeys Brulyx, Death Priests, and Organ Grinders.

Minions: None.

Enemies: All living creatures.

Organ Grinder – Greater Demon

This demon is the most powerful of Brulyx's minions, and the rarest. The Organ Grinder appears as a massive worm or slug, with an equally massive mouth. The demon swallows living people whole, and (for lack of a better term) craps them out as zombies. The Organ Grinder is also a powerful psionic, and can mentally command Slouchers (like the Death Priest, but with much greater range and in greater numbers).

Species: Greater Demon.

Type: Organ Grinder.

Attributes: I.Q. 21, M.E. 16, M.A. 12, P.S. 26 Supernatural, P.P. 17, P.E. 22, P.B. 4, Spd 19.

Alignment: Any evil.

S.D.C.: 6D6x10+25

Hit Points: 1D4x10+10

Height: 10 feet, 6 inches to 15 feet, 8 inches (3-4.7 m; depending on level of maturity).

Length: 25 to 55 feet (7.6-16.7 m; depending on level of maturity).

Weight: 800 lbs to 1450 lbs (360-652 kg; depending on level of maturity).

Disposition: The Organ Grinder is extremely intelligent and logical, they are the generals in Brulyx's demonic legions. An Organ Grinder is always thinking 4 moves ahead.

Description: The Organ Grinders vary in color from a pale white to an almost obsidian black depending on their level of maturity (they get darker as they age).

Horror Factor: 18

Skills of Note: All wilderness, they can speak all languages of the dimension they are occupying.

Natural Abilities: Sense P.P.E. 1 mile (1.6 km), command all minions of Brulyx, heal 1D6X10 S.D.C. per minute.

Combat Skills: Bite 1D6x10.

Number of Attacks: 10

Bonuses: +5 to strike, +5 to parry and dodge, +7 to save vs psionics, +9 to save vs magic.

Magical Knowledge: All spells levels 1 through 12, all the powers of the Death Priest.

P.P.E.: 1D8x10+100

Psionic Knowledge: All Physical and Sensitive.

I.S.P.: 1D6x10+50

Allies: Only obeys Brulyx.

Minions: All minions and servants of Brulyx are minions of the Organ Grinders.

Enemies: All living creatures.

Results of Being Swallowed by the Organ Grinder: The swallowed character is engulfed in the demon's stomach fluids. The chemicals are mildly acidic, and cause intense pain to the living victim. The character has 1D4 rounds before either suffocating or dying of exposure to the demon's stomach fluids. Then the body is simply expelled from the other end of the demon, and rises as a zombie (the type of zombie is determined as usual, based on the presence of magic and/or psionic ability).

Brulyx – The Fallen One

The origins of the being that is now known as Brulyx are shrouded in mystery. It is believed that he was originally a demon in the service of one of the elder gods or the great demons of antiquity. Brulyx has never revealed his origins to any of his followers so anything that is known is based on conjecture and hearsay. It is known that ten thousand years ago, Brulyx mounted an invasion of the Earth that nearly succeeded in overrunning the dimension and enslaving the human race. Only an alliance between a cadre of gods and supernatural beings, with an unknown society of humans that flourished at the time, managed to defeat Brulyx and imprison him in his home dimension. It is known that no less than two gods were killed and more than one hundred thousand mortal beings perished in the war. In the





end, Brulyx fled to his home dimension with the last of his demon servants, where he was trapped for what was believed to be the next fifty thousand years.

That should have been the end of Brulyx, but no being could have foreseen what would happen next. Although defeated, Brulyx had considerable magic power at his disposal and he spent more than a thousand years using that power to make contact with an entity of incalculable power. The creature, which would not reveal its name, informed Brulyx that it was one of the oldest beings in the Megaverse and it was trapped in a prison even more formidable than the one that held Brulyx. It made Brulyx an offer, it would sliver off a fraction of its own essence and merge it with Brulyx's own. This would raise Brulyx to the same level as the elder gods. When Brulyx had made good on his escape from the prison that was once his home, he would then free his benefactor, even if it took him a million years.

Brulyx accepted the offer and was transformed from a powerful demon into a god. Brulyx was limited to one point in the Megaverse where he could open a portal, the dimension and world of his defeat. Using the powers of his new master, he was able to pierce the barrier between Earth and his prison without alerting the few elder gods that still stood guard against his return to the Earth.

Brulyx was astounded to find that the human society that had been so pivotal in his defeat were themselves destroyed soon after his banishment. The Earth itself was wracked with severe geological and climatological changes after his banishment, the most severe of which was the shifting of the poles.

Brulyx spent several millennia searching for the appropriate human to use as his servant on Earth. He made several half-hearted attempts to free himself during this period but was always stymied by the fact that an astronomical amount of mystical energy would be required to free him bodily from his dimension. The bulk of the Earth's P.P.E. reserves had been drained away during the conflicts that led to his defeat. When Brulyx discovered the creature that was once Gregius Bonophat, he realized that he had hit the proverbial jackpot. Gregius was very powerful in the mystical and psychic arts and his soul burned for vengeance. Once the bargain was struck between these two beings, the fate of the world was all but sealed.

The Wave should have been Brulyx's ultimate triumph, but things did not work out quite the way they were supposed to. The mass simultaneous sacrifice of half of the world's population, on the solstice no less, should have been more than enough to allow Brulyx to escape. But something went horribly wrong. The portal opened between Brulyx's dimension and the Island of Aurora in the South Pacific, but when Brulyx attempted to move through, something or someone stopped him. To this day, Brulyx doesn't have a clue who or what may have been involved, but aside from preventing him to leave the dimension, everything else seems to have worked as it should. Brulyx is now attempting to build up enough power via the channeling centers to bring this final barrier down, but he fears it could be decades or even centuries before this is a possibility.

Brulyx

Real Name: To pronounce it correctly he would have to rip out your tongue.

Alignment: Diabolic.

S.D.C.: 22,500

Hit Points: 7200

Height: 8 feet, 7 inches (2.6 m).

Weight: 800 pounds (360 kg).

Species: Brulyx began his existence as a minor demon, possibly in the service of one of the dark gods or great demons. He has now transcended the limitations of his form and is on par with some of the most powerful beings in the Megaverse.

Attributes: I.Q. 24, M.E. 29, M.A. 30, P.S. 30 Supernatural, P.P. 21, P.E. 30, P.B. 2, Spd 12.

Disposition: The world might be better off if Brulyx was one of those slobbering mad demons who disregard the abilities of mortal beings and underestimates all of his foes. Although pure evil, Brulyx is calm and calculating, he has a silver tongue and a general's instincts. Before his fall he was a welcome guest in the realms of many of the most powerful beings in the Megaverse, his stories and hospitality were legendary. Now Brulyx is cold and manipulative, all beings are viewed as one of two things: tools or food. He would sunder a hundred worlds to achieve but one of his goals. He has no friends because no one is his equal, and no real enemies because all threats are beneath his notice.

Description: Before his essence was merged with that of his benefactor, Brulyx was actually quite attractive, almost angelic. But that is now irrelevant, Brulyx is humanoid, but his skin is the consistency of wet cardboard and has a tendency to run off his body in thick globs. His flesh is a murky red and gray combination, and his eyes are pure white. He has no hair, and his skull shows through his skin in places. Always he is surrounded by the smell of rot and decay.

Horror Factor: 19

Experience Level: 12th level Dark God (special).

Natural Abilities: Nightvision 6,000 feet (1829 m), see the invisible, turn invisible at will, bio-regenerate 2D6x20 per melee, impervious to cold, teleport self 90%, dimensional teleport 82% (can not use this power while trapped in his prison), impervious to poisons and disease, read and speak all languages.

Combat Skills: Hand to Hand: Assassin (remnant from when he was a demon).

Number of Attacks: Seven hand to hand attacks per melee or psionics, or four by magic.

Restrained Punch – 1D4x10+15 S.D.C.

Full Strength Punch or Kick – 5D6 S.D.C.

Power Punch – 3D4x10+5 S.D.C.

Bonuses: +4 on initiative, +5 to strike, +10 to parry and dodge, +8 to pull punch or roll/fall with impact, +17 to save versus Horror Factor, +6 to save versus magic, +8 to save versus psionics.

Magical Knowledge: Knows all spells level 1-15, knows all Necromancy spells.

P.P.E. 5,100

Psionic Knowledge: All Sensitive, Physical, and Healing, also Empathic Transmission, Hypnotic Suggestion, Mind Block Auto-Defense, and Psychic Omni-Sight.

I.S.P. 1,985

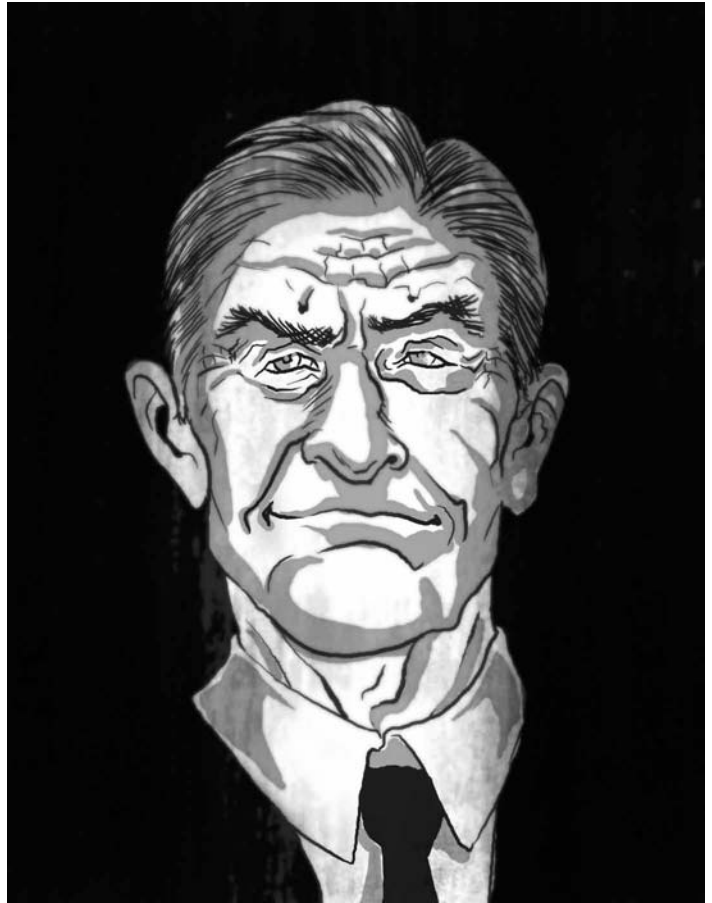
Allies: The only ally that Brulyx has is his unknown benefactor.

Minions: Other than Gregius and the members of the Cult of Brulyx/Benford Group, none except the few demons that followed him into exile, are considered worthy of being his minions.

Enemies: All are beneath the notice of Brulyx . . . except who or what stopped him from crossing over.

Weapons and Equipment: Brulyx needs no trinkets!

Special Power: Brulyx has the ability to see through the eyes and speak through his Death Priests, Sloucher Zombies, and Talker Zombies that have joined his cause.



Gregius

Gregius Bonophat was born in the hills surrounding the small city of Athens on the Greek peninsula. He was the child of a religious family and in his early years he began to be trained for a vocation in the priesthood. He was ordained as a priest of Hades at the age of 15 and for twelve years he was content in that role. He was happily married with seven children when his life as he knew it came to an end. Barbarians from the north had been raiding closer and closer to his home for years but they had never before struck at the people of the Athenian region. When they did it was devastating, they burned and pillaged as they raced across the countryside. Gregius attempted to organize his fellow priests and their families into a defensive force to protect their temple. It was a good but ultimately futile plan. The priests held out for 17 days before the temple fell and all within were

put to the sword. Gregius attempted to fight to the death but two of his acolytes spirited him away against his will.

When they returned to the burnt ruins that had been their temple and home, Gregius found the bodies of his family sacrificed, like all the others, to the barbarians' gods. Gregius's mind snapped and he slew his acolytes in three swift strokes of his sword. He then fell upon the bodies of his family and howled for vengeance.

Brulyx heard his cry, and made his offer.

Over the millennia, Gregius has had a moment of doubt as to the course he has allowed his life to take. But he is a practical man and he accepts that this is now his lot in life, and he will do his best to accomplish his master's goals.

Lord Gregius

Real Name: Gregius Bonophat, son of Actus.

Alignment: Was Principled, now Diabolic.

S.D.C.: 500.

Hit Points: 75

Height: 6 feet, 2 inches (1.8 m).

Weight: 215 lbs (96.7 kg).

Species: Human, now immortal and unnaturally powerful due to his unique bonding with Brulyx.

Attributes: I.Q. 17, M.E. 18, M.A. 30, P.S. 13, P.P. 14, P.E. 30, P.B. 15, Spd 10.

Disposition: Calm and calculating, it takes a lot to shatter his outward face of restraint.

Description: An older gentleman of obvious Mediterranean descent, Gregius has dark hair, olive skin and grey eyes.

Horror Factor: 12 when people realize what he is.

Experience Level: 20th level Priest of Brulyx.

Skills of Note: Gregius has the education equivalent of half a dozen Ph.D.s.

Natural Abilities: Nightvision 600 feet (183 m), see the invisible, turn invisible at will, bio-regenerate 1D6x5 S.D.C. per melee, impervious to poisons and disease, read and speak all languages.

Combat Skills: Hand to Hand: Basic.

Number of Attacks: Five hand to hand attacks per melee or psionics, or four by magic.

Bonuses: +4 on initiative, +2 to strike, +5 to parry and dodge, +3 to pull punch or roll/fall with impact, +15 to save versus Horror Factor, +5 to save versus magic, +7 to save versus psionics.

Magical Knowledge: Knows all spells level 1-15, knows all Necromancy spells.

P.P.E. 1200

Psionic Knowledge: All Sensitive, Physical, and Healing.

I.S.P. 245

Allies: Brulyx.

Minions: All minions of Brulyx are minions of Gregius, with the exception of the Organ Grinder demons.

Enemies: All who oppose him.

Weapons and Equipment: Has access to any weapon he desires, but tends to rely on his own abilities.

Of Bows & Arrows

Optional Material for The Palladium Fantasy RPG®

By Travis Guerrero

Words from the Author

First, I'd like to explain the reason why I wrote this article. In my experiences as a Game Master and a player, I've had several experiences watching a Long Bowman drop his long bow and go into melee combat with paired weapons. As an individual, this often bothered me because these are bowmen, but as a gamer and strategist I understood this as a logical action. Simply put, there was often no reason to try and use the long bow in any type of close range situation. While I wasn't fond of this fact, I accepted it.

One particular incident stands out in my mind in a game when the Bowman of the group put down his bow and arrow while exploring, calling them useless. Now this was too far in my opinion and always stuck out in my memory. Another problem I've heard is how limited they appear. While useful, if compared against a mage or psychic a bow and arrow can seem limited, as are many men of arms (though that is a different article).

As a result of these factors I decided I wanted to give them a fresh look and inspire people to want to play them and give options to make a bow and arrow more versatile. While doing so I had the choice to go for a realistic feel or a fantastic feel. Being as this is fantasy, I went for the latter. Hopefully, reality didn't suffer too badly as a result. Though personally I'm not overly fond of ranged combat (I like melee), it is my utmost hope that after reading this it will make people *want* to play some type of Bowman. With that said, I'll get to the article itself.

Introduction

Anyone can be trained in the use of a bow and arrow, but it takes true talent to become a skilled archer. There are many reasons to study the art of the bow. Some view it, especially nobles, as a sign of class and dignity, because it would be distasteful to sully his hands with the blood of an enemy. Others view it as an art. Anyone can swing a sword, but it takes true skill to fire an arrow on target (though many fighters will argue how much skill it takes to truly use a sword). Then there are others who are simply too scared to face their enemy eye to eye. However, of all of these, few actually truly perfect the art.

Best recognized for his expertise with a bow and arrow is the Long Bowman, but are many more types of archers in the world than just them. There are various types of bowmen with their own special and unique talents. This does not mean any one class is lesser than the others, or that any one of them is the best. Each of them excels in their own respective categories. As a result, the world of archery is far more diversified than most ever truly realize.

Beyond the typical archer/short bowman, Long Bowmen tend to be the best well rounded; good in any number of situations, and probably the most common and recognized. Psi-Archers are some of the best archer assassins, as well as just talented bowmen with psionics. Demon Archers are the best when fighting demons, though perhaps the most rare and least known. Then there are the Circus Bowmen, who have some of the best aim and specialized feats which allow for a variety of techniques, but generally lack in practical combat application.

Archer O.C.C.

Man of Arms

Not everyone knows how to use a bow and arrow, and not everyone who does can be special. There are many who are skilled with a bow but will always pale when compared to the specialists. Though not as skilled, a typical archer is far more common. These archers are only trained in the short bow with no skill in using the long bow. The simplest way to make these archers is to use the Soldier O.C.C. and give them the Archery Weapon Proficiency. This is a quick and easy way to make a typical archer/short bowman without a bunch of new stats and without making the others overly common.

Psi-Archer P.C.C.

Psychic

The Psi-Archer is a Master Psionic with the unique ability to use psionics in coordination with archery. In general, their overall power tends to make them rather conceited, thinking they are the best bowmen in the world. While their psionic abilities make them quite powerful and a force to be reckoned with, their normal archery skills typically lack when compared to others who make it their life's work. It is not uncommon to see these types of bowmen compete to try and prove which is truly the best. Ultimately, it depends on the given situation as all have areas in which they excel.

The main specialty of the Psi-Archer is working with a bow and arrow created purely of psychic energy. While they are capable of using a physical bow and arrow, they feel that it lacks a certain sense of personality. This psychic bow and arrow is akin to a Psi-Sword mixed with a Mind Bolt, but not quite the same as either. It is unique in its own right, and a talent which only the Psi-Archer is capable of developing. Not even the Mind Mage is able to develop this arsenal of psychic energy. Due to this ability to create a bow and arrow out of thin air, from only their own power of the mind, they make ideal assassins, sneaking weapons into an area where none are allowed.

While there are some who will answer this calling, it is important to note that most rarely bind themselves to any type of guild or kingdom. In general, a Psi-Archer will feel too important to be bound to any one group and desire to be allowed to act freely. They'll rarely be found in some assassins' guild or in a military organization, but much prefer to take company in small groups where there is no set chain of command. This type of environment gives them the greatest freedom, making them ideal adventurers. Despite common attitudes among them, anyone with the right potential can become a Psi-Archer and does not

have to follow some stereotypical personality simply because that is what most of his/her kind favor.

Special Abilities of the Psi-Archer

1. Psi-Bow: This is a unique ability which allows the Psi-Archer to form a bow of pure psychic energy. Typically it takes a full melee round (15 seconds) of concentration to form the Psi-Bow. In an emergency though, it can be created at the speed of thought, causing the empty hand to be replaced by a weapon in nearly an instant (one action). It cannot be used to parry or to strike, as it will pass through any item, causing no damage. This Psi-Bow has no physical form but is merely a creation of the psychic's mental will. **I.S.P. Cost:** 10 to create after a melee of concentration, 25 I.S.P. if created without the concentration (one action), 5 to maintain for each period after the first. **Duration:** 3 minutes per level of experience. If the duration is to end, the psychic can focus more I.S.P. into the Psi-Bow to keep it from disappearing at the end of the duration. **Bonuses:** +1 to strike with any Psi-Arrows. **Limitations:** It must be created in an open hand. This means that the psychic cannot be holding anything when the Psi-Bow is created. It is not a matter of physical space, but because the empty hand is used as a focus point. If anything is being held, the item must first be dropped. Also, since this is a



weapon created only of psychic energy, real arrows (physical, not psychic) cannot be used in conjunction with the Psi-Bow. Only Psi-Arrows can be used with this weapon.

2. Psi-Arrow: The second truly unique ability which allows the Psi-Archer to form arrows of pure psychic energy. A Psi-Arrow can be created in a single action. This allows the Psi-Archer to be able to fire off a nearly constant stream of arrows since there is no reload time (equal to number of attacks per melee). Unlike the Psi-Bow, the Psi-Arrows can be used and fired from a real, physical bow. However, a personal preference of any Psi-Archer would be to use the Psi-Bow over a real one as it is an extension of the psychic, any other bow just doesn't have the same feel. I.S.P. Cost/Damage: 1 I.S.P. per 1D4 damage arrow, 2 I.S.P. per 1D6 damage arrow, 4 I.S.P. per 2D6 damage arrow. In *Rifts*® and other Mega-Damage settings, the Psi-Archer may spend five times the I.S.P. cost of any of the above arrows to inflict Mega-Damage. Duration: Nearly instant. It is in existence only long enough to aim, fire, and hit its target (or a different target if missed). Range: 600 feet (182 m) +20 feet (6 m) per level of experience. Accuracy: By spending 6 I.S.P. the psychic can add +3 to strike with a Psi-Arrow. This must be spent for each arrow of which the Psi-Archer wishes to increase the accuracy. Limitations: The Psi-Arrow must be created in an empty hand, with the exception of the string of a bow (psychic or physical in nature). This means that the psychic cannot hold anything when the Psi-Arrow is created, not even another arrow.

3. Additional Psionic Abilities: Meditation, Mind Block, and Sixth Sense are common to all Psi-Archers. At each additional level, starting at level one, one new psionic ability may be selected from any of the three lesser categories (Healing, Physical, or Sensitive). Telekinesis (physical) is a common ability among many Psi-Archers. At levels 4, 8, and 12 the Psi-Archer may select one of the following powers from the Super Psionic category: Catatonic Strike, Catatonic Arrow (special!), Mind Bolt, Psi-Sword, or Psi-Shield. This selection, if desired, is in place of the usual lesser psionic ability, *not* in addition to it. This means regardless, the Psi-Archer will have 15 new psionics at level 15.

Catatonic Arrow: This ability is effectively the same as the Catatonic Strike psychic ability, only it may be used with an arrow instead of a stabbing attack. I.S.P. Cost: 80 if used with a regular physical arrow, 100 if used with a Psi-Arrow. Saving Throw: Standard, there are no penalties for the victim. Limitations: This is another unique ability to a Psi-Archer and not available to even the Mind Mage. Due to the heavy I.S.P. cost, many Psi-Archers never even have enough I.S.P. to use this ability until high levels. Unless the Psi-Archer has sufficient I.S.P. reserves available, this ability cannot be selected.

4. I.S.P.: M.E. attribute times 2 (this means a character with a M.E. of 12 will have a base I.S.P. of 24). The character gets another 10 I.S.P. per level of experience, starting at level one.

5. P.P.E.: Most of the character's P.P.E. has been expended in the development of psychic abilities. **Permanent P.P.E. Base:** 2D6.

6. Bonuses: As a Master Psychic, the Psi-Archer needs a roll of 10 or higher to save versus psionic attack (plus any M.E. attribute bonuses). +3 to save vs mind controlling drugs, potions, and magic charms, +3 to save vs possession, and +2 to save vs

Horror Factor. +1D6 S.D.C. due to their training as men of arms (this puts them at higher starting S.D.C. than a psychic, but lower than the typical men of arms).

Bonuses with a Bow: The character receives the standard bonuses to strike from the W.P. Archery skill when using the Psi-Bow and Psi-Arrow. However, rate of fire using this weapon is equal to the character's normal attacks per melee. See Psi-Arrows for notes on range. When using a standard bow and arrow, the character uses the W.P. Archery skill for all bonuses including rate of fire and range. The character is not trained to use a long bow and suffers the same penalties as a typical archer (*not* a Long Bowman).

Psi-Archer P.C.C.

Alignments: Any.

Attribute Requirements: P.S. 7 or higher, P.P. 12 or higher, P.E. 10 or higher. A high I.Q. and M.E. (10 or higher) are also strongly suggested, but not required.

P.C.C. Skills:

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

Land Navigation (+10%)

Sniper

W.P. Archery

W.P.: One of choice.

Hand to Hand: Basic

Hand to Hand: Basic can be improved to Expert at the cost of two P.C.C. Related Skills, or Martial Arts (or Assassin if an evil alignment) for the cost of three P.C.C. Related Skills.

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

Communications: Any (+5%).

Domestic: Any (+5%).

Espionage: Any (+5%).

Horsemanship: General or Exotic only.

Medical: First Aid only.

Military: None.

Physical: Any, except Acrobatics, Gymnastics, and Wrestling.

Rogue: Any (+5% to Prowl and Streetwise only).

Science: Mathematics only.

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

Weapon Proficiencies: Any.

Wilderness: Carpentry (+5%) and Wilderness Survival only.

Secondary Skills: The character also gets to select four Secondary Skills from the previous list at level one, and two additional skills at levels four, eight, and twelve. These are additional areas of knowledge that do not get the advantage of the bonus listed in the parentheses. All Secondary Skills start at the base skill level. Also, skills are limited (any, only, none) as previously indicated in the list.

Starting Equipment: Two sets of clothing, hooded cape or cloak, boots, a pair of gloves, belt, bedroll, backpack, two medium sized sacks, two small sacks, a quiver of arrows, sharpening stone, a water skin, food rations for 1D4 weeks, a pocket mirror, and a tinder box.

Armor: Starts with a suit of studded leather (A.R. 13, S.D.C. 38); most prefer light, magic armor and avoid heavy and noisy armor when possible, but can wear any type of armor.

Weapons: Starts with a knife, short bow, quiver with 24 short arrows, and one other weapon of choice. All are basic S.D.C. weapons of good quality. Magic weapons and other items must be acquired later.

Money: The character starts with 130 in gold, which can be used immediately to purchase more equipment or saved. Additional money will come from payment for jobs and/or from booty.

Experience Point Table: Same as the Psi-Mystic & Warlock.

Demon Archer O.C.C.

Man of Arms

Demon Archers are a sort of cross between Monk and Paladin, whose focus rests on being able to effectively fight and kill demons. Their origins are found on the island of Eltara, off the shores of the Eastern Territory. While a majority of Demon Archers are found on the Demon Isle, Eltara, some have found their way to the mainland and do what they can there. It is im-

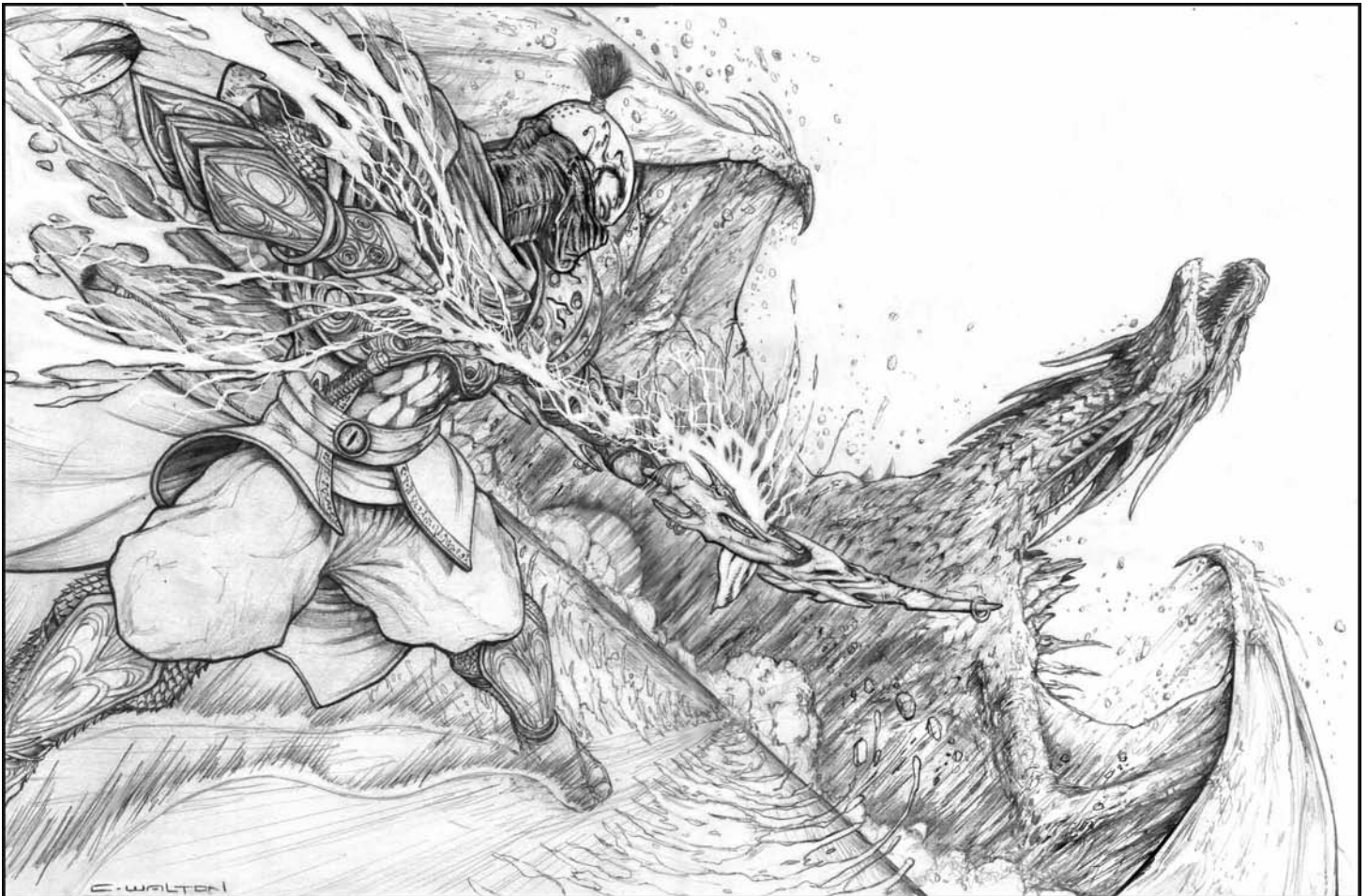
portant to note that the existence of these unique archers is extremely limited. There are 22 Demon Archers stationed at Fort Pressix on Eltara, and it's estimated that about that many are scattered about at various parts of the island and likely fewer than 5 are wandering about on the mainland, usually within the areas of the Eastern Territory closest to their home.

Demon Archers are named for their ability to fight demons, but also for the fact that many are equipped with items known as Demon Bows, forged from the bones of demons. While anyone can learn to use a bow, it takes a considerable amount of innate spiritual/mystical energy to ever develop their special talents. The bow is a symbol of their mastery, though it too takes its toll on the archer. In order to quell the dark demonic taint of the bows, the archers must channel a considerable amount of their personal energy into it. This allows both archer and bow to harmonize so they may truly work together.

Note: Eltara, the Demon Isle, is an island of my own creation and has serious issues with demons. It is off the coast of the Eastern Territory and is not on any official map of the Palladium World (preferred forgotten). It is populated entirely by humans and Dwarves, and the two races have merged into a more unified and joint culture. Hopefully, more about this island and its people will appear in the future.

Demon Archers & Armor

The type of armor used by these archers varies considerably depending on their personal styles. There are some who prefer stealth and remaining unencumbered that rely upon the lighter armor types, while there are others who feel that going up



against demons requires as much protection as possible and use the heavy types. The most preferred, when they can get their hands on it, is magical armor. As men of arms, they are trained in all armor types (including heavy) and their training involves practicing with those made of metal. While it uses P.P.E., the Demon Death Arrow is not hindered by armor types as there are differences between it and spells.

Special Abilities of the Demon Archer

1. Expert Bowmanship: While not up to the level of the Long Bowman's Superior Bowmanship, this is a level between that and the average archer (W.P. Archery only). Unlike the Long Bowman, the focus of Demon Archers is the short bow (mainly because the long bow never truly grew a following on the island and there are *no* Long Bowmen on Eltara) and they will find the long bow as awkward as any other archer.

Rate of Fire with a Short Bow: Two shots at level one, +1 at levels two, three, five, six, eight, nine, eleven, and fourteen. Use these in place of the W.P. Archery numbers; don't combine them.

Superior Range with a Short Bow: 350 feet (107 m) at first level plus 25 feet (7.6 m) per level of experience.

Special Aimed Shot: A slow and carefully aimed shot gives the archer +2 to strike, but uses up two shots from the bow. The player must make a "Called Shot" to strike a specific part of the target, such as the bull's-eye, a candle, rope, finger, etc.

Limitations: Unlike Superior Bowmanship, the character still suffers full penalties from movement penalties and cannot use a long bow with any type of proficiency.

2. Demon Death Arrow (special): Similar to the ways of a Palladin, the Demon Archers have found a way to channel their energies into an arrow to injure demons. It can also be used against dragons, Elementals and other supernatural beings and creatures of magic, though demons are the main focus of these archers. This attack automatically penetrates the creature's Natural Armor Rating (A.R.) and inflicts full damage (in *Rifts* and other Mega-Damage settings, the attack inflicts Mega-Damage even if normally a S.D.C. attack) regardless of possible immunities. If used with a Demon Bow against a demon, in addition to other bonuses, the attack will do double damage! This attack is so devastating that the demon cannot *bio regenerate* damage from the Demon Death Arrow for 1D4 hours!

Limitations: 1. This special attack counts as two shots from the bow. If used in conjunction with the Special Aimed Shot it costs three shots from the bow and will continue to add one more shot for each additional ability that counts as two shots (such as Sniper, which would bring it up to 4 shots, for example).

2. Limited to supernatural beings and creatures of magic, though focused mainly on demons. The Demon Death Arrow is not applicable against body armor, inanimate objects, or ordinary human beings or any mortal, S.D.C./Hit Point creature. Demons on the island aware of the Demon Archer capability may very well don armor as added protection just for this reason. This, in many ways, is a sign of respect, as many demons hate armor and will refuse to wear it otherwise (some still refuse regardless).

3. The Demon Death Arrow is only applicable when used with a bow and arrow and cannot be used in any other type of projectile weapon (such as a gun) or any type of hand to hand maneuver such as a punch, kick, or handheld weapon such as a sword, axe, spear, club, etc., not even if thrown.

4. Uses 2D6 P.P.E. of the archer's personal mystical reserve of energy.

3. Demon Bow: A special short bow crafted from the bones of demons. There are two parts to making this bow. After obtaining the necessary bone, the first is for the Demon Archer to spend enough time with it to channel part of his/her personal spirit (P.P.E.) into the bow so that the evil taint may be cleansed, and so the archer may become one with the bow, at least in spirit. The second is for it to be taken to a special Alchemist within Fort Pressix. These demon bows are his creation, and a very closely guarded secret. He will only make the bow for a Demon Archer after proof of his/her capabilities, typically being able to use the Demon Death Arrow (a type of graduation, so to speak). There is the chance another Alchemist (10th level or higher) may be able to figure out its secrets if he can get his hands on one long enough to study.

Bonuses: 1. Due to its nature, the bow is naturally attuned to demons. As a result, the firing range against demons is increased by 50% and receives a +2 to strike.

2. The wielder of the bow is a +3 to save against any psychic or magic attacks from a demon. It grants no special bonuses to save against physical attacks such as punches and kicks, meaning these still must be avoided normally.

3. Extremely lightweight (half the usual weight) and durable, with a Natural A.R. 12, S.D.C. 75 (only takes damage if someone is specifically trying to break it). Some champions of light may view these weapons as evil by their nature and try to destroy them on principle alone, or fear that they may one day overwhelm the wielder by their evil design. Those living on the island would never try such things, but from time to time one travels to the mainland or a mainlander finds their way to the island.

4. P.P.E.: A majority of the individual's P.P.E. has been spent on joining with the Demon Bow. However, they are individuals who tend to have started with a considerable amount to start with and have helped train in its use during training. The Demon Archer cannot cast spells or use their P.P.E. in any way other than the Demon Death Arrow, but it is more reflective of their inner strength. This increased P.P.E. may still draw the attention of those who can sense such things. **Permanent P.P.E. Base:** 5D6 plus P.E. attribute number. Add 1D4 per each level of experience, starting at level one. Demon Archers cannot draw on P.P.E. from ley lines, nexus points, or other people.

5. Other O.C.C. Bonuses: +1 on initiative and +1 to save vs Horror Factor of demons and Deevils at levels 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13, and 15 (this bonus is not applicable against any other type of Horror Factor).

Demon Archer O.C.C.

Alignment: Any.

Attribute Requirements: I.Q. 10, P.S. 7, P.P. 12 or higher, and a desire to fight demons. A high P.E. is also strongly recommended, but not required.

O.C.C. Skills:

Languages: Eastern and Dwarven, one at 98% and the other at 80%.

Lore: Demons & Monsters (+20%)

Running

Sniper

W.P. Archery

W.P.: Two of choice.

Hand to Hand: Expert

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

O.C.C. Related Skills: Select seven other of choice at level one, plus select two additional skills at levels three, six, nine, and twelve. All new skills start at level one proficiency.

Communications: Any.

Domestic: Any.

Espionage: Any (+5%).

Horsemanship: General or Exotic only.

Medical: First Aid only (+5%).

Military: Any (+10%).

Physical: Any, except Acrobatics and Wrestling.

Rogue: None.

Science: Mathematics only.

Scholar/Technical: Any (+10% on Lore only).

Weapons Proficiencies: Any.

Wilderness: Any (+5%).

Secondary Skills: The character also gets to select four Secondary Skills from the previous list at level one, and one additional skill at levels three, five, seven, ten, and thirteen. These are additional areas of knowledge that do not get the advantage of the bonus listed in parentheses. All Secondary Skills start at the base level. Also, skills are limited (any, only, none) as previously indicated on the list.

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 of arrows, sharpening stone, a water skin, and a tinder box.

Armor: Starts with a suit of studded leather (A.R. 13, S.D.C. 38).

Weapons: Starts with a knife, Demon Bow (listed above), quiver with 32 short arrows, and one other weapon of choice. Except for the Demon Bow, all are basic S.D.C. weapons of good quality. Other magic weapons and items must be acquired later.

Money: The character starts with 110 in gold, because most of his/her money has been spent on the Demon Bow (the Alchemist does it as a favor to Demon Archers, but not totally free of charge) and other equipment. Additional money will come from payment for jobs and/or booty.

Experience Point Table: Same as the Monk & Summoner.

Circus Bowman O.C.C.

Entertainer

In many ways this is similar to a Long Bowman; however there are some important differences. A Long Bowman is trained to fight and be effective in combat, while a Circus Bowman is trained more for showmanship and performing stunts. To accurately perform stunts and tricks though, an extraordinary level of aim and precision is required, many would even say greater than the famous Long Bowman. While this may be true, it is important to note that Circus Bowmen are best known for their talents as a display technique, not for their combat abilities.

They tend to perform in controlled environments such as a traveling circus, where they can use their skills without any real danger of combat. In order to successfully make it as a performer, the Circus Bowman has to work out a routine which can keep a crowd entertained. Simply firing an arrow at a target all day would get boring very quickly. For this reason, the Circus Bowman tends to have perfected a wide array of techniques to keep things interesting.

While performances will vary from bowman to bowman, there are some typical types of routines which can be found, typically mixed and matched by the particular bowman's skills and talents. Some typical routines include firing from horseback, hanging upside down (often linked with a routine from acrobats in the show as well), ricocheting a shot and hitting true to target, or even using such accuracy they split their own arrow in two! These are often given more flair by including sleight of hand maneuvers, dancing, trick riding (a Rifts skill, but suitable here), or even some type of gymnastics moves.

Special Abilities of the Circus Bowman

1. Long Bow: The Circus Bowman is proficient in use of the long bow (typically only the Long Bowman and Ranger O.C.C. are capable of using a long bow). Unlike the Long Bowman, the Circus Bowman does *not* suffer any penalties for use with other types of bows (short bows, crossbows, etc.), making them truly proficient in *all* types of bows. **Note:** While the Circus Bowman is capable of using a long bow, they do not gain the bonuses of the Long Bowman O.C.C., nor their special abilities such as "Superior Bowmanship." Those are abilities specific to that class.

2. Special Aimed Shot: A slow and careful aimed shot gives the bowman +2 to strike, with an additional +1 to strike at levels 4, 8, and 12. This special attack uses up two shots from the bow. 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.

3. Archery Proficiency: This is the only O.C.C. which is allowed to select Archery Proficiencies at level one (with the possible exception of the Long Bowman O.C.C., but those are standard and cannot be altered). At level one, the Circus Bowman may select two Archery Proficiencies of choice. The character may select one additional Archery Proficiency at level six. All of these proficiencies are O.C.C. abilities and do not cost a skill to select, though they do count towards the character's total.

Note: A Circus Bowman should not have more than 5 total Archery Proficiencies. They start with two at level one and can gain up to three additional (5 total) proficiencies free as they advance in levels (see Hand to Hand notes for other increases). If desired, a character can purchase additional Archery Proficiencies by paying skills as normal. However, this means that once the character reaches five, the other free proficiencies later in level are ignored.

Example: A Circus Bowman starts with two Archery Proficiencies at level one. The character has an idea in mind for a particular trick and decides to purchase an additional Archery Proficiency using an O.C.C. Related Skill. The character now has three at first level. At level 5 (from Hand to Hand) and level 6, the character gains two free Archery Proficiencies (no skill cost), for a total of five Archery Proficiencies. Now, at level 10, when the character would gain an additional Archery Proficiency from Hand to Hand, nothing happens. The character already reached the limit and cannot select a new one without paying a skill for it. Also, the character does not get the spent skill back (it is gone for good).

Circus Bowman O.C.C.

Alignments: Any.

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

O.C.C. Skills:

Languages: Native Tongue at 98%, plus two of choice (+5% each).

Performance (+15%; from Rifts)

Sign Language (+5%)

Sniper

Streetwise (+4%)

W.P. Archery

W.P. Targeting/Missile Weapons

W.P.: One of choice.

Hand to Hand: Performance Archery only (no substitution allowed!).

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

Communications & Performing Arts: Any (+5%).

Domestic: Any (+5%).

Espionage: Disguise, Escape Artist (+10%), or Imitate Voice & Impersonation only.

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

Medical: First Aid only.

Military: Recognize Weapon Quality only.

Physical: Any, except Boxing and Wrestling.

Rogue: Any (+5%).

Science: Mathematics only.

Scholar/Technical: Any (+10% on Language only).

Weapon Proficiencies: Any.

Wilderness Survival: Any.

Secondary Skills: The character also gets to select five Secondary Skills from the previous list at level one, and one additional skill at levels three, six, nine, and twelve. These are

additional areas of knowledge that do not get the advantage of the bonus listed in the parentheses. All Secondary Skills start at the base skill level. Also, skills are limited (any, only, none) as previously indicated in the list.

Starting Equipment: Two sets of street clothing including hat, scarf, shirt, jacket, cloak, pants (or kilt and leggings), leather boots, and belt, plus a set of performance clothing made of fancier materials and to catch the eye. Also includes a lantern, a bedroll, backpack, a shoulder bag, a quiver of arrows, sharpening stone, several colored ribbons (to tie to arrows for added flair and/or to assist with tricks), a water skin, and tinder box.

Armor: Starts with a suit of soft leather armor (A.R. 10, S.D.C. 20). This is typically only worn during travels as the world is a dangerous place. The Circus Bowman is *not* a man at arms class and receives the usual penalties for heavy types of armor.

Weapons: Starts with an ornately decorated long bow, quiver with 32 long bow arrows, and one weapon of choice (typically a knife). All are basic S.D.C. weapons of good quality. Magic weapons and other items must be acquired later.

Money: The character starts with a savings of 200 gold.

Experience Point Table: Same as the Juggler (*Adventures on the High Seas*TM, page 23). For those without this book, it is close enough to the Long Bowman & Squire table to substitute.

Hand to Hand for Archers

In a world such as Palladium, it is not uncommon for individuals to be trained to fight. Not all fighting styles are based upon close combat techniques. Among those who have made the bow and arrow their life, there are those who have turned it into a fighting style, not just a weapon to be used for combat. There are two main forms which have arisen from the art of the bow. These two styles are described in more detail below. **Note:** The term “hand to hand” can be misleading in this particular case, but is listed as such for simplicity’s sake and easy to find reference.

Hand to Hand: Performance Archery

This is a style designed with two things in mind: precision and display. While this form’s accuracy with the bow and ability to hit may be quite impressive, it does have one major flaw. It has virtually no defensive capabilities. This is one of the few fighting styles without an automatic parry (meaning the character must spend an action to even parry!). Due to the almost total lack of defense involved, it is typical only taken by performers and assassins (those who aren’t expecting to see much direct combat).

Limitations: Except for dodge bonuses, the bonuses below only apply when using the bow and arrow. When using a different weapon, or even unarmed combat, there are no bonuses other than possible Weapon Proficiency bonuses. There is no auto-parry, no kicks, no Critical Strike range increase, no

knock-out/stun range, and no Death Blow. These are areas just not trained for performing.

Skill Cost: Any class that specializes in the bow (a class like a mercenary with W.P. Archery does *not* count) can select this Hand to Hand style for the cost of one O.C.C. Related Skill. Classes acceptable are Long Bowman, Psi-Archer, and Demon Archer (Circus Bowmen receive this skill automatically).

Basic Combat Moves: Initiative, strike, parry (not automatic), dodge, pull punch, and roll with impact are all granted at first level. Advanced moves will be learned later in levels.

- 1: Starts with two attacks per melee round, +1 to strike and +2 to roll with punch.
- 2: +1 to maintain balance and +3 to Light Arrow (Special! See below for details.).
- 3: +2 to strike on "Aimed" shots only, +25 feet (7.6 m) to effective firing range.
- 4: Back flip (40% +5% per level of experience, or +10% if it is already known); +2 to back flip dodge.
- 5: +1 Archery Proficiency.
- 6: Penalties for difficult to hit targets are reduced by 3 points. (This means a normal penalty of -6 is now only -3. This applies only for hard to hit targets, not situational modifiers.)
- 7: Rate of fire increases by one shot per melee round.
- 8: Arrow Splitting (Special! See below for details.).
- 9: +1 to strike and +1 to maintain balance.
- 10: +1 Archery Proficiency.
- 11: Blind Targeting (Special! See below for details.).
- 12: +1 to back flip dodge and +25 feet (7.6 m) to effective firing range.
- 13: +2 to strike on "Aimed" shots only and +2 to Light Arrow.
- 14: Redirect Arrow (Special! See below for details.).
- 15: Penalties for difficult to hit targets are reduced by an additional 3 points. (This means a normal penalty of -6 is now negated entirely, including the modifier from level 4. This applies only for hard to hit targets, not situational modifiers.)

Arrow Splitting: A technique which is used to hit the exact same target in the exact same spot over and over again. Hitting the same bull's-eye or the same hand of a person is one thing, but this is a much higher level of accuracy meant to hit the exact same point dead on. In most cases, this is used by a performer to hit a target with an arrow and then split that arrow with a second one. This is usually done as a visual display, but the archer can use anything as the target. When used in combat the archer usually targets the same point on something tough and sturdy (like a heavy suit of armor) to try and form a crack and cause it to break as a result.

Hitting the same spot again is considered a Called Shot requiring a 12 or higher to hit. For each shot after the first, the archer suffers an accumulative penalty of -3 to strike for each shot (e.g. the second shot is -3 to strike, third shot is -6, fourth -9, and so on). For each shot that hits after the first, the amount of damage is multiplied by an increase of one (e.g. second shot does double damage (x2), third does triple damage (x3), fourth does quadruple damage (x4), and so on). The level of accuracy required for this can be difficult, but its use can be extremely deadly.

Blind Targeting: The character can fire a bow and arrow even while blind! A blindfold is typically used in a performance as a display of skill and accuracy. This can also be useful if the character becomes temporarily blinded in combat (like sand in the eyes). It is said this technique was originally developed to fight a Gorgon. If the character had a good look at the target before being blinded and neither archer nor target has moved, there are no penalties to firing. If the character has been turned around (often as a part of the show) and is able to keep track of the target mentally (successful sense of balance roll) or willingly moved but still facing the target, then the penalties are -3 to strike at only half maximum effective firing range, beyond that -6 to strike up to full range, and anything beyond that is just not possible with any type of accuracy. If the character has not seen the target or has lost track of it, the character suffers full penalties for fighting blind and must have some method to locate the target (noise, smell, etc.), otherwise he may very well fire in the wrong direction (and possibly hit innocents if they are present).

Light Arrow: This is the equivalent of a pull punch, but instead is used with any type of bow and arrow (crossbows do not count). It is common to use this type of technique to avoid damaging people or items. One of the most common uses is during live performances when firing at live targets (just in case). Same rules as Pull Punch.

Redirect Arrow: In an amazing feat of speed and accuracy, the character can fire one arrow and quickly fire another to alter its course. This is mostly used as a demonstration of skill, but can also be used to alter the course of an arrow that is going off course (probably towards a crowd or something valuable) or to hit a hard to reach spot (for example; fire one arrow over an object then the second to send it back down to get around the obstacle and hit something on the other side). To hit an arrow the archer has fired, the character is only -4 to strike. It is also possible to use this as a defensive maneuver to protect the bowman or someone else and knock the arrow of another off target. In order to hit an arrow someone else fired, the character is -8 to strike. The speed required to pull this off does not allow a character the time for a carefully aimed shot (cannot use Sniper or any special ability that counts as two arrow shots).

Hand to Hand: Bow Combat

An advanced form of archery combat designed for offense and defense. It focuses primarily on the bow and arrow, with virtually no focus on any other type of weapon (see Restrictions for more details). For these bowmen it is not simply a way to make a living, it is a way of life. The main advantage to this style is increased proficiency with a bow and arrow for purposes of combat without ignoring the aspect of defense. This is an excellent fighting style for those who feel the bow and arrow are the ultimate weapon and want to place their entire faith in it.

Restrictions: A bowman with this skill cannot select any new Weapon Proficiencies other than those that come standard with the O.C.C. Example: Long Bowmen get W.P. Archery, W.P. Targeting, and one other W.P. of choice. The Long Bowman would be restricted to these three, without the option to select more Weapon Proficiencies down the line (they're not believed to be needed).

Limitations: Except for dodge bonuses, the bonuses below only apply when using the bow and arrow. When using a different weapon, or even unarmed combat, there are no bonuses other than possible Weapon Proficiency bonuses.

Skill Cost: Any class that specializes in the bow (a class like a mercenary with W.P. Archery does *not* count) can select this Hand to Hand style for the cost of two O.C.C. Related Skills. Classes acceptable are Long Bowman, Psi-Archer, and Demon Archer (Circus Bowmen *must* take Performance Archery).

Basic Combat Moves: Initiative, strike, automatic parry, dodge, entangle, pull punch, body block/tackle, and roll with impact are all granted at first level. Advanced moves will be learned later in levels.

- 1: Starts with two attacks per melee round, and bow and arrow close quarters combat. The character is trained to use the bow and arrow as melee weapons in addition to ranged combat. This includes parrying oncoming attacks without doing damage to the bow or arrow, as well as being able to attack with them (a bow does 1D6 damage and an arrow does 1D4 if the arrowhead is used to stab).
- 2: +1 to strike (archery and hand to hand), +2 to parry, and +1 to dodge.
- 3: +1 to initiative and +2 to damage (archery only).
- 4: Rate of fire increases by one shot per melee round.
- 5: +2 to entangle with the bow (using the bow and pull string to entangle).
- 6: Paired Weapons (for melee combat only; bow and arrow or arrow and arrow combinations only).
- 7: One additional attack per melee round and +25 feet (7.6 m) to effective firing range (plus an additional 5 feet/1.5 m per level of experience starting at level 8).
- 8: Sweeping Leg Hook: Can be used on opponents being faced or coming up behind the character. Does no damage; it is purely a knockdown attack (victims lose initiative and one melee attack), but cannot be parried (only dodged).
- 9: Rate of fire increases by one shot per melee round.
- 10: Critical Strike on an unmodified roll of 19 or 20.
- 11: +2 to damage (archery only) and Power Arrow: Does double damage, but counts as two arrow shots.
- 12: +1 to initiative and +1 to strike (archery and hand to hand).
- 13: +2 to parry and dodge.
- 14: Rate of fire increases by one shot per melee round.
- 15: Death Arrow on a roll of a Natural 20 (if desired). Same as Death Blow, only this move is applicable to arrows only (cannot be used with hand to hand strikes).

Archery Proficiencies

The following proficiencies are similar to a Weapon Proficiency, but limited only to those who specialize in the art of the bow. This includes Long Bowmen, Circus Bowmen, Psi-Archers, and Demon Archers. Similarly, any other class which comes out after, or a G.M. feels is fitting, may take these proficiencies as well. It is important to note that these proficiencies are designed to make a Bowman more unique and specialized, not to let anyone with a bow be as good or better.

Some classes, such as the Circus Bowman, may get Archery Proficiencies as part of their O.C.C. However, as for the others, they may select them using skill selections. An Archery Proficiency counts as one O.C.C. Related Skill or two Secondary Skills. Once selected, or randomly rolled, the Archery Proficiency is always in effect and does not have to be declared. This is a developed talent, something that the Bowman trained in dedicating hour after hour to become better. Some may refer to these abilities as tricks, but to those who have perfected them it is not a trick, it is skill.

Circus Bowmen can select up to 5 Archery Proficiencies (this includes their O.C.C. abilities), Long Bowmen and Demon Archers up to 4, and the Psi-Archer only 2. The reason the Psi-Archer is limited more than the other classes is due to the fact that the Psi-Archer has spent much more time developing psionic abilities over skills. If the G.M. allows any other class to select an Archery Proficiency, it should never be more than 1 (but ultimately up to the discretion of the G.M.). All new Archery Proficiencies start at level one regardless of the level of the archer.

Note: A few of the proficiencies may not be the most realistic, but are included for a more epic feel. If a G.M. feels that a particular proficiency isn't realistic enough, not fitting for a campaign, or just doesn't like the way it is written up, he/she should feel free to restrict its selection or alter it to a degree which is more acceptable. Players should respect the decision of the G.M. and not argue too heavily. This is designed for fun, not for causing problems.

Archery Proficiency Table (Optional)

01-10 Speed Slinging: This is practice in quickly getting a bow into firing position and slinging an arrow ready for fire. The Bowman practices over and over again, getting from a relaxed position into a position ready to fight and fire an arrow. Repeated practice in this area gives the Bowman lightning fast reflexes. At first level the Bowman receives +2 to initiative, and an additional +1 at levels 5 and 10. As an added bonus, if the Bowman has first initiative, it is possible to draw the bow and arrow and fire off a quick shot (cannot be aimed) for the first melee action even if the weapon was not previously ready. If the bow and arrow were ready prior to initiative, then proceed as normal.

11-20 Keen Eye: The Bowman has the ability to take careful aim and hit a difficult target with unnatural skill. Targets include someone taking cover, a small bull's-eye far away, the eye of a target, etc. Any penalties which would normally apply are reduced by 6 points. For example, this means a -8 penalty becomes a -2 penalty, and a -4 penalty is completely negated (it does not give a bonus). The penalty reduction is only for hard to hit targets, not situational penalties such as hanging upside down (which is addressed elsewhere).

21-25 Bowman Lineage: Not only is the character a skilled Bowman, but the individual comes from a long line of archers and bowmen. From family history and upbringing as a kid, the character can fire off one additional arrow shot per melee round. This is in addition to any other bonuses. Due to lineage, there is also a chance the character will be recognized by others. Anyone who is familiar with archery has a chance to recognize the individual, giving the character effectively a Horror/Awe Factor

(depending on ancestry) of 8. The character has a legacy to live up to though, and if the bowman can't live up to it, the Horror/Awe Factor may disappear entirely due to disgrace. Similarly, if the character is able to live up to the family line, there is a chance to increase this Horror/Awe Factor. There is a possible +1 at levels 2, 3, 5, 7, 9, and 12. Bonuses or penalties can be decided by the G.M., or simply go up regardless for simplicity's sake. Recognition is not always an advantage though, as there are those who will come looking for the person to prove themselves, resulting in constant challenges everywhere, not to mention that it makes it almost impossible to go somewhere unrecognized and remain anonymous, even if such a thing may be crucial.

26-35 Armor Piercing: With considerable study, the bowman has a fair understanding of various types of armor. While this does not help to make them or repair them, the archer has knowledge of the weak points and where to aim. When this ability is being used, any shot from the bowman is more likely to bypass any armor, effectively reducing the A.R. number by half (rounded up). There is no actual change to the armor, merely the skill of the archer to beat a suit's Armor Rating. Alternately, instead of human crafted armor types, the character may have studied the weak areas of monsters *or* demons. Only one may be selected (armor, monsters, or demons, not all three are granted). This proficiency may be selected multiple times to receive the bonus in other areas.

36-39 Multiple Targets: This is the ability to sling more than one arrow and fire at multiple targets. There is no easy simple trick to this; it is a mere matter of focusing one's mind on more than one target at the same time. Of course, it is easier said than done and requires considerable training. At first level the character can fire at two separate and different targets, as long as they are both in the same line of sight. Shifting attention between them isn't enough; they both must be visible at the same time. The character can include one additional target at levels 5 and 10. This means at level 10 the bowman can actually target up to 4 different, separate targets which are all in the same line of sight. A Called Shot is required, meaning a 12 or higher is required to hit. The character must roll once for each target.

40-43 One Arrow, One Kill: A proficiency which is designed with one thing in mind: a quick, lethal blow. By focusing on the one single attack, it can be used to turn a normal shot into a Critical Strike! This is best used when taking aim on a non-moving target or sniping. To use this ability, the character must focus on the target for a full melee round (15 seconds). The character can continue to focus on the one, single target for an additional melee round (15 seconds). For each melee round (15 seconds) the target is focused upon, the bowman receives an additional +1 to strike. This means a character who has focused for a full minute (4 melee rounds) has a +4 to strike. Any action, whether it is attacking, defending, or even talking, will disrupt this concentration and require the character to start all over again. If this concentration is not disturbed, and the total (with bonuses) roll to strike is 20 or over, the attack will become a Critical Strike (double damage). A roll of a Natural 20 will result in triple damage! This attack can only be used with a bow and arrow, no other type of weapon or hand to hand move.

44-45 Rapid Fire: One of the most difficult Archery Proficiencies to learn, this provides lightning fast reflexes for one

brief moment. It allows all the character's shots to be fired in the first melee action! This means if the bowman has a rate of fire of 5 shots per melee round, then all 5 can be made in the character's first action. In order to use this proficiency, it must be done as the first attack in the melee round and the bowman *must* have initiative. The character must still roll for each strike. Once this is done, the character cannot dodge and has no bonuses to parry, leaving the individual very prone to attack. For this reason, it is typically only done as a display of skill or to try and end a fight as quickly as possible (feeling a prolonged battle will be worse). This Archery Proficiency counts as TWO selections. This means it costs two O.C.C. Skills, four Secondary Skills, or two of the Archery Proficiency selections available to the O.C.C.

46-50 Ricochet Shot: The character can bounce arrows off of one surface and angle the shot in such a way that it will hit a second/different target. It will inflict only one point of damage to the first target and full damage to the second, true target. Bonuses to strike are half, except for the Psi-Archer if using the Psi-Bow and Psi-Arrows, which can fire at full bonuses. A successful ricochet shot requires an Called Shot, meaning a 12 or higher to hit.

51-60 Steady Aim: Regardless of positioning, the character can fire without penalty even from awkward positions such as from a swaying rope bridge, riding a horse (or other animal), hanging upside down, leaping and shooting, rolling and coming up shooting, etc. Long Bowmen receive this ability free and it does not count towards their overall Archery Proficiency selections.

61-70 Increased Range: Add 50 feet (15.2 m) to the range and an additional +5 feet (1.5 m) per level of experience.

71-80 Dodge & Parry Arrows: The bowman can *try* to dodge or parry attacks from arrows, crossbow bolts, thrown spears, and other similar thrown or fired projectile weapon attacks. Such attempts are done with a -4 penalty instead of the usual -10 penalty. As always, a dodge counts as one melee attack/action. **Note:** This special parry/dodge bonus does *not* apply to energy blasts such as fire balls, lightning, eye beams, and dragon's breath (nor to bullets and high-tech energy weapons, dodge as normal). Long Bowmen receive this ability free, with a slightly better bonus, and it does not count towards their overall Archery Proficiency selections.

81-90 Exceptional Aim: +1 on all shots from a bow and arrow and +1 for a carefully Aimed shot (a total of +2 for Aimed shots). The character also receives an additional +1 bonus to Aimed shots at levels 4, 8, and 12.

91-95 Disarm: Specialized training and knowing how to hit a weapon to disarm an opponent. It does not inflict any damage. The desire to disarm *must* be declared and requires an Called Shot, meaning a 12 or higher is required to hit. Any victims have a chance to try and defend, high roll wins.

96-00 Impact Force: This involves working on properly arranging bow string strength along with the physical body, and training to get the two perfectly synchronized. Development of this Archery Proficiency is about more than simple strength, it's about developing the right muscles for proper release and usage. With training and work, the character can develop the proper musculature for increased force upon impact. Add +1D6 dam-

age at level two to any type of bow and arrow (crossbows and Psi-Bows do *not* count), and an additional +1D6 at level 13.

Archery Combat

Contrary to the belief of many, there is more to being a bowman than simply Called Shots to the head and a victim trying to parry or dodge. While it may seem this simple, there are more complexities which most do not realize. There is a strategy on both sides, and often it is the one who implements the best tactics who will come out the victor. Below just a few of these rules are noted out (some are simply reprinted from the **Palladium Fantasy RPG®, Second Edition** book).

Movement Penalties: To properly aim, most archers need to hold position and take careful aim. As a result, this means the archer is also becoming a target. Running, jumping, rolling, swinging from a rope, firing from a horse, etc. all reduce the bonuses to strike and the rate of fire by half. This means a character with a bonus to strike of +4 and a rate of fire equal to 4 shots is now reduced to only a +2 to strike and 2 shots for that round (as per the Long Bowman O.C.C., **PFRPG**, page 83).

In addition, or alternate to, the above rule, a minimum of -4 to strike and a penalty of two shots (though fired on the first, the second is lost recovering from the maneuvers) should be applied to anyone making such movements. This prevents the novice who barely learned to use a bow from being able to fire while running, jumping, and rolling and not suffering penalties because they don't have any to penalize. Similarly, by having a flat penalty as opposed to one that halves bonuses, it helps to prevent the experienced Bowman from suffering worse penalties than the novice.

Evasive Maneuvers: Firing at a willing target is one thing, but firing on a living target who is trying to avoid is far more difficult. Few possess the ability to actually dodge an arrow (see below for penalties to dodge), but that doesn't mean there aren't methods which can help to avoid being hit. By moving fast and in erratic patterns, it makes it hard for a Bowman to get a clear shot. If there is no place to take cover, evasive maneuvers can be an essential tool to survival. Evasive maneuvers by the target penalize the shooter with -2 to strike and an additional -1 to strike for every 15 points of the character's Speed. This means a character with a speed of 46 (likely riding a horse or not human) causes the archer an additional -3 to strike, for a total of -5.

On the downside, evasive maneuvers cause the person to get where they're going even slower. While they are not moving more slowly, they are not going in a straight line, and this requires them to travel a greater distance. The character's speed, in terms of reaching a destination, is reduced by 10%. If trying to close the gap with an archer, this can allow the Bowman to fire off an extra few shots and/or start to clear some additional distance as well (firing while running away), keeping the target on the defensive while keeping distance to the Bowman's advantage (even if it may cause movement penalties to apply).

Small Targets: It is far harder to hit a small target than larger targets about the size of an individual's body. This penalty can be negated by taking careful aim and costs two arrow shots (the Special Aimed Shot for the Long Bowman, and others like it, counts) when it comes to non-living stationary objects.

However, living beings have a tendency to move, even if simply standing guard. If standing still, the penalty is cut in half when using a carefully aimed shot. Any target actively moving will cause full penalties to be applied. Targeting anything but the main body requires a Called Shot.

Called Shot: 12 or higher to hit.

Head/Hands/Feet: -4 to strike.

Arms/Handheld Weapon: -3 to strike.

Legs: -2 to strike.

Very Small (such as an eye): -8 to strike.

Beyond Effective Range: The "effective range" is the range a bow and arrow can be fired without reduced accuracy. However, if a target is beyond that range it does not stop the archer from attempting to hit. Any such attempt is considered a Called Shot (12 or higher) just to hit the main body. Small targets (as described above) will suffer double the usual penalty as a result. In addition, the archer receives a -1 penalty per range increment beyond effective range. Range increment is defined as the amount of distance by which the archer's range increases per level of experience. The character can fire up to a maximum number of range increments equal to his or her current level of experience.

Example: A Long Bowman and a normal archer (W.P. Archery only) are both firing at a target 100 feet (30.5 m) beyond their normal effective range (different targets, obviously). The Long Bowman gains 25 feet (7.6 m) to his effective range per level, and the normal archer only gets 20 feet (6.1 m) per level. This means the Long Bowman is at a -4 penalty ($100/25=4$) and must be at least level 4 or higher, while the archer is -5 ($100/20=5$) and must be at least level 5 or higher.

Environment: Environment can play a considerable factor when targeting. Glaring sunlight may cause penalties similar to firing blind, varied up or down depending on intensity of the light. Firing in a forest may reduce range due to trees preventing a far ranged shot. Most factors are rather situational and should be decided as best as possible. One environmental factor that will be included here is wind intensity. For the first 10 mph (16 km) of wind, the archer suffers a -1 penalty to strike. Each additional 10 mph (16 km) of wind, the penalty to strike is doubled. This means at 20 mph (32 km) the wind causes a -2 to strike, at 30 mph (48 km) the penalty is increased to -4, at 40 mph (64 km) the penalty for wind becomes -8, etc. By 60 mph (96 km), such as during the Wind Rush spell, the archer is -32 to strike!

Dodging & Parrying Arrows: Normal individuals are at -10 to dodge or parry projectile weapons. Among those included are fire balls, lightning, eye beams, dragon's breath attacks, and, most notably, arrows. Only those with special abilities/techniques such as a Warrior Monk or Long Bowman receive any special advantage (as per the Long Bowman O.C.C., **PFRPG**, page 84).

Shields: Parrying arrows with a shield is easier than dodging them or trying to parry with a smaller item. A small shield reduces the penalty to defend against arrows to -6 to parry, and a large shield reduces the penalty to only -2 to parry. Shields can also be held in place over vital areas on the move, making it nearly impossible to hit the shielded area. In this situation, no parry is necessary to protect that area, but the rest of the body remains exposed and undefended. If stationary, large shields can

be used to try and cover the entire body. Any attempt to hit around the shielded area requires a Called Shot and the penalties listed above for small targets.

Rate of Fire vs Attacks per Melee

Now a reoccurring problem often results from the differences between rate of fire and attacks per melee, especially when both are used in the same melee round. First, let's address how many attacks per melee a typical character has to start. I prefer to use the "two attacks for living" rule, as employed in other games like *Rifts*® and *Heroes Unlimited*™. Thus, at first level, any character with Hand to Hand: Basic, Expert, or Martial Arts starts with four attacks per melee round (starts with two, plus two for living), while those with Hand to Hand: Assassin start with three.

Rate of fire, on the other hand, remains at starting with only two shots per melee round. This means a first level character using a bow and arrow is only able to fire half as many shots as he can make attacks. While this may seem limiting, in truth the added benefit of range helps to balance things out. While the archer may only have half as many shots, while at over 340 feet (104 m) away from an enemy that is still more than any melee fighter would be capable of attempting. Most will use it based on the situation, attacking with the bow and arrow at a distance, then going into melee fighting for close-range combat; though some have made it their life's work to use a bow and arrow in ranged and close quarters combat.

The easiest way to describe the half as many shots per melee round is that the first action is the drawing and notching of an arrow, and the second is to fire. This gives a good mental image and easier method for helping to keep track (when it's easily dividable at 4 and 2). Since only one action is actually being used to fire, the remainder of the usual attacks are considered non-attack actions. Non-attack actions can include moving and dodging. Using a non-attack action results in movement penalties (see below for further details on penalties), but can still be a considerable asset despite the negatives involved.

Example: An archer with four attacks per melee round and a rate of fire of only two. At a distance the archer decides to fire off a few arrows before the enemy gets closer. After a few shots the enemy is within 15 feet (4.6 m). The archer decides to fire off one more shot before switching to melee weapons. As he's notching his arrow the enemy throws his shield to throw the archer off balance. Instead of taking the hit, the archer uses one of his non-attack actions to dodge (he has 2 non-attack actions, 4 attacks minus 2 shots equals 2 non-attack actions). The archer successfully dodges and avoids taking damage while still being able to fire as normal, but as a result of moving will suffer the penalties from moving (listed below).

As anyone trained in the bow and arrow increases in their proficiency, so will their rate of fire until, eventually, it becomes equal to their attacks per melee. At this point, it is easiest to deal with the differences between attacks per melee and rate of fire as if it is one for one. It is important to note that switching between weapons does take actions as well, as a weapon, typically, does not instantly appear in hand with mere thought.

At later levels, the rate of fire will increase and surpass the typical character's attacks per melee. There are some exceptional individuals who will still have equal to or greater attacks per melee round. In that case, stick to the rules above. In the cases where the rate of fire does exceed attacks per melee, any action beyond firing the bow and arrow will cause the loss of only one shot that melee round. This means if a Bowman has a rate of fire equal to 8 and 6 attacks per melee, if the character takes 3 normal actions he will still have 5 shots with the bow and arrow remaining. Remember, switching weapons does still cost an action (or more if not easily switched).

Hopefully, using this method allows characters to use the rate of fire and attacks per melee as in the book and allows for a rule base for the two to work together. This also allows the melee fighter to still have an edge at lower levels while allowing the archer to gain an extra edge (in addition to range) at later levels. This is an optional system and can be taken or left as the reader chooses, but it is my hope that it provides a workable system for Game Masters and players to find usable for their games.





The Order of the Mystic Knights

Optional Source Material for Rifts®

By Ian Schroen & Brian Weber

Mystic Knights. Few villains on the face of Rifts Earth can generate the kind of fear and loathing that these evil practitioners of magic inspire in the general population and heroes alike. This mindset is perhaps exemplified most prevalently in the writings of the historian, Erin Tarn. In describing her encounter with a particularly foul example of the occupation, she uses such terms as menacing, black-hearted, immoral and dismal to describe the Knight and his code. Her descriptions, paired with the Mystic Knight's proclivity toward evil deeds, have contributed greatly to the vile reputation attached to these mercenary warriors. The reality, however, is that her writings are only as accurate as the aging scholar's own personal experiences. As evil and deplorable as she believes the Knights to be as solitary villains, Erin Tarn would likely have attached much more potential danger to the Order had she known all the facts of the dark organization's existence.

While the wicked Mystic Knights wandering across the North American continent are believed to epitomize the membership of that Order, they are, in truth, only one part of a much larger whole. The Order of the Mystic Knights isn't just a collection of like-minded individuals ascribing to a similar black code, but rather a thriving organization of evil intent and staggering power. While the Knights most encountered across the continent are those that have either left the Order or been trained outside it, the real power base of the group lies within a series of Great Houses hidden within the Magic Zone. These Houses, though no less evil in their intentions than the "Wandering" Knights of North America, conduct their operations with a much more developed sense of honor, albeit a twisted honor by the perceptions of good.

Though both Wandering Knights and those of the Great Houses are known for hiring their services out as lethal mercenaries, the motivations that drive each are subtly different. Most Wandering Knights are out only for themselves, earning their vile reputation as honorless thieves and murderers who serve nothing but the almighty credit and their own homicidal tendencies. In contrast to this, the Mystic Knights of the Great Houses, while no less willing to kill and torture, do so to further the status, power and dark honor of the Order. This loyalty traces all the way back to the founding of the dark art.

History of the Order

Emerald green eyes reflected back the sharp peaks of red and orange as the Elven woman stared into the flames crackling before her, tracing her eyes across the surface of the newly placed log as the heat began to curl up its remaining strips of bark. Focusing her attention on the end of the wood closest to her, Meliva quietly spoke words of power, feeling the thrill she al

ways did as the flames began to obey her magical command, streaking across the face of the log in swirling, flickering patterns. Closing her eyes, she let herself begin to float in the feeling of the magic.

"Let it be, Mela," came the voice from behind her, drawing her easily out of her trance with its powerful undertones.

Meliva had long ago gotten over her surprise at how quickly he could come out of his meditation. As such, even though he had been sitting cross legged upon his floor mat apparently lost in thought, she was not shocked to have him address her.

"Ealdor, I was just..." she began, but was cut to silence immediately.

"I know what you were doing, girl," the voice said calmly, losing none of its authority for its low volume, "the fire can do its job quite well without your urging."

Meliva Vale, the Countess Viceroy of House Brujo, turned to face the voice that had addressed her, dropping her eyes briefly in deference to the only man that she called master. Ealdor Brujo was an older Elven man, perhaps past his prime even by their long lived standards, but he had lost none of his fervor to the advancing years. Raising her eyes to meet his, the Elven woman wished, not for the first time, that the rumors of a physical relationship between the two of them were true, rather than just the jealously whispered gossip of her fellow Knights.

"I'm sorry to have disturbed you, Ealdor," she said, half bowing, "I meant only to take the edge off the chill for you. I shall leave you to your meditation." She hadn't taken more than a step toward the door when he raised a hand to stop her, gesturing toward a spot on the floor beside him.

"Sit down, Mela," he said softly, looking up at her, "I wish to speak with you." Waiting until she had settled down beside him, Ealdor continued. "What do you know about the beginnings of our Order, Mela?"

It was a loaded question, and Meliva knew it. Only the Ealdor of a House was allowed to share this information, and he knew as well as she did that they had never spoken of it. Hesitating slightly, she locked eyes with her lord, realizing that she was giving him all the answer he needed, without ever speaking a word. His reaction, however, was not what she expected it to be.

"No, not what you've been told officially, girl," he said, disarming her with a half smile. "You've lived in this House since you were but a little girl, Mela. Somewhere along the line you must have heard some of the whispered postulates, if not from the other children, then certainly from the adults when you came of age. They seem to love guessing about it when they think I'm not listening."

"Well in that case, Ealdor," she responded, suppressing a grin, and settling into a conversational tone. "I have heard a few things here and there, mumblings from children of both the young and old variety. I have heard suggestions ranging from you springing from the Earth wholly formed, to the possibility of you and the other House lords being creatures of energy that have taken mortal form. Some even suggest that the Order comes from some other world, though as far as I can remember we have always been here."

Shrugging her shoulders, Meliva smiled at him again. "Honestly though, Ealdor, I take none of these suggestions at face

value. Only you may judge when I am ready to know the truth of the matter, my Lord. Then, and only then, will I consider myself to be properly informed."

Ealdor Brujo sat quietly and listened as his Countess Viceroy spoke, judging the woman, as he always did, by her words and actions. She had been in his House for most of her life, but had only risen to be his highest assistant within the last few years. Many whispered that she couldn't have become Viceroy without serving some other, more physical purpose for him, but the Ealdor knew the truth of it. This woman had earned her position just as all his previous Viceroys had. She was quite simply the most talented and powerful mystic in his House, short of him self, of course. That paired with her unflinching loyalty had earned her the position she held, and in all the time since her appointment, he had never regretted his decision.

"You have served me well and faithfully for many years, Mela," he began again, watching her eyes as he spoke and acknowledging the strength that lay within them. "It is time for you to learn just how this Order came about..."

Members of the Order of the Mystic Knights rank among the most feared mages in all of North America, not just for their skills with magic, psionics and arms, but for their talent to meld these powers together with superior martial ability. This dark reputation however, has not always been the case. Though the Mystic Knight has always been a mysterious and intimidating figure, it took many years for the Order to rise from its humble beginnings to its current level of notoriety. So long has it been since those first days, in fact, that few but the highest ranking members are aware that the Order had its beginnings through a single Elf: Ieldran Brujo.

The dark mysticism practiced by the Order can trace its beginnings back many hundreds of years, not only through the shadowed post-Cataclysm years after the Coming of the Rifts, but indeed back to the planet of its true origin, a medieval world vastly different from modern day Rifts Earth. Upon this world, the name of which few in the Order now know and none speak, a terrible war raged between the races. Known as a time of great magics, many were the powerful mystic arts created during this era, only to be later outlawed and lost to the annals of time. The art that would one day form the backbone of the Order of the Mystic Knights was one such magic. Begun as a craft of the Elves, these mages originally sold their services as bodyguards during long ceremonies and rituals. Using their skill with the sword and the ability to steal magic drawn by other mages, they provided a solid line of defense against all adversaries. Unfortunately, those same abilities that made the original Mystic Knights staunch defenders also gave them the ability to be vicious attackers. Small wonder it was that a mystic style capable of easily defeating other magic users was destined to see its use outlawed and its practitioners hunted by those that feared it most.

Ironically, when the art was outlawed, and its number of practitioners began to shrink, those seeking to hire these services tended to be much less scrupulous individuals, helping to solidify the focus of the magic into that which its opponents had believed it to be all along. In time, these skills turned to a much darker purpose, one in direct opposition to their original intent. One time defenders of their magical brethren, these Mystic

Knights now became the most implacable of foes, attacking mages during ritual and ceremony, and stealing away the very magical power that they might use to defend themselves. Perhaps it was the fugitive nature of their mysticism that drove them to accept such vile work, or maybe it was simply a product of already distorted morals. Whatever the reason, they became a dangerous and feared force in the world of magic, even as their numbers were thinned by violent attrition and a lack of new blood. One of the last few remaining practitioners of the art, the Elf Lord Ieldran Brujo, made a name for himself as both a lethal agent and a loyal one, never double-crossing his employer or breaking a deal once it was made. It was these combined traits that had allowed him to thrive and profitably ply his unique abilities for the highest bidder for decades. It was also these traits that would lead him to his last mission on the world of his birth.

Leading a group of three other mages, Elves he had trained in his own dark magic, Brujo accepted a contract to eliminate a man considered to be the most powerful mage in the region, supposedly to make way for the ambitions of his client. Realizing too late that they had walked into an ambush, Brujo and his Knights found themselves surrounded by 20 men, led by the mage that they had been sent to kill. In the ensuing conflict, two of Brujo's apprentices were slain, though the enemy paid a heavy price for their blood, leaving more than half of their number dead or dying at the remaining Knights' feet. Faced with his possible defeat, the enemy mage turned his thoughts to escape, using his remaining strength to open a magical portal to retreat through, certain that his adversary would not follow into the unknown world on the other side. Had the man truly known Brujo and his twisted convictions, he may not have made such an error. Having made a pact to kill the mage, the dark Knight and his apprentice didn't hesitate at all, pursuing the target into the portal, intent on following through on their promise.

Stepping through the portal into a strange land, Ieldran Brujo and Calhoun Drake, his eldest and last living apprentice, set upon the mage and the remnants of his defenders, slaying them before they could mount any final defense. The contract fulfilled and their route home gone, the two Knights now found themselves stuck in a foreign land, marveling at the magic-rich environment around them. It would be only later that they would discover that they had not only traveled to a different land, but indeed an entirely different world. The Knights and their craft had come to the dark ages of Rifts Earth and the P.P.E. rich forests of the Magic Zone. Though it would take them a few years to learn the lay of the land and the local power structures, the Mystic Knights were now free from the laws forbidding their mysticism, and in time they picked up where they had left off, selling their unique and frightening services as mercenaries. In the tremulous years prior to the invasion of Chi-Town, they would find lucrative work from the Federation of Magic, and see their ranks swell as new apprentices were found and trained in the Grand City.

By the time the Federation made its strike against the fledgling Coalition, the Order had reached nearly 70 members, most of whom took part, and perished, in the ill-fated invasion and the Coalition's retaliatory aftermath. Yet even at this time of great death, the foundations of the Order survived. Brujo, Drake and his most trusted Knights had remained in the Grand City during the Federation offensive, tasked with protecting the

young Alistair Dunscon and then helping him to escape when it became clear that the war was lost. The young Dunscon never forgot this loyalty, and when he reappeared nearly fifty years later to form the True Federation of Magic, those same Knights that had once protected him were welcomed back into the fold as trusted warriors. Despite this close connection, no mistake should be made as to where the loyalty of the Order lies. The Order of the Mystic Knights neither follow the flag of the Federation, nor stand among the ranks of the Dunscon loyalists. The Federation is merely a patron of the Order's services, albeit a very generous one.

The Order, as a formal organization, did not exist until 13 P.A., after the fall of the Grand City. Prior to this, Brujo and his Knights existed more as a family, passing down their teachings and working together to survive. Unfortunately, much of what Brujo had built in this new world was washed away in the aftermath of the failed invasion. Though only seven Knights survived the ensuing manhunt by Chi-Town forces, including Brujo himself, the valor that they displayed in protecting Alistair Dunscon and his retainers built the foundation of their formidable reputation. Once they successfully secured the Dunscon loyalists in the Magic Zone, Brujo's Knights were in high demand, serving as both protection for fledgling villages and as a means of vengeance for their clients, striking out against those perceived as traitors and deserters. Once again, Brujo returned to the trade that made him famous on his own world, taking up arms against mages. In this, the reputation of the Mystic Knights grew to include not only loyal service, but also deadly results.

Seeing the rising demand for his services, Brujo originally formed the Order of the Mystic Knights as a kind of guild for the training of others in the dark and secret ways of his craft. Brujo, Drake and the other surviving Knights began to draw apprentices from the inhabitants of the Magic Zone, selecting native humans, Elves and any other D-Bees that were willing to serve and showed an aptitude for magic. As apprentices joined the Order and swore absolute loyalty to Brujo, the lord of the Order was able to offer the services of first tens, and eventually hundreds, of Knights to his clients. Through this growing force of expert mercenaries the power of the Order continued to escalate, making the Mystic Knights a formidable player in the ever present power struggle within the Magic Zone.

In the years that followed, Ieldran Brujo would meet frequently with many powerful lords and mages of the Magic Zone to discuss the details of campaigns and assignments that they wished the Order to undertake. Unknown to most in his Order however, these meetings began to take on another aspect for the Knight. During these times spent in discussions with many of the most powerful spell casters in Magic Zone, Brujo developed his fixation with magic. Craving the incredible power that these mages could control, the Knight attempted to learn the ways of spell magic, only to be thwarted by his inability to learn new spells as other mages could. Never before had Brujo wanted to learn spells, always trusting to his natural mystic powers, but now he found that a mental block prevented him from learning the craft, no matter the skills of those who attempted to teach him.

Even as his own Order grew, allowing him to delegate more of his tasks to other Knights, so too did Brujo's fascination with learning spells. In a few years, the fascination had become an

obsession that seemed to demand his every waking moment, even as the leadership of the Order placed its own requirements on his shoulders. Feeling the pull of both of these demands, Brujo made the decision to cede some of his power and control in order to free more time for his magical pursuits. It was this decision that would lay the original foundations for the Order to come.

The writings that would become the charter documents of the Order of the Mystic Knights were originally penned by Alandar Merkose, a Knight of keen intellect, who was among the first of Brujo's new apprentices on Rifts Earth. Alandar's papers clearly defined the ranks of the Order and how to attain them, as well as laying out the powers given to each rank. In 41 P.A. the charter document went into effect and the Order was divided up into five Great Houses. First and most noble of the Great Houses, House Brujo drew its name from, and remained under the control of, the Order's founder. Though he now controlled a much smaller contingent of Knights, Brujo was satisfied with his decision to split the Order. With less now required of him and the ability to appoint favored Knights as his Counts, he could leave the day-to-day operations to other hands and concentrate on his magical obsession. This left the leadership of the other four Houses to be decided.

While Elves had always held many of the highest positions within the Order at that time, none expressed any interest in leaving their longtime lord. For the Elves, the decision to stay in House Brujo was easily made and sprang from their pure loyalty to Ieldran himself. In addition, there were many who knew of and supported their leader's magic ambition as well. With this former hierarchy now centralized squarely into House Brujo, the creation of the other Great Houses was left to the four human Knights in the Order who showed the greatest leadership ability and individual talent. From these men a new legacy would be born.

Each of the four new Houses was formed by a Knight most talented in a specific area of influence. Marius Sigil, a supremely skilled assassin, formed the first House, composed of an elite group of spies, hit men and covert agents. The second House, composed of the officers and field commanders for large-scale conflicts, was formed by Walter Bregdan, already a brilliant commander and leader of human Knights. Drawing on his skills as a one-on-one fighter with few equals, Arthur Hiredmann formed the third House, representing the line troops of the Order. Under the concept that no army can operate without its backup personnel, Conrad Isen, a man who had left his ordinary mechanic's life to become a Mystic Knight, took the lead of the fourth House, composed of the reserve and support troops for the armies. Once the Houses were formed, and their names drawn from their founders, every Knight was asked to swear loyalty to a House that suited their abilities. While some Knights refused the choice, disliking the new model and leaving to become Wandering Knights, most embraced the new doctrine, seeing clearly now the ways and means to rise to power within the Order.

The formation of the Great Houses broke the Order into five relatively autonomous groups, each with its own leadership, responsibilities and goals. Knowing, however, that in times of war and other large-scale conflicts a single leader would be needed to unite the Houses together under one control, Ieldran Brujo

was given the title of Archduke, the supreme leader of the Order. Under the new charter however, the Archduke's true powers over the other Houses were somewhat limited. The real powers of the Archduke come into play during large-scale conflicts, when hundreds of Knights are to be involved. For smaller contracts the Archduke has little say, and the other Houses operate with relative independence.

This system of transferring power and authority to the Houses worked well for Brujo, freeing much of his time for his magical pursuits. In the 50 years following its formation, the Order flourished, nearly doubling in size each decade. During this time the power and leadership of the Houses was generally constant, flowing to relatives as leaders died and making the succession of authority in the Houses fairly predictable. Things changed, however, in 91 P.A., when Ealdor Maceo Sigil proclaimed himself the supreme power within the Order and seized the title of Archduke. It was a power play that surprised many in the Order, from House Ealdors to rank and file Knights, both because of its boldness and also because of its success. So consumed was Ieldran Brujo with his pursuit of magic that he was apparently blinded to the politics at play and let the change in leadership go uncontested. In truth, far from being blind to the politics of the Order, Ealdor Brujo simply cared little for them. To the elderly House Ealdor, magic had become his focus above all else.

The age of Sigil ushered in a new era in the Order of the Mystic Knights. The man rumored of killing his own father to become House Ealdor has now become the face of the Order, and his ruthless, bloodthirsty ways the model for the Mystic Knights of this age. Already feared mercenaries and combatants, the Mystic Knights under Sigil have become horrors, killing any and all who stand in their way, without mercy. The age of Sigil is believed by many to have been the catalyst for the formation of the White Rose, though the suggestion of such in the wrong company is liable to get one killed for his trouble.

Today the Order is a frightening and powerful force. Over 4000 Knights, swearing loyalty to the Great Houses, operate in the Magic Zone, with just as many operating freely all over North America. The Order still carries many close ties to Dunscon to this day, and should another invasion of Chi-Town be attempted, the massive army of Mystic Knights would certainly be on the front lines, assuming the Federation had the credits to pay.

Sitting quietly, lost in contemplation of Brujo's words, Meliva glanced absently at the fading embers of wood in the bottom of the fireplace hearth. Long had been the words of her master regarding his creation of the Order, and neither had given any thought to stoking the fire during that time. Feeling now the chill that the fire's passing had allowed, Meliva rose and moved to build the flames up again, not needing to glance at Brujo to know that his eyes followed her thoughtfully. Though she hadn't spoken since he had completed his tale, Meliva felt certain that the Ealdor knew exactly what question was in her mind, wanting to be asked.

"I have spoken openly with you, Mela," Brujo said quietly, rising from his seat and approaching the fire as Meliva built it up. "And yet, I sense that you are being somewhat less than open with me. Speak what has been in your thoughts so often of

late, child. Clearly my story has brought it sharply to your mind."

Suppressing a shiver at how easily and accurately he had determined her feelings, Meliva turned to face her House Lord. The meeting of their eyes confirmed for Meliva what she already suspected. Brujo was well aware of the question she wanted to ask, and waited only for her to speak the words. What his reaction would be though, was beyond even Meliva's ability to tell.

"I hesitate, Ealdor," she began slowly, speaking each word as if she were testing it first, "only because the question in my mind falls high above my station to ask. Though I'm second only to you in this House there are still those in the Order who outrank me. I don't believe that speaking ill of them would be in my best interest.

"Be that as it may," she continued, trying to gauge his reaction in his eyes, "you say that I should speak openly with you about what troubles me. I will honor your wishes and ask my question, though I now suspect that you already know it."

Glancing at the fire once more, as much to steel her resolve as to make sure the flames would continue to burn, Meliva turned to face her superior and began to speak in an even voice.

"One now sits in the highest post of this Order," she began, her determination solidifying now that she had made her decision, "though he has no right or reason to be there, save by your lack of opposing him. Sigil is a whelp, brought to his House power by the untimely passing of his great father and to the leadership of this Order by his own belligerent assumptions. His murderous creed and lack of any true honor is a stain that blemishes the face of not only our Order, but every true Knight within it. I just don't understand how, Lord Brujo. How could you let a man like this step into your post unopposed? Clearly, you're the better Knight and would have had no large challenge opposing him."

Finishing her words, Meliva waited with nervous expectation for a response from her Ealdor. When the response came though, it certainly wasn't what she had expected. Instead of words advising her to watch her tongue where the Archduke was concerned, Brujo gave a short bark of laughter that surprised his Viceroy enough to make her take a step back and stare at him in shock.

"Strong words, Mela," he mused, ignoring her discomfort. "Strong enough to make me wonder if I haven't elected a White Rose to the highest post of my House."

"Ealdor, I..." she began.

"No girl; be quiet," he continued, holding up his hand as she began to speak in her defense. "I know where your loyalty lays, Viceroy. I don't allow Knights into my service before I know their whole mind. I know you would sooner take your own life than betray the Order, or me.

"Still, Viceroy," he said, his tone losing some of its lightness, "your words against the Archduke will clearly put you in danger if spoken to the wrong ears. Sigil isn't one to be trifled with, Countess, and you would do well to not challenge his authority where he can get wind of it."

"I would never..." she began again, only to be drawn up short by the fire in Brujo's eyes.

"That is twice you have interrupted me, Viceroy," Brujo said, switching easily into his command voice. "I will tolerate

no further interruption from you. You have asked me a question, and I intend to answer it. Your self defense serves no purpose but to infuriate me.”

Paling noticeably, Meliva fell silent, suddenly feeling chill, though the fire beat hot at her back.

“I perhaps know you better than you know yourself, Mela,” the Ealdor continued, letting his voice soften. “Be still, girl, and listen to what I have to say.” Moving closer to the fire himself, Brujo held out his hands, warming and then rubbing them together while he seemed to gather his thoughts.

“Three ways I see to answer you,” he began, turning to face her again, “each of them true in their own right, though I feel that you should pay most attention to the last.”

“Of first mention, but least import,” he said, a slight grin twisting his mouth up, “is the similarity of appointment between you and the Archduke. You seem to ignore that you achieved your position unopposed by your predecessor. Yet you would ask me why I stepped down and ignore the realities of your own ascension. I wonder if you have ever questioned Alandar about his decision.

“Still,” he continued after a momentary pause, apparently satisfied that she wouldn’t interrupt him again. “I consider that of little or no importance. We both know that the manner of your appointment and that of the Archduke come under vastly different circumstances.

“Secondly, I could say that you have vastly underestimated the usefulness of House Sigil,” Brujo said, turning his eyes to the flames. “Maceo Sigil is no fool, Meliva, nor is he a whelp as you would name him. You are correct in your assumption that I could have stopped him, or that I could remove him even now. Yet, I feel that you have missed important details of my earlier story if you question now why I didn’t do so. The current Archduke serves his purpose adequately, though perhaps you have missed the purpose I refer to.

“The magic, Meliva,” he intoned reverently, turning from the fire to face her again. “The magic is the purpose and the reason behind everything. Nothing has happened that doesn’t lend itself to the magical pursuit in one way or another, even the reasons I gave in answer to your question. Indeed, my Viceroy, your predecessor knew the importance of our magical studies well enough to do what was best. By stepping down he not only freed his own time to assist me, but he allowed the most talented new Knight in our House to come to power. Some of the same reasons can be applied to Sigil’s rise to power. I’m content to let the new Archduke play this pointless game of politics within the Order. The man has no vision for where the true power lies, how the future of this Order is going to be decided.

“Imagine,” he said, spreading his hands wide, “a new style of magic, perhaps the strongest ever created, mixing our skill to draw energy from other mages with the ability to cast the most powerful of spells. With the energy base we could draw upon from others, even the most difficult of spells would be within our reach. That is why all my efforts, and indeed the efforts of my House, must be engaged in this pursuit. It is not through Order politics that the power of the future will be found. True power, lasting power, will be achieved with the magic. Let Sigil play his games of being a King, Mela. The future will bury men like him in the true telling of our rise to greatness.”

Hierarchy of the Order

Based off of the family oriented command structure followed by the Mystic Knights all the way back to the time of their origins, the Order is divided into large groups of Knights, called Houses, that operate through a system of political hierarchy. Each House of Knights is governed by the ranking member of the family, known as the Ealdor, who holds ultimate control over all activities of his designated House. This leader is in turn supported by four Counts, who report directly to the Ealdor, and oversee all the routine duties of the House in his name. Each of these four Counts then controls a number of ranked Knights, called Viscounts, who carry out the various tasks for which their Count is responsible. The tiered command structure in a Mystic Knight House is perhaps most appropriately viewed from a military standpoint, where the Ealdor holds the powers of a General, while the Counts and Viscounts make up his staff of lieutenants and sergeants respectively.

Outside of the individual House politics, the Order as a whole is governed by a single ruling House. The Ealdor of this House carries the additional title of Archduke and is not only considered the chief commander of the Mystic Knight forces, but also the face of the entire organization.

Archduke

Much as the Great Houses have a single leader in the form of a House Ealdor, so too is the Order as a whole under the guidance of a single individual: the Archduke. Drawn from the ranks of the House leaders, this Supreme Ealdor exercises both direct control over all aspects of his own House, as well as authority over the resources of his fellow Ealdors when situations arise requiring collaboration between multiple Houses. Indeed, while each individual House has its own command structure and will take on smaller mercenary contracts involving only its own Knights, it falls within the purview of the Archduke to authorize any contract involving Knights from multiple Houses. The threshold for the Archduke’s involvement in a contract is typically fifty Knights or more. This is the point at which, based on the Order’s charter, a contract will involve participation of multiple Houses and require diplomatic relations, both with the client and with the individual House Ealdors. In order to insure that these larger contracts proceed smoothly, the approval and orders are handed down from the highest authority of the Order. With the responsibilities of diplomatic relations, contract negotiation and authorization of large-scale military actions, the Archduke becomes the pivotal figure in sending the Knights to war.

The Archduke holds great power within the Order, but it is power that he must wield carefully. Unlike a king of old, whose position was secured by birthright, the Archduke’s power is secured through respect and ritual, both of which can be broken if bent too far. Indeed, while in many ways the Archduke may operate as king of the Order, issuing commands and expecting unquestioned obedience, his actual authority falls somewhat short of true sovereign power. As first among equals, the Archduke can exercise the right to command the other Ealdors and issue orders to the other Houses as he sees fit, expecting his orders to be followed. However, should another Ealdor take exception to the commands and refuse, the Archduke does not hold the au-

thority to directly remove or overrule his peer. While he is the leader of the Order, he cannot affect the command structure of any House other than his own.

Though his direct authority over an Ealdor who opposes him is limited, the Archduke is not without recourse in these situations, having the option to fall back on Order ritual to resolve the conflict. If another Ealdor refuses his commands, the Archduke may invoke the charter of the Order and call for resolution, asking that the matter be resolved by blood conflict. Under the right of resolution, the Archduke and the defiant Ealdor each select a Knight of their House to fight on their behalf. Observed by a ranked Knight from each of the Great Houses, the fight ends only when one Knight is dead. By his triumph the victorious Knight resolves the dispute in his Ealdor's favor before the eyes of Order, and the outcome is considered binding. Should the Archduke win, and the defiant Ealdor still refuse to comply with the order, the Archduke may call for further resolution. In these cases however, the challenged Ealdor can no longer elect a champion from his House, instead having to face the conflict himself. Though it is extremely unlikely that an Archduke would risk the kind of dissent that this would cause, or an Ealdor put his life on the line except in the most grievous of circumstances, the ritual stands nevertheless as a final course of resolution.

Just as the Archduke may confront an Ealdor to enforce his will, so too may an Ealdor make a challenge against the high lord, though the purposes behind the two contests are of a vastly differing nature. If a standing House Ealdor grows unhappy with the Archduke's leadership of the Order, he may call for the Archduke to yield. This is an official proclamation by the dissatisfied Ealdor that he believes the Archduke unfit for leadership and demanding that the supreme rank be surrendered to his control. If the current Archduke does nothing to contest this bid for control, the title and powers are simply passed to the Ealdor who invoked the right of yield. However, if the current Archduke objects to the claim and refuses to step down, the call to yield becomes a Challenge of Power.

Whether it be a Count challenging for leadership of a House, or an Ealdor making a bid for control of the entire Order, the Challenge of Power can be an extremely risky proposition. Used as a binding determination of leadership within the Order, the Challenge is a test of melee combat, either with or without weapons, between two Knights representing the conflicting parties. In most cases the higher ranking Knight is entitled to choose the location of the battle and the extent to which the opponents will be armed. In addition, the Knight being challenged may either fight the battle himself, or appoint another Knight as his champion, with the understanding that he must abide by his champion's results, whether they be good or ill.

Should the challenged Knight fail in his attempt to retain his authority, he is left with only two options, choosing either to accept his death, or to ask his challenger for mercy. By the tenets of the Order's charter, any Ealdor who asks for mercy must be shown it. However, mercy comes with a high price, especially for one of former power. Upon being granted mercy, the Ealdor is banished forever from the Great Houses of the Order and set upon the path of a Wandering Knight, never again to wield the authority that he once commanded.

On the flip side of the coin, the Knight issuing the challenge, be he Count or even Ealdor, must fight the battle himself, and abide by the location and martial requirements imposed by the higher ranking Knight that he seeks to depose. While a challenger stands to increase his power greatly, should his bid be successful, the penalty for failure is always severe, occasionally resulting in banishment, but more often than not, resulting in the defeated Knight's death. For this reason, most Counts and Ealdors are deterred from invoking the Challenge, even when they are dissatisfied with the leadership above them.

Ealdor

With a name drawn from the old tongue meaning Leader, the Ealdor is the highest lord within a Mystic Knight House, acting as a dictator with unrivaled authority and answering only to his contemporary, the Archduke. Many of the Ealdor's responsibilities, while operating on a smaller scale, are quite similar to those of the Archduke and include both diplomatic relations and the power to make military authorizations for the Knights within his or her House.

On contracts numbering any less than fifty Knights, the individual House Ealdors hold the decision power, arranging contracts with clients and green lighting the military operations that will generate revenue for the House coffers. Though the Ealdor's authority can command all the way up to the fifty Knight limit, it is much more common to see contract operations numbering 3-12 Knights, and only rarely do operations exceed 20. Indeed, though large-scale operations are by far the biggest individual generators of revenues for all the Houses involved, it is the smaller single House contracts that dominate the daily activities of the Mystic Knights. While one of the Great Houses of the Order can and will enter into many hundreds of individual House contracts during a given year, the number of large scale multi-House contracts rarely numbers above a half dozen in the same time period. This high level of House activity is what makes the individual Ealdors such important players in the health of the Order, building up the strength of the parts for the greater good of the whole.

While the Archduke and the Ealdors share similar responsibilities, albeit to different scales, it is the individual requirements of the House leadership that really set the Ealdors apart. Where the majority of the Archduke's duties center around military contracts, the Ealdor must also see to the individual upkeep of his House, operating as the key decision maker for all aspects, from House discipline and rules to the political coordination of House affairs within the various cities and towns that the House has a presence in.

With their operations primarily focused in the Magic Zone, and the Order's ample connections to Alistair Dunscon, it is no surprise that each of the Great Houses of the Order has its central hierarchy located in or near the territory controlled by the True Federation of Magic. It is from this centralized location that each Ealdor extends his reach into any and all government or industry that falls within the sphere of influence of his House. By expanding his control over areas around him, the Ealdor strives to gain more power and influence for his House, not just within the Order, but also within the Federation, and the world at large. In order to accomplish this goal the Ealdor employs many methods, including the general acquisition of property,

bribing of officials and even planting of his own agents within city politics. Within the area of his primary occupation, an Ealdor will also meet personally with city leaders to establish and maintain relationships.

With the kind of authority that they wield within the Mystic Knight Houses, it is inevitable that an Ealdor must, at times, defend against challenges to that power. All the way back to the founding of the Order, the position of House Lord has been held by those Knights of greatest talent who have repeatedly proven themselves through their skills in both battle and leadership. So it is that only those Knights that have ascended to the rank of Count, through years of loyal and skillful service to their House and the Order, may challenge their Ealdor for leadership. This Challenge of Power is a duplicate in form and function to that of an Ealdor bidding for the power of Archduke (see above), and shares the same dire penalties for the defeated Knight.

One interesting and notable difference in the succession of a new Ealdor as opposed to an Archduke is the naming conventions attached to the highest lord of a House. Whenever a new Ealdor takes power, he must also take a new name. Though the first name may or may not change, each new Ealdor is required to take the House name as his own last name, discarding his old name as a part of his past and devoting himself to the House that he now rules.

The minimum experience level for an Ealdor is 9.

Count

Within each Great House the Ealdor holds the ultimate authority in all matters and responsibility for all activities of the House. To assist in the fulfillment of these responsibilities, an Ealdor appoints four Counts to act as both advisors in his decisions and officers to issue his commands. Each of these Counts, the Viceroy, Imperator, Quaestor and Retainer, manages tasks on the Ealdor's behalf, deputy to his power in one of four specialized areas. Appointed into their posts by the Ealdor, only a Count's resignation, or his death, can remove him from his place in the command structure of a House. Each of the four counts carries a separate set of responsibilities, as differentiated by their varied titles.

The Count Viceroy operates as the right hand of the Ealdor, second only to the House Lord in authority. The Viceroy acts primarily as the direct assistant to the Ealdor, often performing much of the daily administrative tasks required of his superior. In addition, the Count Viceroy is the most likely to know an Ealdor's mind on matters and be held closest within his master's confidence. A position of great power within both a House and the entire Order, the word of the Viceroy is considered to carry the authority of the Ealdor behind it. As a result of his great power and influence, the Viceroy is often the most feared of the four Counts, not to mention the one most envied by his peers.

The duties of top military commander within a Great House belong to the Count Imperator. While the Ealdor is responsible for accepting contracts and making the decision on where and who the House will bear arms against, it is the Imperator who orchestrates the details of the attack. As chief of the House's military might, the Count Imperator is tasked with planning the strategy and tactics that will win the day, and fulfill the contract for the client. While all battle plans will carry his approval, or

the approval of one of his most trusted Viscounts, a conflict involving 20 or more of the House's Knights will see the Imperator command his forces from the field, putting him on the line right beside the Knights that he leads. This close bond to the rank and file soldiers of the House frequently makes the Imperator the most respected of the Counts.

As the Ealdor's economic advisor and lead in all House financial matters, the Count Quaestor is responsible for a great many duties vital to the support of the House's operations and the expansion of its power base. Among his responsibilities, the Quaestor handles the acquiring and maintaining of land and property, managing of the House treasury, purchasing of weapons and equipment, stocking of food and medical supplies, as well as the paying of the troops. As this position is so far removed from the primary military focus of the Order it is commonly viewed as the least prestigious of the Count ranks and farthest from the power at the top.

As opposed to the Imperator, who holds authority over all of the House's external conflicts and military contracts, the Count Retainer exercises his responsibility over the security of the Great House itself. As the top official of Internal Security, the Retainer carries control over all of the House's guards and is officially charged with the protection of the House and the enforcement of the rules and laws set down by the Ealdor. In addition, the Retainer is directly responsible for the safety of his House Lord, sometimes assigning groups of his trusted Viscounts to the Ealdor's personal security, but more often standing the post himself, ready to defend his master with his life. While probably the most trusted of the Counts, the Retainer does not command the same awe or respect that the more visible Viceroy and Imperator enjoy.

As with other tiers within the Order hierarchy, only those who have attained a rank one step below the Count may be selected to fill one of these four coveted positions, meaning that only Viscounts may be promoted up to this level. Unlike the tiers above him however, a Count may not be directly challenged by a Viscount to take his position. Instead, a vacancy in a Count position must exist for a Viscount to be promoted into by the Ealdor. Assuming that the vacancy is not caused by a Count's premature demise, or his incompetence, the Ealdor will often give weight to the recommendation of the outgoing Count on whom to promote into his vacated position. For this reason, many Counts will select one of their Viscounts to take on as a protégé to their power, teaching them the myriad functions and duties of their rank in preparation for the day when they will step down. A skilled and loyal Viscount apprentice can normally expect to be recommended by his Count to the Ealdor when the position becomes available.

As described above, all Counts have the right to challenge for the rank of House Ealdor. That said, these types of challenges are actually quite infrequent, owing to both House loyalty, as well as the severe penalty should the bid for power fail. Should a Count fail in his bid for the Ealdor's power, he is virtually assured of his own death, either in the fight itself or by execution should he survive the actual challenge. It is very infrequent that an Ealdor will grant mercy to a Count attempting to usurp his power, choosing instead to eliminate the rival for good. On most occasions this makes the risk of the challenge far greater than the reward. In fact, most challenges occur only when a new

Ealdor comes to power and Knights vie to claim the title for themselves before the new House Lord can become entrenched.

Barring situations where the highest House title is wrested from them, most Ealdors will have named a successor to their power, to take command should they be killed or decide to step down. However, in circumstances where no successor has been named, leadership of the House will automatically default to the Count Viceroy. This successor, whether appointed or defaulted into his position, must nevertheless move quickly to stabilize his House and cement his authority, lest those with an ambition for power attempt to remove him.

The minimum experience level for a Count is 6.

Viscount

As the bottom tier of ranked Knights within a House, Viscounts report directly to the Count who appointed them, and are responsible for serving and protecting their benefactor. Viscounts are responsible for any and all tasks delegated to them by their commanding Count and trusted to complete those tasks on the Count's behalf. As such, a Viscount's duties will vary greatly from one Count to another.

Serving the commander of the military, Viscounts of the Emperor are the Knights most often selected to lead combat missions in the field and will serve as squad leaders under their Count in those large-scale conflicts where the Emperor himself takes the field.

Taking up the charge of their superior officer, the Viscounts of the Retainer make up the internal security force within each House. These Knights perform guard duty and investigations as well as upholding the rules and laws of the Ealdor and defending the House and its hierarchy from outside incursions.

Viscounts who are appointed and under the control of the Viceroy and Quaestor operate more simply as assistants and aides to their individual Counts, performing whatever duties their lords see fit to send them on. Though these Viscounts' duties are less defined than those of the military Counts, they are no less important, nor hold any less power than their peers from other areas of the House. Indeed, a Viscount of either of these two Counts is more likely to be involved in the higher functions of their Count's responsibilities and be greatly knowledgeable about the inner workings of their benefactor's role.

Though the title of House Viscount carries with it the prestige and privilege of being a ranked Knight within the Order, it is most sought after by the Knights of a House for its potential to advance them into even greater power. When any of the four Count positions becomes vacant, it is only from within the ranks of the Viscounts that the Ealdor will select his new advisor. Often an Ealdor will heed the recommendation of the outgoing Count, promoting the highest ranking Viscount into the vacant position. However, this is not a guaranteed outcome as the final decision is ultimately up to the Ealdor as to which Viscount will attain the new rank.

A Mystic Knight's advancement into the ranked position of Viscount is based primarily on two specific criteria: Merit and Birthright. By showing valor in the battlefield, either by excellence in combat or aptitude in leadership, a Knight may earn merit that will bring him to the attention of one of the House Counts and contribute heavily to his chances of promotion. On

the other hand, a Knight's birthright also carries a great amount of weight in his bid for advancement. It should be of little surprise that Knights with an established family line within the Order, especially the sons and daughters of past or current leadership, will normally require less proving of their merit to gain advancement into the position of ranked Knight.

There are technically no firm limits for the total number of Viscounts under any given Count or within a House in total. Most promotions to the position of Viscount are given as they become necessary for the needs of each individual Count, though it isn't unheard of for a Knight to be promoted to the Viscount rank for purely political reasons. Generally speaking, the Count Emperor and Count Retainer will have a greater number of Viscounts under their command, as their positions involve much more militaristic operations. Despite the ability of each Count to appoint as many Viscounts as he wishes, the total number in a given House rarely exceeds 10% of its total size.

The minimum experience level for a Viscount is 3.

Mystic Knight

Though not considered a "ranked" title within the command hierarchy, the Mystic Knight is nevertheless known as the base rank within the Order. They are front-line soldiers without equal and are responsible for carrying out the will of the Archduke, the individual House Lords and ultimately, the contracted clients. While all Mystic Knights undergo the same initial training in the ways of the art, their responsibilities and talents will vary greatly based on the mission and focus of their sponsored House. Indeed, this direction and specialized training available through the Great Houses contributes to the desirable nature of Order membership. Because of the strict structure and charter of the organization, there are only two generally accepted ways to attain membership in the Order of the Mystic Knights; Birthright and Recruiting.

The first method of attaining membership in the Order is also the most direct; be born to it. In almost all circumstances, a Mystic Knight House will automatically bestow the right of membership to the offspring of its existing Knights, regardless of whether the child grows up to become a Knight or not. So long as the children swear loyalty to the House when they come of age, they may retain their membership, and all the benefits that it provides, into adulthood. In addition, those Knights who carry birthright and choose to take up the calling of their House are more often favored for higher ranked positions. On the flip side of the coin, a prospective member may also be recruited into the Order by a ranked Knight of a House. This is often done to bring in promising individuals from outside the bloodline of the Houses and will commonly entail adopting them into the House at a young age to begin their instruction.

Regardless of whether a prospective Knight is recruited into the Order or carries birthright, he must submit to many years of intense and challenging training if he has any hopes of attaining the rank of Mystic Knight. While Knights within a House will usually work in varying groups of less than a dozen, the training of apprentice Knights always occurs in groups of four. This method, reintroduced by Ieldran Brujo when the Order was formed, is meant to mimic, as well as honor, the system of instruction set down by the original Mystic Knights and harkens

back to the foundations of the magical art itself. While the breakdown of the four Knights within the training group can vary, it is most prevalent to have a single Master Knight accompanied by three apprentices.

Once a Knight has reached the status of Master (5th level), he may decide to take on the responsibility of training new Knights within the Order. After declaring his intent to instruct, the House will assign three apprentice Knights to him for indoctrination. As the head of a training group, this Master is then responsible for instructing his students in the history of their House and the Order and the code of the Mystic Knight. In addition, it is his task to condition them in the physical combat and mental discipline necessary to become full-fledged Mystic Knights. On top of all of this training, the Master also ingrains into his students what is considered to be the most important factor in a Mystic Knight's instruction, a mindset of obedience to the dark ideals that are the basis of the Order. After many years of instruction and real world experience with this group, the training of an apprentice Knight will culminate with his participation in the Mystic Trials, where all that he has learned will be put to the test. While it is understood that an apprentice Knight will have to spend years of training in preparation for this final test, there are actually no set time-frames for when the trials will take place. Instead, it is up to the sole discretion of the instructing Master Knight as to when an Apprentice is ready to face the challenges.

The Mystic Trials encompass three days of challenges, and begin with a period of fasting that will last until the tests have

ended. On the first day of trials the candidate will be quizzed by his Master on his knowledge of the various disciplines, skills and history that he has been taught. This includes testing of mental knowledge as well as physical ability and martial prowess. On the following day the potential Knight will spend his time meditating and reflecting on the teachings he has received during his apprenticeship. The third day of the Mystic Trials is the most physically taxing, as the young apprentice Knight is awoken from his meditation with melee combat. In this final stage of trials, the young Knight is tested in battle against his Master and the other two apprentice Knights, fighting non-stop for long hours until the Master feels that he has proven his abilities. A Knight-in-training who makes it through this third trial without collapsing to exhaustion, severe injury or death, enters into a final meditation, lasting less than an hour. It is in this final meditation that the path of dark mysticism opens up before him and he becomes a full Knight of the Order.

Most often, after attaining their full Knighthood, a Mystic Knight will leave the group of four that he trained with, moving on as an individual to make a name within the Order. When this happens, the sponsoring House will designate another recruit to take his place, preserving the structure of the four Knight group. In some instances, however, a new Mystic Knight will choose to remain within the fellowship that trained him, creating a stronger bond between the four Knights. In fact, some fellowships that began as Master and apprentices never separate, holding together as a team even after all three apprentices become Mystic Knights. The spirit of loyalty and teamwork that arises out of this partnership makes these Knights both a powerful force to be



reckoned with, as well as highly respected members of the Order. When a Knight of such an established fellowship is killed, it is most common that the remaining members of the group will attempt to select an apprentice who carries his birthright to replace him.

Marriage & Adoption

Though membership in a Mystic Knight's sponsored House is normally considered to be for life, there are two different circumstances that can shift a Knight's House allegiance. The first of these is the ability of a Knight to marry into another House of the Order. In order for Knights to marry into another House, the marriage must be approved by the Ealdors of both Houses. In addition, those Knights who hold birthright in a House must seek the approval of their parents before they can make a step that would shift their loyalty away from the House of their birth. Once they have been wed, the couple may then decide which of the two Houses their new family will belong to. Both Knights and all of their children will then carry birthright and loyalty to the chosen House from that point on. Though it is not completely unheard of for a Knight to accept a station in a lower House to follow his heart, it is much more prevalent that a newlywed couple will choose to increase their status by moving to the more prominent House within the Order. Indeed, the advancement to a House of higher status is, more often than not, the reason for two Knights to marry.

In addition to ascension through marriage, a Knight may also have his or her status improved by adoption into a different House. Ranked House members (Viscount, Count, Ealdor) may adopt Knights from other Houses to join their ranks. In order for the adoption to be valid, the ranked Knight must first obtain approval from his House Ealdor. This approval ends up being more or less a formality, as an Ealdor will normally only deny requests for adoption when the candidate violates the racial limitations of the House. Once the Ealdor has given approval, the adopted Knight must renounce all former affiliations and swear loyalty to his new House and Lords.

Adoption is most often performed to advance the station of Knights who do not carry birthright within a House. For Knights who are already part of the Order, this normally means advancement into one of the three highest Houses (Sigil, Brujo, Bregdan). However, apprentice Knights recruited from outside the bloodlines of the Order are always adopted into House Hiredmann, regardless of what House their sponsoring Knight belongs to. Only after having proven themselves, usually in battle, can these Knights hope to attain membership in a House of higher status. Oftentimes a sponsoring Knight will follow the progress of his "adopted" recruit, and will be ready to advance him upwards into the ranked Knight's House once he has proven himself.

Non-Knight Membership

While the Order is a society for Mystic Knights, it is also a large-scale military force that requires an array of support type personnel to accomplish its many goals. With Knights filling the role of military might, it is to non-Knight personnel that many of the basic administrative tasks are given. To this end, the Order allows and will grant membership to non-Knights, including

people from both basic and highly specialized professions. Though the rules for admittance of non-Knights will vary from House to House, most will have a good mixture of outside occupations in the fold. Doctors, Operators and even men of magic from different disciplines can be found among these ranks. More important than their specific abilities, non-Knight members must support the mission of both their sponsored House, as well as the Order itself.

Membership in the Order may be granted to non-Knights in one of three different fashions: birthright, marriage and adoption. The first, and by far the most common method for becoming a member of the Order, is to claim it by birthright. To maintain ongoing family bloodlines within a House, the children of Mystic Knights are automatically granted full membership through their parents, regardless of their status as a Knight. As long as they swear loyalty to the House they are free to pursue any occupation they choose and still retain their membership. However, regardless of their birthright, non-Knight members are unable to seek ranked positions within the Order. Furthermore, birthright is only granted to the children of House Knights, not their grandchildren. This requires that every other generation must attain Knight status to secure the family's place within the Order.

A second method by which non-Knights may join a House is through marriage to an existing member. These unions are governed by the racial and occupational limitations of each individual House and must be approved by the Ealdor in order for the outsider to become a member. Suitors who do not meet the requirements are not barred from marrying a Knight of the House, but they will be denied official membership within the Order. However, as long as at least one of the parents is a Knight of the Order, the offspring of this union will carry birthright.

Adoption is the final way in which a non-Knight may join, though it is also the least common of the three methods. Similar to membership by marriage, a candidate for adoption must meet the racial and occupational limitations of their sponsoring House and receive the blessing of the House Ealdor. Also comparable to marriage is the limitations upon children carrying birthright within the Order. As only children of member Knights will carry birthright, an adopted non-Knight is required to marry within the Order to provide their children with this benefit. Those adopted members who marry outside the Order will not carry membership for their spouse or offspring. In cases where a particularly powerful non-Knight is considered for membership, House Lords have been known to adopt entire families and grant them all membership in order to retain the non-Knight as a member of the House.

Houses of the Order

The Order is divided into Houses; large groups of Knights united by common ancestry, either through direct birthright or by invitation into a House and family through marriage or adoption. These Houses are much like the clans of Scotland or feudal Japan, and the bond created among the members is stronger than the bond of the Order itself. The loyalty of a Knight ultimately lies with his House, and it is through the House's commitment that a Knight is truly bound to the service of the Order. Unlike ancient clans, the Houses of the Order were not born out of geo-

graphic location, but rather by the specialized training of their membership. In this way, the Houses hold more similarity to the various branches of a nation's armed services.

The founding of the Order gave rise to five Great Houses, established by the five most influential and powerful Knights of their time. Currently, the first among them is House Sigil, whose Ealdor holds the title of Archduke and exercises control over the whole Order. Next, in order of nobility and importance, are House Brujo, the original founding House of the Order, and House Bregdan. The final two Great Houses, lower in stature and commanding a smaller amount of respect than the top three, are House Hiredmann and House Isen.



House Sigil

House Size: 450 (75 non-Knights).

Alignment Breakdown: 50% Miscreant, 20% Aberrant, 15% Anarchist, 10% Diabolic, 5% other.

Racial Restrictions: Humans and human-looking (True Atlanteans, Shapeshifters, and some muties).

Specialized Non-Knight Membership: Limited to highly trained spies and assassins.

Banner Colors: Black and white.

Banner Symbol: A raven bust.

As the current seat of power for the Order of the Mystic Knights, House Sigil's Ealdor rules the Order as Archduke. Maceo Sigil is only the second Knight to hold this rank and title,

having taken the power away from the original Archduke, Ieldran Brujo, in 91 P.A., in a surprisingly bloodless handover. Delivering a sealed letter to Brujo, and each of the other House Lords, Sigil declared his intent to take the throne, effectively declaring himself Archduke. The letter stated that Brujo, or any of the Lords, could challenge him in combat if they contested his takeover. Believing the declaration of this young upstart to be overwhelmingly foolish, the other House Lords eagerly anticipated the wrath of Brujo to come crashing down upon him. It was an event, however, that they soon realized would not come to pass.

Despite the urgings of his many advisors, Brujo remained silent, apparently consumed by his endless pursuit of magic. Without his objection to the takeover, the shift in power was allowed to take place almost without incident. Only Ealdor Willem Bregdan openly stood against Sigil, challenging his peer's right to claim the power of Archduke. This opposition, however, would not last long in the face of the shift in power. Bregdan attempted to send a Count to challenge Sigil on his behalf, but found himself thwarted by both Brujo's inaction and the laws of the Order. As the former Archduke had neither contested the ascension to power, nor dispatched a Knight of his own to defend the rank, Sigil declared that the title and powers of Archduke had officially been transferred. With Maceo Sigil now the Archduke, the challenge by Bregdan was no longer considered an attempt to stop Sigil from ascending, but rather a challenge to usurp the title for himself. By the tenets of the Order, in these types of challenges only Sigil would be allowed to choose a Knight to fight in his stead, whereas Bregdan would be forced to undertake the battle himself. Furthermore, Sigil proclaimed that he would give no mercy in a challenge to his new authority. Though he was a brave man, and perhaps even Sigil's equal in battle, Willem Bregdan was also not a fool. Seeing that his attempt to stop the takeover had been thwarted, the Ealdor withdrew his challenge, choosing instead to bide his time until a better opportunity might present itself. With Bregdan's withdrawal, the open criticism against the new Archduke grew silent, and Maceo's takeover of the Order was complete.

Motives

The specialization of House Sigil revolves around covert operations. While they can be contracted for spying, sabotage and other types of low level covert work, their high price and expertise is most often contracted to perform assassination missions. In addition to the contracted work of his House, Archduke Sigil has an overwhelming craving for power. As such, he uses much of his resources for non-contract work. He subtly employs his agents to further the control of his House and the Order, infiltrating the political systems in many of the predominant Magic Zone communities. Ultimately, Sigil desires to have enough power to rival Lord Dunscon and be considered his equal.

Relationships with other Houses

While at a glance it would appear that House Sigil has more enemies than allies, the oath of loyalty sworn to the Order works to keep the other Houses in line. Though a great deal of animosity remains toward the Archduke, especially among the Knights

of House Brujo and House Bregdan, the years since Maceo Sigil's rise have seen a strengthening of the ties between House Sigil and House Hiredmann. This is due largely to the Archduke giving House Hiredmann greater responsibility and increased workloads since he took power. This increased contact with Hiredmann is part of Sigil's strategy in case any of the other Great Houses attempt to either rise up, or split off from the Order. Being the largest House, Hiredmann's strength behind the Archduke gives him an edge in any internal struggles that may arise.

Archduke Maceo Sigil is a man of dark intentions, far more so than Ieldran Brujo, the first Archduke. Sigil interprets the Mystic Knight code much more loosely than his predecessor, and instructs his Knights to act with less honor and mercy. Perhaps the biggest difference is the weakness of Sigil's word. Unlike Brujo, whose word was his bond, the current Archduke will change his mind and go against his word in an instant if it suits his needs. As a result, the temperament of the Order as a whole has become more twisted and evil. The reputation of the Mystic Knights has transformed from its earliest incarnation of respect and cautious fear, to the current level of outright dread and horror.

This darker leaning in the era of Sigil has led to splintering within the Order as those that follow the older ways find themselves in opposition to the current mindset. The most prominent reaction attributable to this split was the creation of the White Roses, a nobler sect of Mystic Knights, who are now outlawed and hunted by the Order. Another notable rift is House Iscaeld, located in Canada, who have consciously remained isolated from the rest of the Order since the rise of the current Archduke. There are also a handful of small groups within the Order that secretly conspire against House Sigil, and the number of Knights that have left the Houses to become wandering freelancers has increased dramatically.

Notable Knights of House Sigil

Archduke Maceo Sigil

Rank: Archduke of the Order; Ealdor of House Sigil. Race: True Atlantean of the Aerihsman Clan. Level of Experience: 12th; age 76, but looks about 35. Alignment: Diablic. Attributes: I.Q. 12, M.E. 21, M.A. 25, P.S. 16, P.P. 22, P.E. 15, P.B. 19, Spd 34.

The personality and motivations of Archduke Maceo Sigil have only darkened with age, placing him among the most sinister minds in the Magic Zone. He not only believes that the sword is mightier than the pen, but also that the covert abilities of his House can undermine all of what he considers to be pointless political rhetoric. To this end, Maceo uses the resources of his House to position his pawns in public office and increase his control in the Magic Zone.

Maceo's father, Marius Sigil, was one of the first apprentices of Ieldran Brujo here on Rifts Earth. An Atlantean of the Aerihsman Clan, Marius wanted to prove himself outside the ranks of the Sunaj. With his natural skills and training as a

Sunaj, applied with his education as a Mystic Knight, Marius became not only an excellent spy but an assassin of uncanny skill. When Brujo decided to form the Great Houses, Marius was appointed as one of the new House Ealdors and instructed to train his Knights to double as assassins and covert operatives. As his ties to the Sunaj had remained close, Marius brought much of his extended family into the newly formed House. As the only child of the Ealdor, Maceo was put on the fast track to greatness, receiving special treatment and rising quickly through the ranks.

While serving as Count Imperator, Maceo was the most successful assassin in the Order, completing 26 successful contracts, 19 of which were carried out with melee weapons at close range. Not only did he hold a high success rate, but Maceo was never compromised while carrying out a mission and never left a trace of evidence behind to implicate himself or the Order. In fact, he was so skilled and successful in the field that rumors rapidly spread after his father's death that Maceo himself had carried out an assassination in order to take leadership. Immediately after the older Sigil's death, his son would assume power over House Sigil without challenge. Just three years later, the ambitious Knight would also take control of the entire Order. Archduke Sigil hungers for power, and his craving is nearly insatiable.

Count Brom Wolfram

Rank: Count Viceroy. Race: Changeling (see **Rifts® Conversion Book One, Revised**, page 82). Level of Experience: 7th; age unknown. Alignment: Miscreant. Attributes: I.Q. 11, M.E. 21, M.A. 17, P.S. 10, P.P. 14, P.E. 15, P.B. 5, Spd 12.

Presented to Maceo as payment for work performed for Splugorth agents, Brom Wolfram is a Changeling of amazing talent. Brom's shape changing ability allows him to assume any humanoid form, a trait which so enthralled Maceo, then Count Imperator, that he immediately struck a bargain with the creature. Maceo would release the Changeling from slavery, as long as he agreed to serve as the Knight's apprentice. Though initially he agreed with some hesitation, Brom has neither wavered from his decision, nor ever regretted it. The Mystic Knight training and his instruction from Maceo, as well as his own natural abilities, have transformed the Changeling from talented spy into expert assassin.

Count Wolfram carries a reputation nearly as frightening as Maceo's and commands respect similar to that given to the Archduke. The Changeling has kept his alien heritage a secret from all others within the House and the Order, adding even further to his persona as a truly gifted Knight. Taking great pleasure in his duties for the Archduke, Brom has little true ambition of his own, electing instead to advance the cause of his Lord. Brom was born to be an assassin and holds Maceo in high regard for providing him with the opportunity and rewards that come with the position. In his role of Viceroy to the Archduke, the Count is usually entrusted with the most sensitive and critical of missions.



House Brujo

House Size: 650 (100 non-Knights).

Alignment Breakdown: 60% Aberrant, 15% Anarchist, 15% Miscreant, 10% other.

Racial Restrictions: Humans and Elves only.

Specialized Non-Knight Membership: Limited to mages.

Banner Colors: Blue and white.

Banner Symbol: A Gothic griffin.

The first formed of the Great Houses, Brujo still commands tremendous respect within the Order. Though the House no longer holds the top control of the Order, Ealdor Ieldran Brujo shows no signs of disappointment or concern. Indeed, to an outsider looking in it would appear that the Ealdor hardly noticed the change. The fact is that since the creation of the Order, Brujo has slowly and steadily handed off more responsibility and power in order to focus his attention on the pursuit of magic. When Sigil became Archduke, Ieldran Brujo took it as another opportunity to shift more focus to his obsession. As it is controlled predominately by Elves, the leadership of House Brujo is capable of great patience and restraint, both in the tolerance of their Ealdor's magical pursuits, as well as their revised status as second House of the Order.

Motives

Many of the members of House Brujo are motivated solely by their pursuit of the magical arts. This is a direct result of the Elven leadership of the House, as well as the large number of Elves holding House membership. This long lived race, through the research and perseverance of their Ealdor, has acquired the ability to learn new magic spells, in the fashion of traditional spellcasters (see revised O.C.C.). The discovered process, which can take months, or even years, for the learning of a single spell, is not realistic for the human membership that holds a majority within the Order. It is, however, uniquely suited to the Elves because of their extended life spans. For the largest majority of House Brujo's membership, all other motives, such as political ambition, are merely a means to an end in their pursuit of magic.

In relation to their magic focus, the Brujo Imperator has been tasked with the recovery of magic items and scrolls for study. The items that have been deemed of the highest importance are those relics to be recovered from the War of Tolkeen, both from the survivors of that conflict and from the ruins of the great city itself. Similarly, with the importance that he attaches to magic, the Ealdor will rarely accept contracts from clients other than wizards. Brujo sees the rewards from these men of magic as far more important than any monetary compensation available from other non-magical clients. A relationship with a powerful mage is of immense worth to the leadership and Knights of House Brujo.

Relationships with other Houses

Of the Great Houses, Brujo is the one that maintains the strongest tie to House Isceald, a lesser House operating in Canada. House Isceald views Ieldran Brujo as the rightful Archduke, contending that he was never challenged by combat for the title and therefore retains it. Furthermore, they revere Ieldran Brujo as the founder of the Order, and would follow his commands without question. However, Ealdor Brujo is so far removed from Order politics, and so engrossed in his pursuit of magic, that he would be unlikely to ever call on them for their allegiance.

Inevitably, there is some tension and animosity between House Brujo and House Sigil, occurring mostly between the younger, non-ranked membership. Fights between the youth of these two Houses are quite frequent, though the Retainers of each House are quick to punish the Knights involved. Unfortunately, these conflicts are continuously urged on by the circulation of rumors that several Brujo Knights have been killed in the field by Sigil assassins. These rumors have become so prevalent, in fact, that they have spurred the creation of a secret Brujo sub-faction, calling themselves *the Vindicators*, who are intent on finding justice for their fallen brothers and returning the rightful power to House Brujo.

The Vindicators

The Vindicators are a secret sect of Knights within the ranks of House Brujo, attempting to covertly undermine the power and control of House Sigil and the current Archduke. The mindset of the Vindicators came into being shortly after Sigil's rise to power, however the group itself didn't materialize until the mysterious deaths in the field of several Brujo Knights. Sus-

pictions of Sigil involvement in these deaths not only prompted the group to form, but continues to fuel its increasing membership. While their day to day operations center on retaliation for the suspected foul play against their brethren, the ultimate goal of this hidden brotherhood is to return House Brujo to power within the Order.

Viscount Coran Drake is the appointed leader of the group, and takes it upon himself to personally recruit new membership. While fellow Vindicators will notify Coran of potential recruits, only the Viscount is allowed to approach them. As a first step to possible recruitment, he will have the Knight transferred to work under his direct supervision. Over the course of a few weeks the Viscount will casually probe their thoughts and loyalties, making sure that they will fit with the group. Those who do not measure up will find themselves transferred away from the Viscount with no knowledge of the Vindicators. If, however, he feels that they have the proper mindset and temperament, he will bring them into the fold, having them swear an oath of loyalty on his magic sword. This weapon once belonged to his father, Calhoun Drake, the first Emperor of House Brujo and the only original apprentice to come to Rifts Earth with Ieldran Brujo. Killed in combat almost ten years ago, Calhoun Drake has become a revered leader within the Order, and few would dare to swear an oath on his weapon that they didn't intend to keep. Likewise, the weapon itself carries an additional stigma as a "Holy" relic of the Order, having been wielded in battle by one of the first Knights of the art.

Coran is very selective when it comes to picking his membership, and the Viscount has yet to deal with a recruit who has turned down his offer to join the Vindicators. On occasion he has had to strong-arm or intimidate a few disenchanting members to remain silent and active, but those episodes are usually few and far between. Viscount Drake will regularly spur the enthusiasm of the Vindicators with tales of House Sigil's treachery, spinning an effective web of propaganda that keeps his membership thirsty for revenge against their Sigil foes. So far, the influential young Elf has convinced a fifth of the House membership to join his covert cause, and seems to gather more every month.

Notable Knights of House Brujo

Ealdor Ieldran Brujo

Rank: Ealdor of House Brujo. Race: Elf (see **Rifts® Conversion Book One, Revised**, page 86). Level of Experience: 13th; age 193, but looks to be in his early forties. Alignment: Aberrant. Attributes: I.Q. 21, M.E. 12, M.A. 19, P.S. 16, P.P. 17, P.E. 23, P.B. 14, Spd 17.

Ieldran Brujo is an old soul, having lived half his life on the planet of his birth, and the other half here on Rifts Earth. He has seen many things in his long life, and knows one thing to be undeniably true: Magic is power. Brujo sees magic as the greatest power imaginable and though he has spent nearly 200 years perfecting his dark variant of mysticism, he believes the Mystic Knight art to be stalled at a plateau. In his perception, it is his individual efforts that will break through this perceived ceiling of mystic power and reveal the most powerful form of magic this world, or any other, has ever seen.

Once a Knight of incredible skill, strong leadership and firm, albeit twisted, principle, Brujo has become consumed by his quest for magical supremacy, forsaking nearly all of the power he once held as leader of the Order. So strong is his devotion to this cause that he has convinced a majority of the Elves within his House to follow his lead. It is through their belief in his mission that he is protected from the power hungry Knights in the House ready to take over for the faltering founder.

Countess Meliva Vale

Rank: Countess Viceroy. Race: Elf (see **Rifts® Conversion Book One, Revised**, page 86). Level of Experience: 7th; Age: 43, but looks in her mid twenties. Alignment: Aberrant. Attributes: I.Q. 21, M.E. 17, M.A. 20, P.S. 14, P.P. 18, P.E. 15, P.B. 21, Spd 14.

Few who know Countess Meliva Vale can easily associate this cold, ambitious young woman with the Elven child who began her life as a message runner in the House of Ieldran Brujo. Brought to House Brujo before her 6th year of life, Meliva spent the majority of her formative years amongst the strict discipline and honor code of that House, learning what it meant to be a Mystic Knight. At the age of 19, she began to show not only serious interest in the path to becoming a Knight, but also an innate acceptance and aptitude with magic. Within 4 years of her admittance as an apprentice Knight, Meliva had surpassed both of her fellow apprentices and easily passed her Mystic Trials, becoming a full-fledged Mystic Knight in a surprisingly short amount of time.

Having attained her Knightly rank, Meliva spent more than half a decade making a name for herself in the Order, fighting alongside her brethren in many conflicts and distinguishing herself as a capable leader and excellent strategist. By the time she was promoted to Viscount of the Viceroy, Meliva had built up substantial glory and renown on her name, even having proven herself well enough to come to the attention of the Ealdor of her House. At the behest of Ieldran Brujo, Meliva was taken on as a protégée by Alandar Merkose, the active Count Viceroy at the time. Enjoying the responsibility of her position, and the authority that came with it, Meliva spent the next half dozen years serving the Viscount as his right hand.

Though she had always believed that her apprenticeship to Alandar would strengthen her chances of being chosen to take his place, Meliva had never expected it to happen as soon as it did. In a move that surprised not only Meliva, but also many of the other Counts and Viscounts, Alandar Merkose stepped down as Viceroy well ahead of his time, successfully recommending Meliva for the position. At the age of 36, Meliva Vale became the youngest Viceroy in the history of House Brujo.

Despite Alandar's glowing words of praise for her abilities when explaining his decision, Meliva has been aware of the constant whispers among some of her fellow Counts that the only reason she holds the coveted Viceroy position is due to Ieldran Brujo's interest in her feminine charms. For her part, Meliva pays little attention to the words, considering them simple bitterness and jealousy. Rather than try to challenge these perceptions with words, Meliva has turned her energies to performing her duties in exceptional fashion, and gaining the grudging respect of even her staunchest opponents.

Viscount Coran Drake

Rank: Viscount of the Emperor. **Race:** Elf (see **Rifts® Conversion Book One, Revised**, page 86). **Level of Experience:** 6th; age 31, but looks in his early twenties. **Alignment:** Aberrant. **Attributes:** I.Q. 13, M.E. 11, M.A. 20, P.S. 15, P.P. 17, P.E. 15, P.B. 9, Spd 14.

Viscount Coran Drake is a nobleman of the Order, being the son of Calhoun Drake, an original founding member of the Mystic Knight art on Rifts Earth. As such, he was able to quickly rise through the ranks, though this was not entirely due to his lineage. Though the Knight's skills with a weapon are average, his skill with the spoken word is unmatched in the Order. He is a natural leader, and would make an excellent politician. These are the skills that he has used to form his Vindicators.

Due to his noble lineage, Coran is given many of the privileges that are normally reserved for Counts. Among these privileges is the fact that he is the only Viscount allowed to attend the monthly briefing with the Ealdor. During these meetings he will usually take any opportunity he can to speak his mind about taking back power from the treacherous House Sigil. While he has not been formally reprimanded for these outbursts, they have thus far been ignored and brushed off as the brashness of youth by the Ealdor and his Counts. Regardless, Coran continues to push his anti-Sigil agenda every chance he gets, hoping that one day his words can inspire the leaders of the House as they do the Knights.

If the leadership of his own House cannot be moved in this way, Coran intends to move on to what he considers Plan B. Once he has ascended to the rank of Count, he intends to use his position and ancestry to form a new House that reflects the talents and ideals of his Vindicator faction, one that is not afraid to stand up to House Sigil and remove the "false" Archduke from power. In the unlikely event that this plan ever comes to pass, it could very well signal the beginning of a devastating civil war within the Order.

House Bregdan

House Size: 850 (150 non-Knights).

Alignment Breakdown: 65% Aberrant, 20% Anarchist, 10% Miscreant, 5% other.

Racial Restrictions: Humans and Elves only for ranked Knights. No restrictions for non-ranked Knights.

Specialized Non-Knight Membership: Limited to skilled men of arms and high level adventurers. No Crazies.

Banner Colors: Red and white.

Banner Symbol: A Gothic lion.

A powerful force within the Order, House Bregdan closely matches the strength of House Brujo. Bregdan is one of three Houses that, along with Brujo and Sigil, constitute the upper caste of the Order of the Mystic Knights. Though it is commonly accepted that Bregdan is the third House of the upper caste, beneath Sigil and Brujo, it is this House that holds the most control when it comes to large-scale conflicts involving the Order. The Knights of Bregdan are the officers and field commanders that keep the army moving.

Ealdor Willem Bregdan was the highest ranking Knight to stand against the takeover by House Sigil, but was overcome by the superior manipulations and political maneuvering of Maceo Sigil. Since that time, though his voice of open opposition has gone silent, Ealdor Bregdan continually weighs other options for ending the rule of Sigil.

Motives

The House of Willem Bregdan is a noble one, and its members operate as the equivalent of officers in a modern army, commanding the soldiers on the field of battle. To this end, Knights of Bregdan are specially trained as strictly in education as they are in magical and martial combat. It is Bregdan Knights who command the battles of the Order and any contract that exceeds 50 Knights will see Knights of this House dispatched as field commanders. These Knights hold to a much stricter code than others within the Order, and in situations where other Knights fall under their command they will strive to hold those Knights to their same high standards.

Despite his silence since Sigil's initial takeover, Willem Bregdan still desires to remove the upstart Archduke from power. Whether that power is ultimately returned to the former Archduke Ieldran Brujo, or claimed by Willem himself, the Ealdor of House Bregdan most desires the authority to forcefully return his House's strict interpretation of the code to the entire Order.



Relationships with other Houses

Though the Knights of House Bregdan continue to perform their duties to the Order admirably, there is a fair amount of animosity between the House and that of Archduke Sigil. Even prior to Sigil taking power, the leaders of the two Houses rarely spoke unless direct contact was absolutely necessary. Now that Sigil is in a position of authority, there is an even greater tension between these two men. Willem Bregdan has not forgotten the treachery of House Sigil any more than the Archduke has forgotten the strong words that the Bregdan House Lord used against him. Thus far, the politics between the two have been precariously balanced and carefully respectful. Should the scales tip, however, and the two Houses come into conflict, it would most certainly lead to an all-out civil war across the entire Order.

While Ealdor Bregdan and the Knights of his House command the respect of the other Houses, they have no close ties with any of them. Willem Bregdan sees the Knights of most other Houses as lacking the discipline necessary to truly follow his strict view of the Mystic Knight code. He doesn't actively dismiss his Knightly peers for this difference, but it has caused him to keep a great number of them at arm's length. On the flip side, this same elitist status has caused many other members of the Order to keep the Bregdan Knights at a distance as well.

Notable Knights of Bregdan

Ealdor Willem Bregdan

Rank: Ealdor of House Bregdan. Race: Human. Level of Experience: 10th; age 55. Alignment: Aberrant. Attributes: I.Q. 11, M.E. 14, M.A. 16, P.S. 20, P.P. 13, P.E. 17, P.B. 13, Spd 21.

Ealdor Willem Bregdan is perhaps the most noble of Mystic Knights, as he holds to a very strict interpretation of the Knight's code. While he is not what would be considered a good man by any stretch of the imagination, his word is true and his every action has purpose. Willem walks in the way of the sword and the gun, devoting his life to the craft of warfare, and though his allegiance must be purchased, it is unwavering. Unfortunately, it is this sense of duty with which he is now struggling.

Ealdor Bregdan is unsure whether he should give allegiance to the current Archduke who has taken power, or continue to uphold his loyalty to the former Archduke, Ieldran Brujo. His decision in the matter carries grave consequences for the Ealdor, and for perhaps the first time in his life, Willem Bregdan is unsure in which direction he should proceed.

Count Martin Ambrose Griffith

Rank: Count Retainer. Race: Elf (see **Rifts® Conversion Book One, Revised**, page 86). Level of Experience: 8th; age 49. Alignment: Aberrant/Scrupulous. Attributes: I.Q. 14, M.E. 21, M.A. 9, P.S. 13, P.P. 23, P.E. 15, P.B. 26, Spd 29.

Martin does not look the part of his position as Count Retainer to House Bregdan. His thin build, fair skin and long hair make the Elf seem completely out of place for a Knight of the Order. It is these looks, however, that fooled many into underestimating the Knight. By using both his charming appearance and superior skill in combat, Martin was able to quickly rise to a position of authority in the House of Bregdan. His ambitions were

helped along further by his heritage, as Martin carries the noble blood of Ieldran Brujo, passed down from his mother's side. As far as the Knight has progressed, his ambitions are considerably greater. He aims for nothing less than to become Archduke, ending the reign of men within the Order of the Mystic Knights and restoring the power to the Elves. Ultimately, Martin seeks to return honor to his Order, and in this goal he is not unlike Ealdor Willem Bregdan. Unlike Bregdan though, Martin clearly sees the rebirth of the Order through himself.



House Hiredmann

House Size: 3600 (800 non-Knights).

Alignment Breakdown: 35% Aberrant, 30% Anarchist, 25% Miscreant, 10% Diabolic.

Racial Restrictions: None (25% non-human). Notable non-humans include 3% Simvan Monster Riders, 3% Kittani, 2% Ogres, and 1% Vanguard Brawlers.

Non-Knight Membership: No class restrictions.

Banner Colors: Red and black.

Banner Symbol: A wolf bust.

Hiredmann holds the distinction of being the largest of the Great Houses within the Order, with a membership almost 4 times greater than the next largest House. This is due largely to the lack of required specialization in the House as well as Hiredmann's high tolerance for non-humans and non-Knights

within the ranks. Indeed, this Mystic Knight House will welcome almost anyone who will swear loyalty to its Lord. The Knights of Hiredmann are the all-purpose fighters and soldiers of the Order. In large contracts, these Knights serve as the line soldiers, always making up the bulk of the Order's mercenary armies. In addition to its work on large contracts for the Order, House Hiredmann works a great number of smaller contracts, sending out small contingents of Knights to supplement existing mercenaries and mages. Despite its large population and its high workload, the House is considered to be in the lower caste, and has little political power within the Order.

Motives

House Hiredmann operates purely to serve the Order and generate revenues, with no hidden plots or agendas. This is due, in part, to the fact that four different families have taken control of the House within the last 20 years. As each new family has taken control, the agendas of their predecessors have been swept away. So often has the power within the House been shifted from one Lord to another that the current Ealdor focuses almost entirely on retaining his current power, rather than pushing to expand the authority and influence of the House. Despite this lack of attention on Ealdor Hiredmann's part, the increased contact with the Archduke Sigil has begun to quietly strengthen the House's position. Should the current Ealdor realize this, and act on it, House Hiredmann could potentially become a very powerful force within the Order.

The Emperor of House Hiredmann is officially charged with the task of eradicating the Order of the White Rose. While other Houses actively pursue these rogue Knights, knowing that rewards are sure to follow, it is the sworn duty of this Emperor to hunt them down. Given the enormous size of the Hiredmann House, the Emperor controls vast resources for combating these hated foes wherever they may appear.

The Emperor also oversees many long-term contracts for the Federation of Magic, including providing security oversight for the city of Nostrous. In addition, the House has contracted to have Knights camp in the general vicinity of the cave entrances to the City of Brass as part of the defenses to keep out unwelcome visitors. Because the Mystic Knights are so prevalent in the Magic Zone, and have no publicly known connections to the Federation of Magic, they are considered less likely to arouse suspicion regarding their presence in the area.

Relationships with other Houses

Hiredmann faithfully serves the Order and the leadership of House Sigil, carrying out their responsibilities without question or complaint. The only strain on House Hiredmann's relationship with the other Houses is the issue of adoption. As the most populous House in the Order, not to mention the starting point for a majority of Knights, the other Great Houses have a habit of taking away many of the best Knights in Hiredmann, adopting them upwards into the higher Houses. However, resentment of this practice from the Hiredmann Counts and Viscounts is minimal, as they too seek acceptance into the upper class.

Notable Knights of Hiredmann

Ealdor Aleron Hiredmann

Rank: Ealdor of House Hiredmann. Race: Human. Level of Experience: 9th; age 29. Alignment: Miscreant. Attributes: I.Q. 9, M.E. 10, M.A. 8, P.S. 15, P.P. 20, P.E. 16, P.B. 15, Spd 17.

Known as Aleron Sarr before his rise to power, the Ealdor of House Hiredmann is constantly afraid of having his title and authority stripped from him. Though he adopted the House name with his ascension to power, Aleron carries no real bloodlines to the original Hiredmann family. Lacking this noble birth, the young Ealdor fears that he will become just another stroke in the ever changing canvas of the House leadership. This fear has rapidly progressed into an obsession, causing Aleron to forever question the motives of those around him. Even elevating members of his own family into Count and Viscount positions hasn't helped assuage the Ealdor's worries. Looking to surround himself with those supportive of his rule, he has succeeded only in making himself suspicious of his own flesh and blood. Aleron's paranoia keeps him in veritable isolation, leaving the day to day operations to his Counts and only risking the outside world to meet with the Archduke or, infrequently, to lead an army in battle.

Count Joseph Sarr

Rank: Count Viceroy. Race: Human. Level of Experience: 7th; age 27. Alignment: Miscreant. Attributes: I.Q. 19, M.E. 9, M.A. 11, P.S. 14, P.P. 17, P.E. 15, P.B. 10, Spd 18.

Aleron's younger brother Joseph serves as Viceroy, and effectively runs the operations of the House in his brother's stead. Though he has thus far dispelled rumors of Aleron's growing madness, Joseph is quickly running out of viable excuses for the Ealdor's behavior. Knowing that rumors of weakness will bring out their enemies, Joseph sends his spies into the ranks of the Viscounts, attempting to weed out those disloyal to his brother. Any Knight who is found wanting in loyalty will find himself reassigned to the front lines of the closest large-scale conflict or dispatched on contracts that amount to suicide missions. The Viceroy's hope is that his actions will prevent Aleron's paranoia from becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Count Walter Sarr

Rank: Count Emperor. Race: Human. Level of Experience: 10th; age 42. Alignment: Aberrant. Attributes: I.Q. 7, M.E. 12, M.A. 11, P.S. 20, P.P. 13, P.E. 15, P.B. 13, Spd 17.

Uncle to the sitting Ealdor, Walter protects the reign of Aleron with his life and sword, following his brother's dying wish. Yet, despite his best efforts, he sees that his nephew's sanity is slipping slowly away. Where once the Ealdor was strong and capable, Walter has seen the failure of his kinsman's confidence, and the effect it is having on the young man's behavior. To this malady the Count Emperor can see but one cure; he must bring honor to the Hiredmann House and legend to his Ealdor's name. To this end, the Count aggressively seeks out and destroys the White Rose wherever the Knights are found. He believes that bringing an end to the rogue Knights will secure the rule of the Sarr family, and more importantly, calm his nephew's turbulent mind. In this endeavor the Emperor spares

no resources, commanding an army of nearly 500 Knights, broken into 10 units, which search all over North America for the secret stronghold of the White Rose.

Viscount Faolan Sarr

Rank: Viscount of the Imperator. **Race:** Wolfen (see **Rifts® Conversion Book One, Revised**, page 76). **Level of Experience:** 8th; age 21. **Alignment:** Anarchist. **Attributes:** I.Q. 14, M.E. 13, M.A. 9, P.S. 24, P.P. 14, P.E. 15, P.B. 11, Spd 28.

Orphaned as a pup, Faolan was found by Aleron Sarr, wandering the forests near the city of Nostrous. Adopted by the Sarr family, the Wolfen was raised as a rogue Dog Boy, and proved himself to be a fierce warrior, ranking among the best fighters in the House. Elevated to the rank of Viscount when Aleron took power in the House, he has become one of the few non-humans to ever hold title in the Order. While Faolan is devoutly loyal to the Sarr family, he can't help but feel resentful of his position in his House and within the Order. With his adopted family members holding the ranks above him, the Wolfen knows that there is little chance that he will ever move above his current station. In addition, he knows that his race will prevent him from ever being adopted by any of the elite Houses in the Order, regardless of his merit.

As a result of his stalled advancement, Faolan has hatched a plan to increase his own importance. While the Count Imperator is off rooting out the last of the White Knights, Faolan is left to lead the troops in their protection of Nostrous. In this task, Viscount Sarr has not only succeeded, but excelled, felling every bandit group to come upon the city and personally slaying no less than a fifth of all such intruders. He seems to have unnatural instincts, always having his troops in perfect position to strike at threats to the city and prevent their escape. He has been recognized by the city many times for his valor, and once even received a commendation from Lord Dunscon himself.

Unfortunately, while he is undoubtedly one of the greatest warriors in House Hiredmann, his merits in battle are not all legitimate. Unknown to all save his own troops, Faolan has been secretly funding the attackers, paying poor, desperate bandits to attack the city, only to stop them himself and further elevate his reputation. In addition to padding his name, this fraud also pads the Wolfen's pockets, as Nostrous pays a bonus to Faolan and his troops for each attack they successfully thwart. Should his scheme of fraud ever be found out by the city, Faolan would surely face a quick and brutal execution. Fortunately for the Wolfen, since he never leaves any of his victims alive, it is unlikely that his deception will be discovered.

House Isen

House Size: 500 (300 non-Knights).

Alignment Breakdown: 35% Aberrant, 30% Anarchist, 25% Miscreant, 10% Diabolic.

Racial Restrictions: None (20% non-human). Notable non-humans include 5% Kittani field mechanics (non-Knights).

Non-Knight Membership: Primarily skilled professions, including Operators, Techno-Wizards, pilots, scholars and doctors.

Banner Colors: Gold and white.

Banner Symbol: A Gothic eagle.

House Isen is responsible for support functions for all the Great Houses of the Order. The members maintain weapons, armor and vehicles; prepare fortifications; develop, deploy and defuse explosives; treat wounded Knights; pilot transports; and care for horses and other exotic mounts. The House not only opens its doors to non-Knights, it often relies on the expertise that these outsiders bring into the fold. Isen is the only House where the non-Knight membership actually outnumbers the Knights.

Motives

Despite sometimes being looked down upon by their peers in the Order, the Knights of Isen fill an important role in managing the support staff of the armies, especially during large or extended contracts. The Knights and other agents of the House act as field medics and mechanics, repairing battle damage to both metal and flesh alike. In addition, they are responsible for raising and providing horses and pack animals to the other Houses, building up fortifications, as well as setting up traps and explosives and detecting and defusing those of their enemies. However, while these Knights usually serve in these support roles, they have the same combat and magical training as other Mystic Knights in the Order, and are just as lethal.

In addition to its work with the armies of the Order, the House also contracts out its services as mechanics and Operators, performing both standard services as well as TW upgrades. One of the House's most profitable ventures to date is the re-



charging of E-Clips. Due to the Mystic Knight's natural ability to channel P.P.E. into energy, they can offer better deals on a recharge than most other vendors. Isen also gets a number of contracts to send Knights and Techno-Wizards as field mechanics, a capacity in which they can support a large mercenary company with mechanical maintenance in addition to acting as backup infantry.

Relationships with other Houses

House Isen is largely removed from the political process inside of the Order. The Ealdors of Isen have long held the tradition of not involving themselves in the machinations that pervade the upper Houses. This doesn't mean, however, that the leaders of Isen are uninterested in personal gain, only that they follow a different path. Instead of playing the political games, the Isen nobles have been laundering money from the House's income into their own pockets for years. The Ealdor, his Counts, and some selected Viscounts own lavish homes and vehicles and surround themselves with the best things that money can buy. While this extravagant spending and behavior on the part of the Isen nobility has not gone unnoticed by the Archduke, it has thus far remained unchallenged. Whether Sigil is simply allowing the Ealdor autonomy to run his House, or biding his time until it is most advantageous to level an accusation, remains to be seen.

Notable Knights of Isen

Ealdor Cedric Isen

Rank: Ealdor of House Isen. Race: Human. Level of Experience: 11th; age 46. Alignment: Anarchist. Attributes: I.Q. 15, M.E. 7, M.A. 10, P.S. 14, P.P. 17, P.E. 16, P.B. 8, Spd 12.

Keeping with the precedent set down by his forefathers, Cedric Isen does not get involved in the politics of the Order. Instead, he simply obeys the commands of his Archduke and respects the words of his fellow Ealdors. This philosophy has kept him well under the radar and helps him to hide a dire secret; Cedric Isen is a double agent for the Order of the White Rose. However, while the Ealdor agrees with their principles and precepts, he lacks the conviction of the White Rose Knights to break away from the Order. Likewise, he does not wish to relinquish the power and comfort he has attained and trade it for a life of hiding and being hunted. For their part, members of the White Rose agree that he should remain inside the Order of the Mystic Knights, able to secretly transport new members out of harm's way and funnel money and information to their cause. Should this affiliation ever come to light, it would certainly spell the end of Cedric Isen, and likely the end of his entire House as well.

Count Dade Vivender

Rank: Count Quaestor. Race: Human. Level of Experience: 6th; age 25. Alignment: Miscreant. Attributes: I.Q. 16, M.E. 19, M.A. 9, P.S. 10, P.P. 12, P.E. 15, P.B. 7, Spd 19.

The only son of a merchant with less than perfect morals, Dade's upbringing included the craft of stealing money through nonviolent means. At a very young age he learned how to fix prices, drive up demand and most importantly, hide earnings

from the tax collectors and others with their hand out. Though it seems like a lifetime ago to him now, Dade still remembers those lessons well, and applies them to his current position as Quaestor by skimming money from the House's profits to line his own pockets. Though this is hardly unusual in House Isen, where every noble seems to live in the lap of luxury, Dade has taken the practice to the extreme, secretly drawing off for himself almost twice what the other Counts receive. Unfortunately for him, the one skill that Dade hasn't learned is discretion. Dade is continually increasing his cut, and spends the credits he gets almost as fast as he pockets them. So far, of the other nobles that are on the take, only Ealdor Isen has confronted the Quaestor, and Dade had to agree to split his extra take with the Ealdor in order to keep him quiet.

Despite the large amounts of money that Dade manages to pilfer on a regular basis, the young Count has realized that the ability of his position to steal funds is eventually going to reach a fiscal plateau. Even as Count Quaestor there is only so much money he can take before his activities become apparent to one and all. To this end, Dade has rethought his goals in the Order and his ambition is now no less than to dethrone Cedric Isen and take his place as Ealdor of the House. Unfortunately, Dade is well aware that he can't match the Ealdor in battle or challenge, and as such, he has been biding his time, looking for any possible edge that could allow him to unseat the House Lord. Should Dade ever discover the truth regarding Ealdor Isen's connections to the Order of the White Rose, the ambitious Count would surely use the information as leverage to accomplish his goals.

Other Houses

While only five Great Houses were created during the formation of the Order, there are a handful of other Houses that have formed outside the boundaries of that organization. These usually consist of groups of Knights who have been either separated or banished from the Great Houses. While these Knights may not swear loyalty to the Order, they still have much of the same training, generally follow the same code and carry the same stigma of horror and fear that surrounds all Mystic Knights. In addition, these Houses represent the only Knights that an adventurer is likely to encounter outside of the Magic Zone.

House Isceald

House Size: 1500 (400 non-Knights).

Alignment Breakdown: 30% Aberrant, 30% Anarchist, 30% Miscreant, 10% other.

Racial Restrictions: None (20% non-human).

Non-Knight Membership: No class restrictions.

Banner Colors: White.

Banner Symbol: A grizzly bear track.

House Isceald is perhaps the oldest House in the Order, though its creation followed a different path than that of the Great Houses. Prior to Ieldran Brujo's forming of the Order, the ancestors of the Isceald Knights existed much as all Mystic Knights did, living in family and social groups throughout the Magic Zone. However, unlike many Knights, who roamed the

land and called no place home, these Knights established a base of operation, taking up residence in a small farming town called Iscaeld. Accepted as the leadership of the town in exchange for their promise of protection, the sect of Knights was able to flourish over the years, strengthening their fame as well as swelling their ranks. The Knights of Iscaeld would have been well in line to participate in the formation of the Order, had the magical nature and eventual fate of their adopted home not taken the opportunity out of their hands.

Having moved into the community for its location upon a ley line, the Knights had discovered quickly that Iscaeld was not just an ordinary farming town, but one of the mysterious Fadetowns known throughout the Magic Zone. Seeing the movement of the town as a boon to their occupation, and finding the initial side effects easily tolerable, the Knights set up shop and existed there for years. All would have remained as it was for many years to come had the magic not taken a hand in altering the lives of the Iscaeld Knights forever. On a dark night, five years before the Order would be formed, a terrible Ley Line Storm ravaged the town of Iscaeld. At the height of the storm, just as it passed overhead, the town began to “fade” one last time, mixing with the raw power unleashed by the storm and disappearing from the Magic Zone for good, reappearing hundreds of miles Northwest in the frozen landscape of Canada. This abrupt change in environment, however, would not be the most drastic that the town and Knights would have to accept. They would soon discover that while only a few moments had passed for them, time in the real world had advanced rapidly. The Fadetown’s natural flux, along with the power of the Ley Line Storm, had transported Iscaeld through both space and time, returning the town to the face of Rifts Earth nearly 50 years after it had disappeared.

Though there were some among their ranks that lamented the separation from the Magic Zone, and their own time, the mystic mass exodus was generally accepted by most of the Knights, who set about reestablishing their power base. It was only several years later, after securing their new home and place in the northern wilderness, that the Knights of Iscaeld began to actively pursue knowledge of their former comrades. Their investigations southward into the Magic Zone would soon reveal to them the formation of the Great Houses and the creation of the Order of the Mystic Knights. Deciding, after all those years, that they were satisfied with their own leadership for day to day operations, the Knights chose to remain in their adopted town of Iscaeld, forming their own Mystic Knight House. Making contact with the Order, House Iscaeld pledged themselves as allies to their Magic Zone counterparts. Today, though the House is not considered a Great House of the Order, Iscaeld’s independence has been fully recognized and they are considered a member of that organization.

While the town of Iscaeld is still considered a Fadetown, its magical activity has dropped to a minimal level, with strong “fade” effects happening only once every six to eight months. Whether the town will ever return fully to the Magic Zone is a mystery that not even the wisest among them can solve. However, enjoying their independence away from the main Order, the Knights of Iscaeld have no desire to see this come to pass.

Motives

The Knights of Iscaeld operate more or less independently of the Order of the Mystic Knights, contracting their services in Canada. Though it was chance, not choice, which landed the House in Canada, far away from the rest of the Order, the Ealdor of Iscaeld likes the situation that the relocation has provided. Ealdor Berkeley likes running things his own way and seeks to grow his House to rival any other mercenary company in the North. Like House Hiredmann, these Knights don’t have any specific specialty, save perhaps their adaptation to living in the wintry North. However, where the House most differs from its Order based counterparts is the role of non-Knights within their ranks.

The Quaestor of Iscaeld, for example, is not a Mystic Knight, a practice that is unheard of in the Great Houses. Instead the position is held by Count Nathan Hall, a human Headhunter who grew up in the village of Iscaeld and earned the title, and retains it, with good reason. Hall is the face of the House in many instances, visiting nearby towns and selling the services of his mercenary company to eliminate supernatural threats. While most towns don’t trust and will shun the Mystic Knights, Hall is able to keep the identity of his “company” a secret and thereby generate a full third of the House’s revenue by posing as the leader of a standard, mundane mercenary army. Furthermore, Hall is a suave and tricky businessman, able to squeeze out more payment than many clients are initially willing to spend. This is often done through questionable business practices, including claiming a single monster bounty from several different clients.

Relationships with other Houses

House Iscaeld is effectively cut off from the rest of the Order and has limited relations with any of the other Houses. However, they remain loyal to the Order as a whole, and would answer the call from the Archduke should a major conflict arise. Though the Knights of this northern House would respond to Sigil, their loyalty ultimately lies with Ieldran Brujo and his descendants, who were in power when they joined the Order. They honor the Elf as the founder of the Mystic Knights, and the “one true Archduke.” Should House Brujo formally rebel against Sigil’s leadership, Iscaeld would quickly send Knights south to join the fight for the man they consider to be the real leader of the Mystic Knights.

Notable Knights of Iscaeld

Ealdor Jonathan Berkeley

Rank: Ealdor of House Iscaeld. Race: Human. Level of Experience: 11th; age 56. Alignment: Aberrant. Attributes: I.Q. 14, M.E. 9, M.A. 11, P.S. 19, P.P. 17, P.E. 16, P.B. 13, Spd 15.

Founder of the House of Iscaeld, Jonathan Berkeley is a typical Mystic Knight. He sells his services, and those of his House, to the highest bidder, faithfully executing his duties through to the end. After a contract is complete, however, he has no qualms about selling his services to a former client’s enemies. Berkeley was also the catalyst for his House’s relationship with the town of Iscaeld.

Early in his career as a mercenary, Jonathan met Nathan Hall, a Headhunter from the town of Iscaeld. Though he wasn't the best Headhunter in the region, let alone in his own town, Hall did have a good head on his shoulders and a sound strategy to increase his own prominence. Whenever the town would post bounties for supernatural creatures that no one in Iscaeld could manage, Hall would subcontract the work out to the Mystic Knights, collecting the money and then paying the Knights for their services. It was Berkeley who slew the very first demon for Hall under this arrangement, and many more would follow in the months to come. However, the beasts that often plagued Iscaeld soon grew tired of being hunted down one by one and, forming together, attacked the town en masse. The town was nearly destroyed before Hall's call for help was finally answered by Berkeley and his band of Knights.

When the battle was over and the Knights stood victorious, Berkeley demanded that the town turn over whatever wealth they had left, as payment. Hall, knowing the town had little to give and ever the crafty bargainer, saw a possible opportunity in this turn of events and set about to orchestrate a deal between the surviving members of the town and Berkeley's band. The Knights would live in Iscaeld, protecting the town from any external forces that threatened them. In exchange, the town would provide them with food and shelter, as well as an equal cut of the local tax. Seeing the merit in the deal, and considering the possible benefits in controlling the Fadetown, Berkeley agreed and has worked closely with Nathan Hall ever since.

Count Nathan Hall

Rank: Non-Knight; Count Quaestor. Race: Human. Level of Experience: 8th; age 45. Alignment: Miscreant. Attributes: I.Q. 16, M.E. 19, M.A. 9, P.S. 10, P.P. 12, P.E. 15, P.B. 7, Spd 19.

Though strange things had occurred in the Iscaeld Fadetown since well before the Mystic Knights had arrived, strange didn't begin to describe how it felt after the entire town was teleported hundreds of miles northwest into Canada and fifty years into the future. It was then, during the first days of orienting to their new and drastically changed situation, that Hall and Berkeley went into business together. While in the Magic Zone, Berkeley had a number of clients he knew he could depend upon for work. However, once transported through time into the Canadian wilds, the economy of both the town and the Mystic Knights came into question. In this dire circumstance it was the business-savvy Nathan Hall who shined through, quickly finding work in many nearby towns hunting the various beasts that roam the North's chilly wilds.

Hall became the representative of the town, and the face of Hall's Headhunters, a fictitious front company for the Iscaeld Mystic Knights. Hall himself would bring in every bounty for payment, earning himself a reputation as one of the best hunters in all of Canada. As a result, the Headhunter demands and receives top dollar for every assignment he takes on. Both the town and the Knights have grown rich off of this scheme, and as reward, Berkeley adopted Hall into Iscaeld House, eventually granting him the title of Count Quaestor, a great honor for a non-Knight.

House Despeiren

House Size: 172 (23 non-Knights).

Alignment Breakdown: 45% Miscreant, 40% Diabolic, 10% Aberrant, 5% other.

Racial Restrictions: None; but rarely non-human.

Non-Knight Membership: Limited to Necromancers only.

Banner Colors: Red.

Banner Symbol: A human skull.

Founded by a band of Wandering Knights, House Despeiren is a cult of death, separate from the Great Houses and reviled by many Mystic Knights, both inside and outside the Order. Despeiren is one part Mystic Knight House, one part dark magic guild and one part vampire haven. These twisted Knights work, and ally, with foul Necromancers and worship the lords of the undead, Vampires. Operating in the Deep South, they roam the lands east and south of Lone Star, preying upon the weak and ever serving the goals of their vampire masters. While the vampires of Despeiren rule the night, the Mystic Knights protect and serve them during the day. House Despeiren is an aberration of the Order, and as with the White Rose Knights, they are viewed with contempt and disdain by most Mystic Knights.

Dimitri Levitan, the vampire king, commands the small Mystic Knight House, using them as his soldiers. Though he has turned some of the Knights to become his vampiric minions, he has left the majority of them human, so as not to diminish the daytime strength of his army. A group of Necromancers are also among the ranks of the House, learning the powerful dark magic from Dimitri. The most promising of these students are even instructed on how to return from death as vampires themselves.

Motives

Adrian Despeiren, the Count Imperator of House Despeiren, is a Mystic Knight turned into a Secondary Vampire under the rule of Dimitri Levitan. He leads a group of three vampires, all who were once his Mystic Knight apprentices, and who now serve as his Viscounts. As is common among wandering Mystic Knights, these four never broke the fellowship formed during their training, and when Adrian became a vampire the other three followed his lead. These four vampires, along with the Necromancers of the House and a few human Knights, serve as the nighttime army of House Despeiren, pillaging towns, installing themselves as the new rulers and feeding off the townsfolk for money and blood. Ultimately, the ambitions of the House are nothing less than to control the entirety of the southern badlands.

Relationships with other Houses

In the eyes of the Order, the warped Knights of House Despeiren are outlaws, just as wretched and hated as the Knights of the White Rose. Despite this, they are not yet hunted by the Order, instead simply being branded as banished Knights and forbidden to return. Should any of them ever return to the Magic Zone they would surely be killed, just as any non-believer Mystic Knights would be met with hostility if found traveling south of Lone Star. Fortunately for both sides, the Knights of

Despeiren have no desire to return north, and the Order rarely fulfills contracts outside their sphere of influence in the Magic Zone. Under these terms, one might say that the two groups of Knights have reached an uneasy truce.

Notable Knights of Despeiren

Count Adrian Despeiren

Rank: Count Imperator. **Race:** Secondary Vampire (see **Rifts® World Book 1: Vampire Kingdoms**, page 14). **Level of Experience:** 7th level Mystic Knight, 2nd level Secondary Vampire. **Alignment:** Aberrant. **Attributes:** I.Q. 17, M.E. 23, M.A. 20, P.S. 28, P.P. 23, P.E. 20, P.B. 14, Spd 24.

Adrian was born into the Order as a member of House Hiredmann, growing up to be a proven and successful Knight. Performing well on the field of battle, he was named to the rank of Viscount to the Imperator at the fairly young age of 21. This talent would give rise to a strong ambition that would eventually wind up being the man's undoing. When the Count Imperator was killed in battle, and Adrian was not selected as the new Count, the young Knight was furious, demanding that he be allowed to challenge the new Imperator for the title. Though this challenge was completely outside the normal tenets of the Order, and well within his rights to refuse, Ealdor Hiredmann weighed the Knight's merits and decided to allow the challenge to take place. Though he fought viciously, and the battle was closely matched, Adrian was eventually defeated in the one-on-one combat. Customarily, the penalty awaiting a foolhardy Knight who underestimated his superior would be a swift death. However, considering his successes in the field, Ealdor Hiredmann took pity on the Knight, sparing his life, but banishing him forevermore from membership in the Order.

Cast out from the only world he had ever known, Adrian traveled south, allowing time and distance to heal his wounds, both of body and spirit. Contracting out his services as a soldier for hire, the Knight began the process of building a reputation anew outside of the Order. In time, Adrian convinced other Wandering Knights he encountered to work with him, ultimately forming a small mercenary company that he would call, as a jab at the Order, House Despeiren. Assigning himself the title of Count Imperator, the rank which had caused his banishment, Adrian ruled the mercenary House as Count.

Though greatly skilled in their arts, work for House Despeiren was often sporadic, sometimes going for months without a solid contract. However, that would change when Adrian made the acquaintance of a very unusual employer, a dark Necromancer by the name of Dimitri Levitan. Impressed with the Mystic Knight's abilities, Dimitri provided the mercenary company with ongoing, albeit relatively simple, work stealing magic items, hunting down supernatural beings and retrieving the corpses of many different creatures. These missions continued, off and on, for many months until the untimely demise of the Necromancer. Arriving back at Dimitri's compound after a successful mission, Adrian and his apprentices found the site under attack by a horde of demonic creatures, apparently seeking retribution against the Necromancer. Too late to spare their employer from a painful death, the Knights instead turned their attentions to his attackers, fighting off the demons

and then beginning to inspect the ruins for any salvageable magic items. What they didn't expect to find, however, was the Necromancer awoken to undeath, transformed from human to vampire by some dark magic.

Knowing only that vampires were mindless killers and fiends, the Mystic Knights stood ready to kill the creature, until it spoke with Dimitri's calm voice, right down to using the same tone and inflection. Adrian Despeiren had heard rumors that such a thing was possible, but had never believed it to be true. Standing before him now though was irrefutable proof, no mindless, Wild Vampire under the thrall of another, but the birth of a powerful Master Vampire, in complete control of his new form. Adrian found himself instantly enamored with the creature, idolizing what he considered to be a perfect blending; the power of a vampire with the mind of a man. Pledging their loyalty to the newly born creature, and serving him with respect and admiration, the Count and his apprentice Knights were eventually rewarded with what they craved, vampiric transformation. As a Secondary Vampire, Count Despeiren has lost some of the composure of his human form, but considers it a fair trade for the untold power he has received in return. With much of his training and magic abilities still intact, vampiric Count Adrian Despeiren is among the most feared of all Mystic Knights.

Count Edward Wynn

Rank: Count Retainer. **Race:** Human. **Level of Experience:** 6th; age 26. **Alignment:** Aberrant. **Attributes:** I.Q. 11, M.E. 13, M.A. 12, P.S. 19, P.P. 15, P.E. 15, P.B. 6, Spd 22.

Wynn is Count Adrian Despeiren's most trusted Knight, even more so than the Count's own apprentices, and he has earned it through his own merit. Edward was the first Knight to join ranks with Adrian, and first to swear loyalty when he declared himself Count of a new House. The two share a strange bond, thinking alike and often even speaking alike. Perhaps the only thing that the two Knights don't share is ambition. While Adrian is clearly a leader, Edward is happy and devoted in his role as a follower.

After Adrian formed the rogue House Despeiren, he named only one other Count to authority; Wynn as Count Retainer. His primary duty was to protect Adrian, a job that became even more important once Adrian had been turned into a vampire. Wynn leads the human Knights and oversees the daytime operations of the House, ensuring that the vampires are kept safe during their slumber, and often seeing to Adrian's security personally. While Adrian sees the Count Retainer as his equal, Wynn clearly views his role as subservient to his vampiric master. This subservience, however, does not hold outside of his relationship with Count Despeiren. To all but his friend and Lord, Edward Wynn is a cold, heartless Knight, who is without mercy for those that cross him or threaten the House.

Dimitri Levitan

Rank: Non-Knight; Vampire King. **Race:** Master Vampire (see **Rifts® World Book 1: Vampire Kingdoms**, page 13). **Level of Experience:** 8th level Necromancer, 5th level Master Vampire. **Alignment:** Diabolic. **Attributes:** I.Q. 26, M.E. 21, M.A. 25, P.S. 31, P.P. 26, P.E. 22, P.B. 22, Spd 30. **Skills of Note:** Literacy: Dragonese 92%, and Speaks American,

Dragonese and Spanish at 98%. Spells of Note: Animate and Control Dead, Necro-Armor, Death Bolt, Command Vampires, Strength of the Dead, Summon Vampire, Transfer Life Force, Bone Scepter, Bone of Invisibility, Bone Staff, Fire Ball, World Bizarre, Horrific Illusion, Create Mummy, Create Zombie, Shadow Meld, Fragile Bone to M.D.C. Bone, and Return from the Grave.

A Necromancer from the swamps of the Southeast, Dimitri Levitan was orphaned at the age of nine by the violent deaths of his parents. These killings would be the first in a long string of events that would consume him in a fascination with mortality that he would never shake. When it came time to decide what he would do with his life, only one option ever truly existed for Dimitri; he would study the black arts that would allow him to control both life and death.

To this day Dimitri carries an obsession that he developed in his youth, needing, at all times, to be surrounded by something dead. Corpses, skulls and bones are but the most common of the items that feed this obsession. The Necromancer also carries at least one Bone Magic item on his person at all times, and wears a pair of Gargoyle wings across his back, which he has fashioned into a gruesome cape. In addition to the items of death carried on his person, Dimitri has also buried all manner of corpses in the area surrounding his residence.

Despite his obsession with death in all its forms, Dimitri Levitan was unwilling to embrace his own when the harbingers of his destruction came calling. He was struck down at the hands of angry demons, seeking revenge for the Necromancer's crimes against their kind. Death, however, had always been anticipated by the Necromancer as an eventuality of his profession. It was an eventuality that the Necromancer had planned well for, and that was destined not to last. Using powerful Necromantic magic, Dimitri Levitan rose again, returning from the grave as a Master Vampire. Thus began the second era of he who called himself le Roi de la Morte, the King of the Dead. As his physical power increased with his rebirth, so too did his ambitions. No longer satisfied with just controlling the dead, Dimitri needed to control the living as well, if for no other reason than to comfortably sustain his seemingly insatiable thirst.

Dimitri is fluent in American, Dragonese and Spanish and has developed the habit of speaking in multiple languages while normally conversing with people. Rarely can the Necromancer bring himself to articulate an entire thought in a single language. This can sometimes cause confusion with the troops, as the vampire detests having to repeat himself and will rarely clarify his orders.

Wandering House

House Size: 2800

Alignment Breakdown: 30% Anarchist, 30% Miscreant, 20% Aberrant, 15% Diabolic, 5% other.

Racial Restrictions: None (50% non-human).

Banner Colors: Vary by group.

Banner Symbol: Vary by group. Usually skull designs.

Wandering House is the name used by the Order to describe those Knights who operate outside of the Magic Zone and elect

to travel alone or in small groups. Some are free Knights, allowed to quest on their own, or sent on missions to gain valor and build honor on their name. Others are banished Knights, forsaken by their Houses for failure and cast out of the lands occupied by the Order. Still others are apprentice Knights of those wandering outside of the Magic Zone. These Knights hold varying degrees of allegiance to the Order, dependent on the reason of their wandering. Wandering Knights have perhaps the least strict interpretation of the Knight's code, most honoring only credits and the means to their acquisition.

These Knights can be found scattered all across North America, some traveling in groups of four similar to the training groups within the Order. More often than not, these groups of four will contain at least one apprentice Knight, learning the techniques of this dark mystic art through experience in the field. Knights born of this wandering caste are looked down upon by their counterparts within the Order and considered the lowest form of Knight. Unless they are able to greatly distinguish themselves in battle, these warriors will never gain admittance into any of the Great Houses.

Notable Wandering Knights

Barrett, Son of Stygian

Rank: Master Mystic Knight. Race: Titan (see **Rifts® Convention Book One, Revised**, page 97). Level of Experience: 6th level Mystic Knight. Alignment: Miscreant. Attributes: I.Q. 14, M.E. 8, M.A. 11, P.S. 31, P.P. 21, P.E. 24, P.B. 10, Spd 21.

Though not a biological son of the famous Tolkeen General, Warlord Stygian, Barrett was raised in the ranks of her army and appointed to serve as her squire in his youth by King Creed himself. Learning the arts of warfare and mysticism from Stygian, Barrett regarded his master as the greatest warrior in North America. Having attained the rank of Knight by the time the war started, Barrett fought side by side with the Warlord, standing by her all the way to the end of the bloody campaign. At the last, the two Mystic Knights were only separated during the final assault on the city of Tolkeen, Stygian ordering Barrett to escort a group of fleeing civilians while she stayed behind to hold off the attackers. It was only after several direct orders from his teacher that Barrett agreed to split up, and it was the last time that the Titan ever laid eyes on her. While the great Warlord's body was never recovered, Barrett believes that his teacher was among the ranks of the fallen, and harbors an intense hatred of the Coalition for her demise.

While Warlord Stygian was a Knight of House Bregdan who left to serve King Creed, Barrett is a member of no House, and bears no allegiance to the Order. Instead, he hunts near the ruins of Tolkeen, searching for signs of his teacher, dead or alive, and destroying any of the hated Coalition enemy that cross his path. Barrett carries a Rune Axe with remarkable similarity to the one once carried by Warlord Stygian, though the weapon is crafted large enough to fit in his giant hands (Mega-Damage: 1D4x10; weapon magically returns when thrown).

Apollo Hiredmann

Rank: Former Ealdor of House Hiredmann. Race: Human. Level of Experience: 11th; Age 57. Alignment: Aberrant. At-

tributes: I.Q. 11, M.E. 10, M.A. 10, P.S. 18, P.P. 16, P.E. 16, P.B. 9, Spd 15.

Apollo is the last Ealdor of House Hiredmann to have carried both the family name, as well as a direct bloodline back to the House's founder, Arthur Hiredmann. Deposed more than twenty years ago, Apollo spent nearly five years searching for a means by which he could reclaim his power, and punish those who had robbed him of it. After all those years, with no ready resolution in sight, the former Ealdor finally made the decision to get on with his life, turning his back completely on the Order that had been his birthright and never looking back. Though he had been working as a soldier for hire in order to support his efforts to return to prominence, Apollo finally began to take the occupation seriously, hiring out as a skilled mercenary and quickly growing a reputation as one of the best money could buy. Today, more than twenty years later, Apollo Hiredmann has come to enjoy the freedom of his life and thoughts of returning to the Order of the Mystic Knights are nothing more than a distant memory.

Despite Apollo's lack of desire to rejoin the Order, the Mystic Knight has found his interest in leadership recently renewed. Having accumulated a large amount of money over his successful mercenary career, he has decided to put his resources to work by forming a small mercenary company under his control. Working the contacts he had acquired through the years, the former Ealdor has gathered together a group of seven talented mercenary soldiers, each of whom brings a unique skill set to the fold. Dubbing the company *El Cazador*, or "The Hunter," and operating out of an established home base in the city of Kingsdale, Apollo contracts out the group for mercenary jobs of varying sizes and difficulty. Having long ago given up even the trappings that marked him as a Mystic Knight, Apollo is able to easily deal directly with clients without the stigma of being recognized as a member of that hated occupation.

Forbidden House: The Order of the White Rose

House Size: 1500

The Order of the White Rose is the mortal enemy of the Mystic Knights, representing the most heinous of traitors for killing their own and forsaking the Order. While the Mystic Knight code allows for a Knight to challenge his master, it is understood that he must remain loyal to the Order itself. These White Knights have left the Order and sworn loyalty to another cause, taking up an oath of arms against the Mystic Knights. These actions, no matter how they are motivated, are unacceptable to the laws of the Order. The Archduke has now labeled this gathering of Knights as *Forbidden House*, and membership is considered a sentence of death. Though outwardly the Order declares that the White Rose Knights have been completely vanquished, the truth of their continued existence is known all too well. Even now the

rumors of a White stronghold outside the Magic Zone echo in the halls of every Great House.

Though they are always careful to openly rebuke these Knights as traitors to the cause, not all Houses within the Order view the threat of the White in the same fashion. Archduke Sigil has become obsessed with the group, furious that they openly question his power and tarnish his reputation. He feels, in fact, that their very existence speaks poorly to his control over the Order. Ieldran Brujo, on the other hand, could not care less about their existence, interested only in his continued quest for magical growth. Meanwhile, Cedric Isen condemns the actions of "Forbidden House" to his fellow Ealdors, even as he operates as an agent of the White within the Order, sending willing recruits and supplies eastward, where the Order of the White Rose will retrieve them. One of the strongest opinions of all though comes from those Knights who seek to take power back from Maceo Sigil. To these Knights the threat of the White Rose is seen as the current Archduke's fault, and most consider his actions the reason the White was formed at all.

The origins of the Order of the White Rose date back to 92 P.A., only a year after Maceo Sigil seized control of the Order. A man of almost nonexistent morals, his ascension to the rank of Archduke heralded an age of increased bloodshed and wickedness, with the Knights of his House often at the forefront. In fact, though the Knights who marched on the town of Bloom were of House Hiredmann, it was a Knight of Sigil who led the group, insistent on securing the magical flowers for his House by any means. It was the greedy, immoral Viscount Desmond Sigil, adopted son of Archduke Maceo Sigil, who was felled in the city of Bloom by the mutiny of the White Knights. It is commonly believed within the Order that the values Desmond displayed that day were those encouraged by the new leadership, and therefore the catalyst of the revolt.

Despite all this, Maceo Sigil dismisses any notions of responsibility, and points the blame squarely at the Knights who revolted that day in Bloom. To rectify the situation, the Archduke has declared it the responsibility of House Hiredmann to dispatch every last White Rose Knight, as it was their Knights who originally defected. Even now though, 18 years after the incident at Bloom, the Order is no closer to uncovering the secret stronghold of the White Rose. Ask any Knight of Hiredmann and they will tell you that they have killed almost 100 White Knights, though they are hesitant to admit that their own losses in the conflict have surely been equal to that number. The reality is that no one in the Order, not even Cedric Isen, knows how big the White sect has become. Most members believe, however, that the ranks of the White Knights are dwindling and number no more than 200 at best. As a result, House Hiredmann fields an army of only 500, broken into ten groups, who search for the Knights. Were one of these groups to come across the secret town of the White Rose, it would surely be another great defeat for the Order, given the true size of the rogue sect.

For more information on the Order of the White Rose, see **Rifts® World Book 29: Madhaven™**, page 22.

Mystic Knight O.C.C.

– Revised

“An army of them, I’m telling you, a whole freaking army of them,” Roland said, taking another swig from the stranger’s flask and settling it back into his own lap. “There had to have been hundreds of them, maybe as many as a thousand.”

As he had been doing since the beginning of the conversation, Roland used his hands, looking as filthy and worn down as the rest of him, to illustrate his point by spreading them wide in a gesture of size that somehow conveyed numbers in his mind.

The stranger, seemingly unimpressed by the gesture and unconcerned that his flask was still in Roland’s possession, lifted one eyebrow in a questioning fashion. It was a simple motion, but it drew a reaction out of the ragged looking soldier.

“Listen, bud,” he said, starting to show irritation at the stranger’s doubt, “you can believe me or not as you choose, but I’m telling you that I know Mystic Knights when I fight them and this was a whole army of them. Not soldiers, not mercs, but freaking Mystic Knights. The entire city guard division of Baxton went down in under 15 minutes and I just barely escaped with my life.

“Figures,” Roland mumbled as he brought the flask back to his lips. “First person I tell the story to looks at me like I’m half crazy.”

Tipping his head back to drain the flask, Roland almost choked on the burning liquid as the stranger stood up abruptly, staring down at him with cold, emotionless eyes.

“Quite to the contrary, Roland,” the stranger said, a small smile tugging at the edges of his mouth. “I know for certain that you tell the truth. I’ve heard the tales of Baxton’s fall several times over the last two months.

“Though,” the stranger continued, “when last I heard the tale, the Knights numbered less than fifty.”

“Did you know someone stationed at Baxt...” Roland began nervously, a twist of fear tightening in his gut as his instincts belatedly kicked in.

“The funny thing is,” the stranger continued, as if Roland hadn’t spoken, “I wasn’t aware that we had allowed any of the Baxton Civil Defense to escape. I’ll have to speak to the commander about that when I see him next.”

Even as he reached for his weapon, Roland knew that it was already far too late.

Though many dark rumors and tales abound regarding the Order of the Mystic Knights, the reality is that very little information of any import has ever been widely known regarding these menacing soldiers for hire. To compound that fact, most of what is commonly known about them is distorted as a result of the fearsome reputation they have accumulated. For their part, the Order does absolutely nothing to dissuade the rumors and misinformation surrounding them, knowing that it is much easier to deal with the whispered secrets of the fearful masses than it would be to handle the world at large if the truth was known. For now, the Order is content to let the vast majority of the



North American population be ignorant to the true breadth of their power and influence, lest the Knights find themselves in consideration as a real threat by the major powers on the continent.

An Order in much more than just name, the relentless mercenaries known as the Mystic Knights are actually a powerful force to be reckoned with in the world of Rifts Earth. While outside the Magic Zone they are most often encountered working alone, or in small groups, lending credence to the concept that they are solitary cutthroats and killers, the truth of their size and organization is vastly different. In reality, the Order of the Mystic Knights more closely resembles an organized mercenary army, with a permanent base of operations, an established leadership hierarchy and a code of laws that governs their activities. From within the Magic Zone, five Great Houses exercise control over the Order, contracting out the services of thousands of these elite warriors for missions ranging from assassinations and small-scale incursions, to full-fledged military campaigns consisting of hundreds of Knights. Though there are other, lesser Houses and Wandering Knights spread across the North American continent, it is here that the true heart of the Order resides.

While the Order of the Mystic Knights will work contracts for anyone that is willing to pay the required fee, their evil reputation normally restricts their clientele to those of similar dark intent. Frequent employers include wicked mages, various evil organizations and individuals throughout the Magic Zone, the Black Market and of course, Lord Dunscon of the True Federation of Magic. Over the years since their formation, the Order has gained a reputation throughout the Magic Zone as a lethal force whose unflinching loyalty can be obtained for the right price. Once they have been hired to do a job, the Mystic Knights will pursue their assignment with relentless perseverance, holding complete loyalty to the client and honoring the contract to its final completion. Despite this ability to purchase their allegiance, the true loyalty of any Mystic Knight within the Order lies with their individual House and the organization as a whole. This can make them a powerful ally to those who deal with them honestly, and a horrible adversary to those who dare attempt a double-cross or refuse to honor a contract.

Mystic Knight O.C.C. Bonuses for Knights of the Great Houses

The following are class revisions to the basic Mystic Knight O.C.C. found in **Rifts® World Book 16: Federation of Magic**. These revisions reflect the more intense and focused training available to the Mystic Knight membership of the Great Houses. A Mystic Knight of the Order spends additional time in his meditations and studies, concentrating on the specialization of his individual House and how he might advance his own abilities in the pursuit of the House's goal. Due to this focused training, a Knight of the Order gains additional spells & skills at first level reflecting his House Membership. All of these bonus abilities are in addition to those gained from the Mystic Knight base class.

Determining House Membership: All Knights are members of a House or group. Select a House or roll on the random table below.

01-06 House Sigil.

07-15 House Brujo.

16-30 House Bregdan.

31-60 House Hiredmann.

61-65 House Isen.

66-82 House Isceald.

83-95 Wandering House. (Cast out from House. Re-roll for original House.)

96-98 Forbidden House. (Defected from House to join White Rose. Re-roll for original House.)

99-00 House Despeiren (Vampire House).

House Membership Bonus and Ability Packages

Apply the membership package of the House that your Knight hails from to the base Mystic Knight O.C.C.

House Sigil

Trained in the abilities of spying, sabotage and assassination, the Knights of House Sigil dedicate their lives and training to perfecting the skills of stealth. This specific focus grants the Mystic Knights of Sigil additional skills and spells related to their House specialization in the covert arts.

Bonus Skills:

Hand to Hand: Assassin

Tracking (people) (+15%)

Undercover Ops (+10%)

Bonus Spells:

A specialized Knight of House Sigil will have the following bonus spells known to him when he becomes a Knight: See Aura, Chameleon, and Cloak of Darkness. In addition, at certain plateaus in his training, the Knight will be able to select additional bonus spells based on his training focus. At levels 5 & 10 a Sigil Knight may select one additional spell from the following list: Agony, Invisibility: Superior, Locate, Mystic Portal.

House Brujo

Focusing their energies on the pursuit of magical advancement, the Knights of House Brujo devote themselves to the mystic arts that the class is named for. This specific focus grants the Mystic Knights of Brujo additional skills and spells related to their House specialization with magic.

Bonus Skills:

Language: Dragonese/Elf (+30%)

Literacy: Dragonese/Elf (+15%)

Research

+10% bonus to Lore: Magic

Bonus Spells:

A specialized Knight of House Brujo will have the following bonus spells known to him when he becomes a Knight: Sense Magic and Eyes of Thoth. In addition, due to their focus on magic, the Knights of House Brujo learn one additional spell of choice at levels 6, 9, 12 and 15. These additional spells can be selected from spell levels 1-10.

House Bregdan

Responsible for commanding the armies of the Order, the Knights of Bregdan concentrate on learning additional abilities to assist with their duties. This specific focus grants the Mystic

Knights of Bregdan additional skills and spells related to their House specialization of leadership and tactics.

Bonus Skills:

- Hand to Hand: Martial Arts
- Intelligence (+10%)
- Military Fortification (+10%)

Bonus Spells:

A specialized Knight of House Bregdan will have the following bonus spells known to him when he becomes a Knight: Charismatic Aura and Superhuman Endurance. In addition, at certain plateaus in his training, the Knight will be able to select additional bonus spells based on his training focus. At levels 5 & 10 a Bregdan Knight may select one additional spell from the following list: Magical Adrenal Rush, Sorcerous Fury, Meteor.

House Hiredmann

Warriors and expert combatants, the Knights of Hiredmann are most concerned with those added abilities that enhance their martial and magical prowess in battle. This specific focus grants the Mystic Knights of Hiredmann additional skills and spells related to their House specialization as front-line troops and fierce soldiers.

Bonus Skills:

- Hand to Hand: Martial Arts
- Detect Ambush (+15%)
- Forced March

Bonus Spells:

A specialized Knight of House Hiredmann will have the following bonus spells known to him when he becomes a Knight: Deflect and Fire Ball. In addition, at certain plateaus in his training, the Knight will be able to select additional bonus spells based on his training focus. At levels 5 & 10 a Hiredmann Knight may select one additional spell from the following list: Fire Gout, Lightning Arc, Speed Weapon.

House Isen

The Knights of Isen dedicate their training focus to those abilities that assist in their role as support for the Order. This specific focus grants the Mystic Knights of Isen additional skills and spells related to their House specialization as the strong backbone of the Order's lines.

Bonus Skills:

- General Maintenance & Repair (+15%)
- Field Armorer & Munitions Expert (+10%)
- Pilot: One of choice (+10%) or Paramedic

Bonus Spells:

A specialized Knight of House Isen will have the following bonus spells known to him when he becomes a Knight: Manipulate Objects, Watchguard, and Mend the Broken. In addition, at certain plateaus in his training, the Knight will be able to select additional bonus spells based on his training focus. At levels 5 & 10 an Isen Knight may select one additional spell from the following list: Dispel Magic Barriers, Wall of Defense, Summon Fog.

House Isceald

As the only Knights whose abilities were formed as much from their environment as their House design, the Knights of

Isceald have gained bonuses based on their combat focus as well as the icy landscape of their House locale. This specific focus grants the Mystic Knights of Isceald additional skills and spells related to their House specialization in combat and survival within the Canadian tundra.

Bonus Skills:

- Wilderness Survival (+15%)
- Detect Ambush (+10%)
- Outdoorsmanship
- Forced March

Bonus Spells:

A specialized Knight of House Isceald will have the following bonus spells known to him when he becomes a Knight: Crushing Fist and Frostblade. In addition, at certain plateaus in his training, the Knight will be able to select additional bonus spells based on his training focus. At levels 5 & 10 an Isceald Knight may select one additional spell from the following list: Fire Gout, Dragon Fire, Giant.

House Despeiren

With their obsession with all things pertaining to death, the Knights of Despeiren have gained additional abilities related to this dark fixation. This specific focus grants the Mystic Knights of Despeiren additional skills and spells related to their House specialization with the dying and the undead.

Bonus Skills:

- Language: Spanish (+20%)
- Wilderness Survival (+30%)
- Lore: Vampires (+20%)

Bonus Spells:

A specialized Knight of House Despeiren will have the following bonus spells known to him when he becomes a Knight: Armor Bizarre and Horror. In addition, at certain plateaus in his training, the Knight will be able to select additional bonus spells based on his training focus. At levels 5 & 10 a Despeiren Knight may select one additional spell from the following list: Agony, Animate and Control Dead, Deathword.

Details and Benefits Applicable to all Mystic Knights of the Great Houses

Racial Requirements: There are no restrictions to be a Mystic Knight, however some Houses impose a racial restriction on their membership (see Houses of the Order, above). Most (65%) are human. Both males and females can become Mystic Knights.

Learning New Spells: Though it is commonly believed that Mystics cannot learn new spells, Ieldran Brujo has proven this wrong. Though the frustration of being unable to learn additional spells has stopped most modern Mystics from even trying to tap this resource, the obsession of Brujo has finally unlocked the secret to doing so. When trying to learn spells from another, as opposed to intuitively gaining them with experience, the Mystic must meditate constantly for weeks. At least eight hours of each day must be spent in meditation on the spell. For a Mystic to learn a new spell in such a fashion requires 2D4 weeks per level of the spell he is attempting to learn. This means that learning a first level spell usually takes around four weeks,

while attempting to learn a tenth level spell could take well over a year. At this rate, learning new spells is impractical for most Knights, especially those of human descent. However, for Ieldran Brujo and the Elven elite in the Order, this amount of time seems inconsequential to their unusually long life span. Ealdor Brujo believes that learning these new spells is paramount to unlocking a new, more powerful form of dark mysticism. While Brujo has discovered this means by which perhaps any Mystic can learn new spells, he has kept this technique a secret from all but his most trusted Knights.

Equipment and Money: Ranked Knights of the Order will wear more ornate armor than those of the base rank Knights, often with Techno-Wizardry as rewards for their service. In addition, a ranked Knight will frequently carry additional magic weapons. (See **Rifts® World Book 14: New West** for a selection of TW guns and other items.) Knights with more experience will often have a robotic horse, monster steed, new hovercycle or some other mode of transportation.

Knights in good standing with the Order work through their Houses, and are paid a portion of the contracts they work on directly. Such a Knight is usually paid between 1500 and 3000 credits a month, depending on their reputation/rank and how much work they perform. In addition, the Order will provide housing, clothing, food, and other basic essentials.

Related O.C.C.s: The Mystic Knight presented here represents the selfish and evil Knights who make up the feared Magic Zone mercenaries. Stats for the good Mystic Knights of the Order of the White Rose, including White Knight, Squire, Keeper of the Garden, and Gateway Knight, can be found in **Rifts® World Book 29: Madhaven™**.



The Court of Tarot

Optional Material for Beyond the Supernatural™

By Scott Gastineau

Part One

Pearl Dance

“Thank you, Mister Hastings,” Anna said, “I’m okay. I just stumbled a little. It’s these shoes. I’m not used to high heels and long dresses. That’s not a very girlie thing for me to confess, is it?”

The tall, thin man scratched the long whiskers of an unkept beard. “Hope you don’t mind that get-up, Anna. The fashion’s a couple of years behind the curve, I reckon, but it’s the best a Florida cracker like me could do on short notice.” The rough, older man looked more than a little out of place himself, in a stylish tuxedo at the rotunda-lobby of a hotel known for its glamorous history. He spoke, however, completely at ease, “That’s one of my daughter’s dresses. I used to bring her to these shindigs when she was your age.”

“The dress is fierce, Mister Hastings. It’s a perfect fit. It’s the girl inside it who might not fit in.”

“Now don’t go second-guessing yourself, Anna. I seen you in action. You’re talented, and that’s why I brung you.”

“Why exactly did you bring me here, Mister Hastings?” she asked earnestly.

“The folks you’ll meet tonight can help you achieve anything – but they can also be a nest of angry water moccasins, and they’ll turn on you if you show them fear. Another thing, stop calling me ‘Mister Hastings.’ That’s showing weakness. I told you, friends call me ‘Buzzard.’”

Anna looked deeply into his face. Despite his unshaven appearance, Buzzard was one of the wealthiest men in the state, an educated scholar of the occult, a skilled hunter, and a brave warrior. That much she learned from knowing the man for a few hours. She suspected that she might know him for years but never figure him out. “Are these people your friends, Buzz?”

“No, they ain’t my friends, I reckon. I don’t trust half of them no more than a half-starved gator. They’re just a bunch of good old rich folk and crazies who get together for fancy-pants hoe-downs a few times a year. This here is the Pearl Dance, a tradition started by the founder, Queen Ida Alice Flagler the First. Then again, these here are helpful people to know. They can finance those expeditions you’re wanting, they got technology which nobody else got, and they know more about the supernatural than just about anybody. Besides that – well, they’re just interesting folk, I guess.”

Anna half-heard Buzzard and half-heard the loud party which was just beyond. The two new friends were standing in the Rotunda, the aptly named circular front lobby of the Ponce de Leon Hotel. She knew that the next room held a charity ball and the

most important people in Saint Augustine, Florida. Perhaps they were the most important people anywhere. Anna said, "I've got one more question before we go in, Buzzard-Man. Why are you helping me?"

Buzzard paused before answering, and his gaze drifted out to nowhere. "I like you, Anna. No, not that way. You remind me of my daughter. Besides, Saturiba likes you too, and the old chief is never wrong about folks."

Anna shuddered slightly at the casual mention of Buzzard's spirit guide. The Native American had been the chief of a small village where the town of Saint Augustine was located now. He had been a legendary figure during his own time and a respected commander among the now-extinct Timucuan people. Spanish colonists had described him as being strong and healthy, seven feet tall, covered in tattoos, and possessing long fingernails sharpened to points. Even without being able to see him, she somehow imagined the imposing presence of the figure whenever Buzzard mentioned him.

Buzzard guided Anna up a marble staircase and into the dining hall. During the day, the space was a lunch room where the students of Flagler College could sit and eat hot dogs on antique chairs worth ten thousand dollars each. This night, the college reclaimed its original identity as the Ponce de Leon Hotel, premier resort for the super-wealthy of the Gilded Age. Two classical bands took turns filling the room with dance music. A different waiter served every small table. Guests of every recognizable ethnicity, age, and fashion sense danced in the center of the floor, or they gathered in small, chatty groups around the edges of the room.

Anna had seen this room frequently, but it was never quite like this. As a student, she ate her meals in this room. As a part-time tour guide, she had shown tourists the priceless, stained glass windows by Robert Tiffany. She had never, however, seen the room in its full, gilded glory.

A stern guard in a black suit and unusual glasses moved close to the pair. Buzzard whispered something in the guard's ear. The guard turned to the crowd and shouted, "Announcing the arrival of Lord Jackson Hastings, the Five of Swords, and his guest, Miss Anna Anderson." The pair stepped forward to make room for another couple entering behind them.

Anna asked, "What's up with the colored monocles? I see several of the guards wearing them."

"Those are their psi-optics. It's a do-hickey made by the egg-heads at the labs. It lets a fellow see the auras of all the folks about him. It lets them know who's sick or possessed, whose got the mojo, and everybody's rank. When a somebody gets granted membership in the Court, the Queen herself will mark that body's aura with a Court symbol. We call it, 'etching.' My aura is stamped with her approval too. She likes to brand her herd."

"So anyone who can see auras can see the marks?"

"Yep, that's the purpose of the psi-optics. It's also a right handy gizmo for finding invisible critters too. Not everybody can use it, though, so don't start your birthday wish list just yet."

Buzzard led Anna to the dance floor. He waltzed surprisingly well; Anna picked up the moves quickly. She changed the subject, "How does a person get a rank?"

"Most ranks get bequeathed. It usually gets passed down through the family, but that ain't always the case. The Queen

can promote anybody to a higher rank when an empty position opens up. There were originally a maximum number of seventy-four members at a time, the number of cards in a tarot deck with four suits. Right now, I think we got just over a hundred members. The Queen can create new positions, but that don't happen often. She can't, however, take away a body's rank after he or she gains the rank. That's tradition."

"What do the suits mean? The card suits, I mean, not the tuxedos."

Buzzard answered, "Well, you got four original suits of the tarot; Staffs, Cups, Coins, and Swords. Each suit has fourteen ranks, starting with aces and going up to tens. After tens are jacks. After jacks we got counts or countesses. We don't use the term 'Queen' with a suit because it would make for confusion. There's only one Queen in the Court. After counts come princes or princesses at the top instead of kings. When the Court expanded, four other suits were added; Batons, Grails, Discs, and Daggers. When you put all the suits together, they're called the Minor Arcana.

"Each suit tends to stick to its own, but that ain't always the case. Staffs and Batons are mostly guards. They're mostly sol-



dier-types. Most of the guards around here don't have rank, but those that do are mostly Staffs. The Batons are more like a SWAT team.

"Cups and Grails are the engineers. Cups call themselves 'Psi-Mechanics.' The Queen personally funds their research and owns their state-of-the-art facility north of town. Old Tom Edison himself was the first director there, so my father told me. The first Queen hired Edison to create a speaker-phone for chatting up the spirits. Grails work with more traditional machines that anybody can use.

"Coins and Discs are the deep pockets. Lots of silver spoons with an interest in the occult are Coins. The Coins tend to be old money and the Discs are more new money, but that ain't always the case. My family has been Coins since my grand-dad's time, but I'm a Sword.

"Us Swords are scholars and investigators. The Daggers work with the Swords, but them Daggers tend to stay in the libraries. Some Daggers are real, honest know-it-alls. They also keep a big old collection of magic enchantments, but nobody in the Court other than the Queen herself has the mojo to use much of that hocus-pocus. Us Swords go out and do the field work. Mediums are preferred but most anyone with useful abilities can be a Sword. That's where you'll fit in, too.

"Last, there are twenty-two Major Arcana like in a tarot deck. The Queen herself is represented by the Empress card. Rumor says that Rasputin, the mad monk, was the first Major Arcana member, but I can't say that for certain. The Major Arcana works outside of the pecking order of the suits, so it don't have to answer to nobody but the Queen."

Anna had more questions, but she noticed a group watching her. They glared in a way which made her uncomfortable. "Who are they?" she asked.

"Who do you think they are?"

Anna studied them and answered, "The two older women are wearing very expensive jewelry but gowns which are years out of fashion. They're old money and probably identical twins. The twin in the maroon dress is dominant. The young man between them isn't a blood relative, but he is a friend of the family. His nasty ponytail and his wrinkled suit are his way of daring someone else to criticize him. From his body language, he's confident in this environment but he also has decided that I am some sort of problem. He's avoiding eye contact with you, so I think he's intimidated by you."

Buzzard told her, "Those three are trouble. The woman in red is Lady Ruby Warden. Her family, like mine, has been the Court since the beginning. She's the Princess of Coins. She don't got the fattest wallet, but she does manage all of the Court's real estate, which gives her a lot of clout. The woman in off-white is Lady Pearl Warden. She's only a Seven of Coins, but she runs a safe house for the Court south of town, and manages a small bank for the Court. The snot-nose is Lord Wilson Wilson the Third. In addition to giving him a name like a cartoon, his parents also left him more money than I'm likely to see in my life. He's only the Ace of Discs, the lowest rank. He's ambitious, though. He wants to climb the ladder."

"What does that have to do with us?"

"A Seven of Swords got himself killed recently without leaving his rank to nobody. That creates a blank slot which is ex-

pected to get filled tonight. Wilson wants it something bad. If he gets it, that will leave an Ace position open. Because I'm sponsoring you, you'll be in the running for that Ace spot. The Queen will probably go for it, if she likes you, so Wilson is reckoning that you will help him without meaning to. When he's done with you, he's likely to turn on you like he does to most. Best avoid that snake for now."

They left the dance floor to drink some punch. Anna wasn't thirsty, but she was pleased to leave Wilson's line of sight. "Does Wilson stand a good chance of getting what he wants?"

"I suppose there are others who earned it more than Wilson, but trying to guess what the Queen will do is like trying to fish while drunk."

"Why is it so hard to guess the Queen's decision?"

"The Queen don't always see things like you or me. She don't get out much. She tends to stay upstairs where she don't attract none too much attention."

"Which one is the Queen, Buzzard?" Anna asked while stuffing cake in her mouth.

"Here she comes now. Don't talk to her with your mouth full, Anna."

The crowd parted as a small group passed through. Among them, there were a few burly guards, an athletic woman, a balding man, and a doll-holding girl. Many other guests bowed as the group passed.

The woman with the athletic build walked with a long stride. Her dark hair was pinned up. She wore a crimson pantsuit, heavy boots, and a psi-optic monocle over her left eye. She carried a machine-pistol on her right-side hip, a baton on her left-side hip, and a stern look on her face.

Buzzard bowed slightly before the group and said, "It's an honor to be in your presence again, your Majesty. I remain humbly at your service."

The stern woman said, "Lord Hastings, introduce your guest. The Queen has asked to meet her."

"I present Miss Anna Anderson. The Andersons were great patrons of the Court during the reign of Queen Flagler the First, and it is my pleasure to introduce their descendant to Court."

Anna was a little shocked by this statement, but she tried to not let it show.

"Anna, these are the closest advisers of the Queen." Waving towards the stern woman, Buzzard introduced, "This is Lady Jasmine Ravenbilt, Captain of the Guard, protector of the throne, and the Princess of Staffs."

Anna curtsied. Buzzard continued, "Rumor has it that Jasmine was a colonel in the Isreali Special Forces. The story goes she left after she killed a general for forgetting to say 'bless you' after she sneezed."

Jasmine snapped, "That's why I don't deal with rumors, Lord Hastings. Why do you keep making ridiculous statements about me?"

"Easy, Jasmine, I'm just determined to see you smile before I die."

An older man with gray, thinning hair waited to be introduced. He wore glasses and a pin-striped, charcoal gray business suit with a silver necktie. Buzzard continued his introductions by pointing to the white-haired man, "This here is Lord Van

Dragen, head librarian of the knowledge, court magus, and the Prince of Daggers.”

Van Dragen smirked and said, “Good day, Miss Anna, aren’t you in one of my classes?”

“Yes, Doctor Van Dragen, I’m taking Introduction to Criminal Psychology this semester.” Buzzard snickered at this answer.

Van Dragen glared at the man. Buzzard explained, “He’s qualified – just ask Interpol. I’ve got his wanted poster to prove it.”

Van Dragen barked, “Lord Hastings, insults are beneath a man of your position.”

Buzzard turned to Anna before saying, “Don’t let the southern drawl fool you, Anna. It just so happens that he stole his English skills from some victim from Atlanta. Your teacher is Belgian. All across the continent, he’s known as the Memory Thief.”

“Memory Broker,” Van Dragen corrected.

Buzzard said, “That too. Remember it, Anna. You’re sure to get perfect grades from him.”

In the middle of the pack was a small girl, perhaps ten years old. She had curly blond hair worn down to her shoulders, large, dark eyes, and an exceedingly frilly dress. The girl held a curly-topped, red-haired doll which was wearing a matching dress. The doll’s blue eyes were slightly crooked. Buzzard directed Anna’s attention to the girl and the doll. “And this is the esteemed Queen Flagler the Fourth, Empress of the Major Arcana, ruler of la Florida, keeper of forgotten lore, champion of the mortal realms, and our gracious host.”

Anna curtsied again. She spoke directly to the girl, “Thank you for your hospitality, your Majesty.”

The girl simply stared into Anna’s face. A moment later, a voice came from the doll saying, “The girl is mute, Miss Ander-

son. We, however, greet you warmly. You are most welcome in our home. We are Queen Flagler by title, but you may call us, ‘Lady Teapot.’”

Anna said, “Uh, I, thank you, ma’am, Lady Teapot.”

The doll held out its hand, “You may now kiss our ring.”

Anna leaned forward and hesitantly kissed a small stone on the doll’s hand. When her lips brushed the fingers, she could tell that the arm was actual porcelain.

“Lord Hastings,” the Queen scolded, “You should have prepared your guest better. Do you enjoy using your Queen’s appearance to startle others?”

“Pardon, Lady T, I guess I just got used to you and forgot.”

“Indeed,” the Queen answered with no small amount of judgment in her voice. Switching to a softer tone, “We trust you are well, Lord Hastings?”

“I’m still kicking, Lady T. So long as the silver spoons keep wanting a guide through the hammock, I’ll be keeping busy. There’s always some yankee fool who wants to bag a giant alligator or swamp ape or some fool thing.”

“You are too modest, Lord Hastings. We have already spoken with Chief Saturiba. He has told us that you slew the Bogey Man who has been pillaging our streets. We would prefer to now hear your version, Lord Hastings.”

Buzzard rocked back a little. Anna quietly let him speak as the others leaned in closer to hear better. “Well, if the chief already told you, then I reckon I’ll just hit the highlights. That darn Bogey had gone from hunting stray cats and dogs to hunting homeless folks one week ago. That’s when the paper started calling him, ‘the Cannibal Bum.’ I’ve hunted Bogeys before, but this one was right clever. He left body parts all around the county to lead the sheriff deputies down the wrong trails, and he even twice planted evidence on a couple of hobos to keep the city police guessing. Our own Sensitives couldn’t pin him down



neither, so I tried the old methods. I learned tracking from the best. The chief gets confused by mobile phones, but he knows his tracking, sure enough. It took me four days, but I finally tracked the Bogey – to the ruins of the old Jesse Fish Plantation on the island. I suppose that I should have brought some backup, but I had hunted Bogeys before, like I said. This one took most of my rifle bullets, but I brung it down.”

Lady Teapot interrupted, “When did things go badly?”

“I’m getting to it. Well, Bogeys always hunt alone, right? I wasn’t expecting it, but that Bogey had been sharing a habitat with a pair of Ghouls. They were in the Fish family’s crypt, where they were munching on family bones for breakfast and Bogey’s leftovers for dinner. My brass bullets were as helpful against Ghouls as gull droppings. They heard my gunshots when I brought down the Bogey, and they came out of their hidey-holes. If it weren’t for Saturiba’s warning, I would have been supper. They backed me up into the ruins. That was when Anna, here, came to my rescue. Her team dropped those dirty Ghouls like old pros. That was about three hours ago.”

Anna thought that the cross-eyed stare of Lady Teapot turned to her, but she couldn’t be certain. “Miss Anderson, we would like to hear your report now.”

“Well, your Majesty, I was studying the Cannibal Bum killings also. I could see that the killer was working with accomplices by the distribution of the evidence. However, no one could pinpoint a location. I built a statistical model which showed that the killers were moving primarily at dawn and midnight. Then I remembered that according to *Worlds Within Worlds*, ley lines flare with energy during these times.”

Anna thought that she saw the advisors wince at the mention of the book. The Queen commanded, “Continue.”

“I theorized that the killer was using a ley line to hide his movements from psychics and police dogs both. Statistical analysis of the crimes revealed a seventy-nine percent probability that such a ley line existed on a specific path, running north to south with the flow of the underground river we call the Saint Augustine Aquifer. I assembled a team of students and took them to the island. Our psychic confirmed the invisible ley line, so from there it was just a matter of hiking the line until we found the killer’s hideout. We met Mister – I mean, Lord Hastings, when we arrived. The two humanoid creatures we encountered there were very hostile. We had to use deadly force.”

Van Dragen and Ravenbilt murmured something to each other which Anna couldn’t hear clearly. “We see,” Lady Teapot’s voice rolled like a contented purr. “Tell me, child, what is your ambition?”

“Your Majesty, I just wanted to stop the killings.”

“We mean what will you do next, Miss Anderson. Do you intend to remain a student at Flagler College for the rest of your life?”

“No, your Majesty, I’m majoring in archeology, but my primary interest is parapsychology.”

“What are you hoping to find in the dirt, Miss Anderson? Is it gold or fame?”

“Neither, your Majesty, I’m hoping to find the history that we lost. The archaeological record conflicts with the historical record at several key points. We are missing pieces of history,

chunks of five hundred years or more missing. Lost civilizations like Atlantis are waiting to be found.”

“What makes you think you can find these things, Miss Anderson?”

“I believe I was there. I sometimes get these random flashes of memory from another time. I wake up at night and hear myself speaking in a language which I can’t identify. The name I remember is Bimini. I think I was there in a previous life, and I think I can find it again.”

Anna jumped when an unexpected voice came from over her shoulder. “You should let her do it, my Queen.” Wilson Wilson was leaning over her. “Hastings’ pet is suggesting exactly the type of investigations which the Court should be pursuing. Too much of our talent is locked up in that research facility, building better mouse traps, when that personnel should be in the field.”

The Queen replied, “That would aid your own proposals, would it not?”

“Yes, my Queen, archaeological digs are an excellent cover for us to plant informants and sleeper cells in numerous countries which have been otherwise resilient to our infiltration efforts. The plan which I proposed last week will allow us to control the world’s leading universities. We could cut my timetable in half by placing the right agents at right dig sites.”

Lady Ravenbilt added, “There is a danger of extending our information network too quickly. We risk exposing ourselves.”

Wilson ignored her observation and pressed further, “My Queen, if you grant this girl the rank of an Ace, she will have access to our full library. We will benefit tremendously even if she never finds a single pottery shard.”

Buzzard began to speak but then shut his mouth tightly. He threw a look at Anna. She understood. Anna spun and confronted the young man, “Lord Wilson, I’m no younger than you. My research is legitimate. I wasn’t brought here by Lord Hastings to facilitate your Machiavellian schemes. Buzz off!”

Wilson coolly responded, “This one has teeth, Hastings. I had heard that you were raising fighting cocks, but I thought you had more sense than to bring one to a Court function.”

Hastings answered, “You’re mixing your metaphors, son. Cocks don’t got teeth.”

Lady Teapot declared, “We have heard quite enough. You will all be silent while we proceed with the ceremony. We have decided to accept Lord Hastings’ request that his associate be granted membership and rank within the Court. Miss Anderson, please kneel before us.”

Anna obediently knelt before the Queen and her advisors. Lady Teapot continued, “We, Queen of the Court, recognize the accomplishments of Lady Anna Anderson of the Saint Augustine Andersons. We grant to her the rank of the Seven of Swords.”

“No!” shouted Wilson, “Her hick family hasn’t earned that rank!”

With vision-blurring speed, Jasmine Ravenbilt was on Wilson. She shoved him against a wooden column, drew her baton, and pressed it against his throat in one smooth move.

Lady Teapot instructed, “Release Lord Wilson.” The baton dropped away. “We are certain that his Lordship may request that the Court hear his grievance and settle the matter. Of

course, such a hearing would require his Lordship barter some asset of peer value to the disputed rank, his inheritance perhaps?"

Wilson stuttered, "Tha-thank you, my Queen. I wouldn't inconvenience the Court with a matter so trivial."

Lady Teapot announced, "We will continue. Lady Ravenbilt, please administer the oath."

"With pleasure, your Majesty," Ravenbilt said with no pleasure in her voice. She moved in front of Anna and stood above the younger woman. The baton began sparking with a blue energy that rolled like liquid electricity along the length of its shaft. The older woman passed the baton over Anna's shoulders while speaking, "By the Queen's authority, you have been knighted. Please repeat after me, Lady Anderson. I pledge my life and obedience to the Queen and her noble Court."

Anna repeated, "I pledge my life and obedience to Queen Flagler and her noble Court."

The Queen continued the pledge, saying, "As proof, I swear to advance the plans of the court ..."

Anna repeated, "As proof, I swear to advance the plans of the court ..."

"To speak knowledge fearlessly, to share what I have learned ..."

"To speak knowledge fearlessly, to share what I have learned ..."

Lady Ruby Warden joined, saying, "to maintain the dignity of my station, and to defend this fragile world."

"To maintain dignity of my station, and defend this fragile world."

Lady Pearl Warden said, "For that defense, I shall oppose all forces of darkness ..."

"For that defense, I shall oppose the forces of darkness ..."

Lord Buzzard Hastings said, "hunt the monsters who would prey upon us, punish all traitors ..."

"Hunt the monsters who would prey upon us, punish all traitors ..."

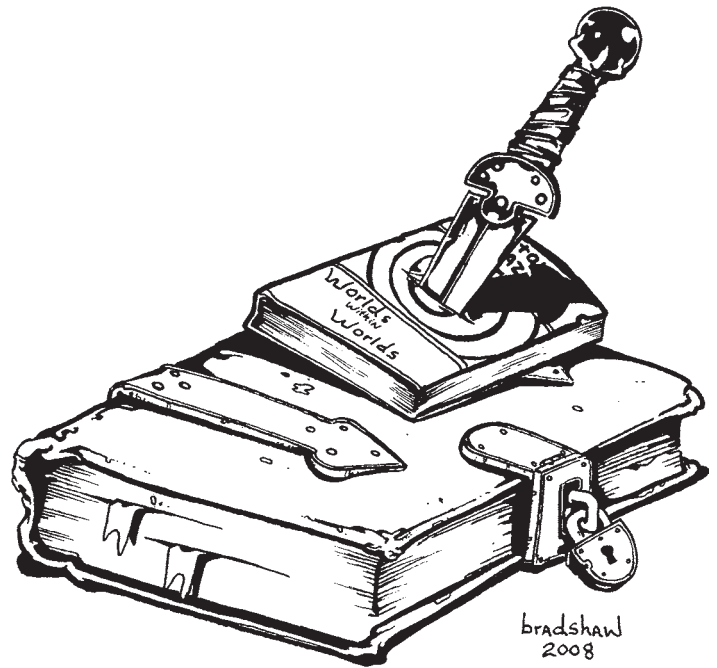
Lord Van Dragen said, "and to completely destroy the Lazlo Society."

Anna repeated, "and to completely destroy the Lazlo Society."

Long Live the Queen

The Court of Tarot is a secret society of paranormal investigators. The Court is dedicated to tracking supernatural monsters, eliminating paranormal dangers, and then exploiting them for its own benefit.

In a *Beyond the Supernatural* campaign, the Court serves an important purpose as a foil to the Lazlo Society. Against characters who are already aligned with the Society, the Court is a source of opponents who can add dramatic tension to a game. For characters who have a choice between the two, the Court offers a support structure more generous but more demanding than the Society. The Lazlo Society is altruistic, and it is assumed that most of its members have good alignments. The Court is Machiavellian, and its own membership is shifted much more



towards the selfish alignments. The Lazlo Society is huge, but it operates on a shoe-string budget. The Court is very small and elitist, but it has impressive resources.

The Court still operates out of the small city of Saint Augustine, Florida. This community has a history dating back to 1565. During a period which Mark Twain called the "Gilded Age," the Flagler family began building hotels in Saint Augustine. Henry Flagler was an oil refiner and railroad owner, one of the nation's wealthiest industrialists. Henry died in 1895. His widow was Ida Alice Flagler, a reportedly insane woman. Ida Alice was greatly influenced by the 19th Century American Spiritualism movement which popularized spirit writing, ouija boards, and seances. Mrs. Flagler founded the Court as an elite club for recruiting the most powerful mediums and wealthy socialites who could sponsor spiritualist research. Since that time, the Court has quietly gathered one of the best collections of paranormal information in the modern world. The Court continues to preserve spiritualism culture from the Gilded Age, a key goal set forth by Ida Alice.

The rules of the Court were established by Ida Alice Flagler herself. Membership in the Court is attained through invitation only. A member will invite a prospective member to one of the Court's several social events held throughout the year. At this function, the Queen will interview the applicant and her sponsor. Final approval for membership is left to the Queen's decision. Once granted, however, membership may never be rescinded. There are a limited number of membership slots open, but the Queen has authority to create new slots at any time.

Rank is organized according to a tarot deck, with aces being the lowest ranking members. The number cards represent increasing ranks beyond the ace. Face cards are considered officers of the Court. Face ranked members are jacks, and then countesses or counts, princesses or princes at the top of each suit. The Major Arcana are members represented by the twenty-two non-suit cards. There is only one Queen at a time, represented by the Empress Card. Thus far, four Queens have controlled the Court at different times.

Membership and rank are willed away upon the death of a Court member like a royal title would be passed from parent to child. Ranks are usually passed to children, but this is not always the case. Members have sometimes bequeathed their ranks to favorite students, spouses, or anyone willing to pay the most money for the privilege.

The Court uses an extensive network of bribed and sometimes blackmailed government officials. This network provides Court members with information and favorable treatment. Around the world, the Court's network of informants is limited, so there is a 20% chance that any Court agent will be able to find a member of the informant network in any law enforcement agency or government office. In North America, the network is more extensive and dense, granting a 40% chance. In Florida, the Court is above the law, with an 80% chance, and the Court controls most of the members of the state legislature. In Saint Augustine and the rest of Saint Johns County, the Court is a secret government which rules with an iron fist.

Here is a breakdown of the attributes of the Court using the Supernatural Organization Rules by Erick Wujcik and Kevin Siembieda, found in *Boxed Nightmares*TM, page 10.

Type: Secret Club or Society of Magic

Equipment: Medical & Special.

The Court doesn't keep stores of equipment because agents are expected to be self-sufficient or else in partnership with one of the wealthy members. The Court does fund a large research facility called Edison Park. At Edison Park, dozens of inventors develop new weapons and equipment. Many of these inventions are psi-devices and available to agents upon request and approval by a face-ranked or major arcana member.

Weapons: Armed Agents.

All members of the Court are encouraged to carry some form of weaponry. The Court provides basic revolvers to all of its own guards. Psi-devices are provided to agents and guards who demonstrate the ability to use that technology.

Vehicles: Fleet Carriages.

The Court maintains a fleet of forty horse-drawn black carriages which are kept in a Court-owned stable on the outskirts of town. The horse-drawn black carriage was a tradition from the Gilded Age when guests would arrive at the Ponce de Leon Hotel in style. The Court has maintained this tradition for its own members. The Court also keeps a pair of stretch limousines for longer trips.

Offices: Urban.

The Court is headquartered in the Ponce de Leon Hotel on the campus of what is now Flagler College. The Queen lives on the restricted fourth floor of the hotel. This is also where a small staff of personal assistants and guards work. These servants run the daily business of the Court as well as seeing to the Queen's needs.

Military Power: Security Guards and Private Army.

The Court maintains a large team of thirty to fifty security specialists (Staff cards, first to third experience level), but only thirteen of them have ranks. Roughly 20% of the guards at any given time are Ghost Hunters, another 10% are Natural Athletes, 10% are composed of other psychic character

classes, and the remaining 60% are Ordinary People with military veteran experience. Half of the Ordinary People are also Minor Psychics. The Court also employs an elite unit of ten to twenty combat specialists called the Knights Errant (Club cards, third experience level or higher, half are psychic). The Knights Errant are equipped with psi-devices, state-of-the-art armor, and a variety of modern weapons.

Sponsorship: International Private Industry.

The administrative budget of the court is provided by the Queen's personal fortune. That fortune is derived from her significant business holdings in multiple industries.

Special Budget: Functionally Limitless.

The Court includes members of many of the wealthiest families in the world. Almost ten percent of the world's wealth is under direct control or indirect influence of the Court. Funding any particular project, however, requires finding one of those wealthy members and requesting the cash. Hiring mercenaries for a particular project is another Court tradition.

Administrative Control and the Law: License to Kill.

Ever since the time of the first Queen, the Court has considered itself to be above the law of mundane people. Remember that the Court doesn't publicly exist, so any crimes committed by Court members get covered up by authorities but punished by the Court itself.

Internal Security: Tight.

The Court relies heavily upon its secret status for keeping out spies and criminals. The security force protects the Queen's living quarters around the clock along with a few other restricted locations. There is no technological-based security, but the See Aura ability or psi-devices which copy that ability are used to check the ranks of members before allowing them access to restricted areas.

Research: Varies.

The Court funds a research facility focused on the creation of psi-devices. It also often funds paranormal or magic research, one project at a time.

Other Information Gathering: Informants.

The court also uses its bribery network to maintain a steady supply of information coming from law enforcement. The court has even bribed an agent of the Lazlo Society who sends regular reports on the Society's business.

Library: Arcane.

Although not well organized, the Court keeps extensive records on all of its research and investigations. Using the library with a successful Research skill roll will produce the same results as a any Lore skill with the same percentage proficiency as the Research skill. This library also features one of the better collections of spells and enchantments. A successful Research skill roll will find any particular spell from first through eighth level, or a spell from ninth through eleventh level at a -30% penalty to the skill roll. Without many actual practitioners of magic, these spells are under-tested, so each spell has a 10% chance of functioning incorrectly or not at all.

Agency Credentials: Unknown.

Agency Salary: Excellent.

While on a job for the Court, these agents are typically paid two to four times normal salaries for their professions.

Total Points Spent: 266

Who May Join the Court?

Membership in the Court is open to anyone who inherits a rank or meets the approval of the current Queen. The Queens have cared little or not at all about ethnicity, sex, or criminal history of the prospective members. The Queens have cared about respect, ambition, loyalty, and what talents the prospective member has to offer the Court. Being rich does help, but what the Court seeks most are talented individuals who can broaden the Court's understanding of the supernatural.

The Court is always seeking psychics. Psychic Mediums are the most preferred for any branch of the Court. The court guards (Staffs and Batons) also prefer having Ghost Hunters and Natural Athletes in their ranks. The inventor branch (Cups and Grails) likes to also recruit Psi-Mechanics and Natural Geniuses. The paranormal investigator and scholar branch (Swords and Daggers) like having a variety of talents upon which to call. The financing branch (Coins and Discs) just care about money. For a character class which best represents a prospective Disc Rank, I suggest using the Capitalist Entrepreneur O.C.C. from *Mystic China*TM. The Court would love to find another supernatural creature willing to join, but these creatures are not easy to find and even harder to convince.

No Lazlo Society member has ever been invited to join the Court, and this will likely never happen.

What are the Benefits of Joining?

Court members gain access to the social network which is the Court. This includes scholars who are experts on xenobiology, occultism, and all forms of lore. The Court also includes dozens of wealthy members who may or may not be willing to sponsor a new member's research. Other perks include access to restricted locations such as several safe houses, the Edison Park Research Facility where unique psi-devices are created, and the Arcane Library (see library description above). These locations and other sites of interest in Saint Augustine are detailed later on in this article. Lastly, it's better to be in the Court than facing its wrath.

Rival Organizations

Over its hundred-year-plus history, the Court has endured numerous rivalries with other organizations. These included the Order of the Golden Circle, the Golden Dawn, the Thule Society and others. The Court has always prevailed. The current rivalry with the Lazlo Society could be perceived as the latest battle in a war of attrition. Both organizations seek the same knowledge and understanding of the supernatural, but the Court has no interest in sharing.

The trouble began with Victor Lazlo himself, who unknowingly foiled some of the Court's schemes during his investigations. Some Court members have had similar experiences with

current Society members. Most members of the Court see the Lazlo Society as a upstart band of troublesome low-class misfits which can only cause trouble or get in the way. A faction of the Court favors full warfare before the Society grows any stronger.

The Court's informant in the Lazlo Society keeps the Court's officers knowledgeable of any major developments or breakthroughs. The Court may attempt to place other moles in the Society for purposes of sabotage. The average Court member knows the Lazlo Society only by reputation. A few members of the Lazlo Society know about the existence of the Court, but none of them suspect the full size and power of it. There are currently no double agents in the Court working for the Society. Any character who can make a successful Lore: Cults and Secret Societies skill roll will know at least of the Court's existence, and at a -50% penalty, will know how to contact it.

Suggested Court Campaigns

Defense Against the Darkness

When it comes to monster hunting, few have more experience than the Swords of the Court. These investigators haven't seen everything, but they have seen a lot. The rest of the Court relies on them to field test new equipment, defend the community, and bring back live specimens for study.

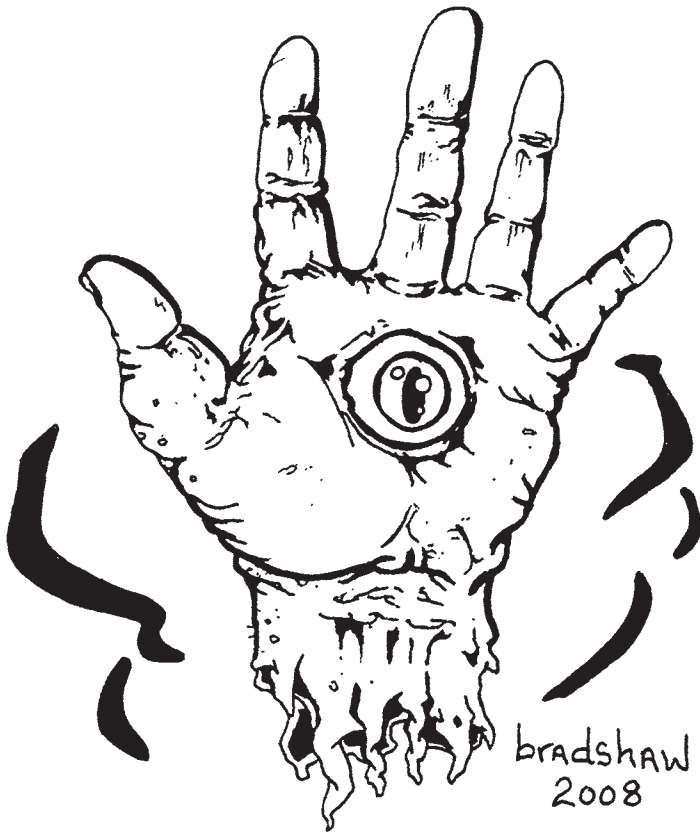
The Swords are vital to the Court for supplying new data. The quest for knowledge is never ending, and there is always one more ancient lost book to recover. After all, if those nuts in the Lazlo Society find it first, they might just be crazy enough to burn it.

This type of campaign will focus on investigation. Parapsychologists, Natural Geniuses, and Psychic Sensitives will be very useful in this environment. Arcane Detectives would also be very welcome (see *Nightbane*[®]: *Between the Shadows*TM). When the environment gets dangerous, make certain to also have a Physical Psychic and Fire Walker there to kick monster tail.

Remember that Court is not a band of heroes, but self-serving individuals. Some are more helpful than others. Being a hero feels good, but getting paid for it feels better.

Queen of the Mountain

Why settle for joining the Court when you can rule it? Characters who can cast enchantments or read thoughts throw a new wrench into the otherwise mundane political campaign. Player characters would be ambitious paranormal investigators who first seek to join the Court and then advance as quickly as possible through the ranks. They can achieve the recognition they need through adventuring, but making the right contacts and right deals requires political finesse. Remember that any member can bequeath his or her rank to you, so be loved by members in high places. On the other hand, there may only be one Queen at a time, so some rivalry between the player characters will no doubt develop. This could be an excellent campaign for a single player.



Occult Wars

Open hostility breaks out between the Court and another paranormal investigation faction. This could occur in either a contemporary setting or within a different historical decade.

The Court versus Monster Cults! A sinister opponent would be an occult group which has actually managed to contact a powerful otherworldly intelligence. Witches' pacts could be formed with monsters including evil gods, Demon Lords of Hades, Deevil Lords of Dyval, the Four Horsemen, Elemental Intelligences, Vampire Intelligences, or even a young Splugorth princess looking to make a name for herself. A particularly dangerous and devious foe would be a Nightlord cult. The player characters would be Court agents who are desperately trying to stop the monster cult before it manages to open a gateway which would allow the boss to enter their world. This style of campaign is heavy on the magic, so keep a Nega-Psychic nearby, but not too close.

The Court versus the Mystic Order of Whatever! In the past, the Court could oppose another secret society in races to collect arcane artifacts, recruit powerful mystics, and control access to magic knowledge. These other secret societies could be the Golden Dawn in 1900, the German Thule Society in 1940, KGB psychics and superspies in 1950, or communist mystics from China in 2000. For a more neighborly conflict, use the Order of the Golden Circle (a.k.a. the Redneck Illuminati). The player characters are Court recruits who quietly work to tip the balance of power towards the Queen. This type of campaign would involve lots of pulp-style action, secret missions, and cover identities. Details on the Court throughout history appear in the next section.

The Court versus the Lazlo Society! This campaign is a battle for the hearts and minds of investigators everywhere. Both sides

scheme to discredit the other with planted evidence, theft, and threats. It's a philosophic and political battle more than a gun battle – but that can very easily happen too. The player characters are double-agents and triple-agents playing one side against the other. They can't trust anyone, not even each other. When two factions of paranormal monster-hunting heroes fight each other, what do the monsters do?

Part Two

Lights and Darkness

December 31, 1901

A train's headlight pierced the night. A man with scars sat still in his seat and peeled an orange with a long knife. Next to him, a girl with long black hair leaned out of the window. She watched the thick woods and swamp of Florida pass, momentarily illuminated by the train's light. Her hair flew in every direction. "Senor Davis," she said, "Will the woods in New York City be dark like this?"

"There are no woods in New York, Isabella. That's why they call it 'City.'"

"Will you take me sightseeing?"

"Sure, Isabella. We'll try to find a ship in Saint Augustine or maybe Jacksonville. We're in no hurry."

The girl leaned out farther. "Uh," she said, "something stinks."

The man agreed, "It smells like rotten onions. A skunk ape is nearby."

"You promised to not hunt anymore, Senor Davis," the girl reminded.

A heavy man with gray hair and spectacles joined them, sitting in the seat across of their own. "Uh, what is that smell?" he asked as he settled down. The scarred man looked up from his orange but said nothing. The bespectacled man said, "Good evening. I'm Frank Paffe, returning to Saint Augustine. I own a stationary shop there. To whom do I have the pleasure, Sir?"

The girl turned and answered for the scarred man, "His name is Senor Jack Davis, and I am Senorita Isabella. Senor Jack is a mercenary. He's killed a lot of people, but he's no good at reading."

Frank Paffe turned his attention to the girl. "Senorita, you really shouldn't lean out of the train window like that."

"I won't get hurt," Isabella answered in a matter-of-fact tone.

Jack requested, "Isabella, please stay inside the train. You're making Mister Paffe nervous." She quietly complied, but she didn't seem very happy with the idea.

Frank continued to make polite conversation. "That's a beautiful dress you are wearing, Isabella. Where do you live?"

Isabella answered, "We don't live anywhere now. I was born in Cuba. Senor Davis was born in New York City. We've been on a treasure hunt in the Mayan cities, so this is the farthest north I've ever been. We're taking the train from Miami. Senor Davis is taking me around the world."

“Really, that is amazing.” Turning his attention back to Jack, Frank said, “If you are a mercenary, you should consider spending some time in Saint Augustine. There is a lot of work to be had right now.”

“What do you mean?”

“You’ve been out of the country for a while, haven’t you? Ida Alice Flagler, widow of the late industrialist Henry Flagler, is turning Saint Augustine into a patronage community for mystics. She’s a major patron of spiritualism research, and she’s even declared herself a queen. Right now, she’s hiring mystics of all types and enough veteran soldiers to make her claim of authority serious. The mystics who are flocking into town are also hiring mercenaries for protection and a little extra muscle. Veterans of the Spanish-American War are in demand.”

Jack asked, “What does the sheriff think of her kingdom?”

“The sheriff is on her payroll. A lot of government officials are taking bribes from her. I’m on my way back from Daytona where I went to deliver bribe money to several state officials. In fact, everyone knows it. That’s why I don’t mind saying it.”

Jack asked, “What is this business about hiring mystics?”

“Oh, maybe it’s all nonsense, but she’s interviewed hundreds of psychics. She hired some Russian mystic as her spiritual advisor. She has Mister Edison working on some secret project too. Everyday, more self-described psychics and mercenaries arrive. It’s to the point where the psychics now have to be licensed by the county before they can sell their services.”

Jack couldn’t help but laugh at that.

Isabella didn’t get the joke, but she offered, “Senor Davis is both a mercenary and a medium.”

Frank said, “Oh, I hope I didn’t offend.”

“There is no offense taken, Frank.” Jack put away his knife, “Besides, I’m retired now. I have a promise to keep to Isabella. Our deal was that she would help me during one last adventure, and afterward I would retire and take her around the world.”

“That’s generous of you, Mister Davis.”

“No, a promise is a promise.”

Isabella offered, “Senor Davis is the best soldier and the best medium.”

Jack said, “You’re a medium also, Frank. You don’t like to admit it, but you showed your cards when you complained about the smell. That was the stench of a supernatural creature in the woods nearby.”

“Or it might have been a skunk on the tracks.”

“Not this time, Frank. Tell me about your spirit guide.”

“I don’t really have such a — well, yes. I suppose that would be the nun. My family has a tradition which dates back to the time when we arrived in San Augustin as refugees. The Spanish colonists took us in and prayed for us. Whenever a Paffe becomes ill, a sister will appear by the bed and pray with us until we feel better. Is that what you had in mind, Jack?”

“Your guide appears rather infrequently, but yes. I knew that you are a medium because you can see my guide.”

Frank seemed confused, “But my, no, one isn’t here, I — wait,” Frank’s eyes settled on Isabella, “By the saints, she’s a spirit? I’ve seen spirits before, but I’ve never seen one so clear and lifelike before.”

Isabella giggled at Frank’s awkwardness.

Frank pressed his questions, “Well, you can both stay at my place while you are in town if you like. I can’t offer much in the form of entertainment, but I do have clean beds. You can tell me more about these spirit guides.”

Jack replied, “We don’t want to intrude. I think I’ll rent a room.”

Frank explained, “The smaller hotels might all be full. Winter is the visitor season. If you can afford it, you’ll be able to rent a room at one of the grand hotels like the Alcazar Hotel. It’s cheaper than the Ponce de Leon, but the Alcazar has a bowling alley, a casino, tennis courts, bands which play around the clock, and the world’s largest indoor swimming pool. I’ve seen the guests of the Ponce de Leon and the Santa Monica hotels sneak over to the Alcazar.”

Isabella asked, “Can we, Senor Davis? Can we, please? I want to swim in that pool!”

“We can’t afford it, Isabella. These places make you rent a room by the season, and we’ll only be in town for one night.” Isabella turned away and pouted.

Frank Paffe offered, “There is another way. With your talents, Frank, you could probably join Queen Flagler’s Court. Then you could use any of the hotels any time you want. I know of only one other person in town who is both a mercenary and a psychic. I’m delivering an envelope full of money to him next. After this, I’m done with errands for the season.” Frank waved a crisp envelope in front of himself. Thunder crashed outside of the train, and rain began to fall.

Isabella’s eyes grew wide. “Senor Jack, Robert’s name is on that envelope!”

“What?”

Frank explained, “Yes, this envelope is for Mister Robert Black-Drink-Howler from the Court. He’s Seminole, I think. Are you familiar with Mister Howler?”

“Yeah, we fought in Cuba. What is he doing in Saint Augustine?”

“He’s working for the Court. In fact, he’s one of the Queen’s favorite agents.”

Jack added, “I must say, Frank, I’m very disappointed to learn that he’s still alive.”

Isabella said, “Senor Robert tried to kill Senor Davis during the war.”

Frank advised, “You should be nice to Mister Howler when you are in town. The mercenaries are rough folks, but they keep the peace well. Also, Mister Howler leads a band of veterans called the Manatees. If you cross one, you’ll have to deal with them all.”

Isabella stated, “Senor Davis doesn’t fight anymore. He’s taking me to New York City.”

The rain fell much harder. Frank tried to change the subject as he leaned forward to close the window. He asked, “Are the two of you related, Isabella? Is that how you and Senor Jack met each other?” Lightning struck somewhere near the tracks, illuminating the sky for a moment.

Isabella told him, “No, we are not related. We met when he killed me.”

Order in the Court

The Court of Tarot is an elite, ambitious organization of paranormal researchers. It has been quietly investigating in the world of *Beyond the Supernatural* for over one hundred years. Over that time, the Court has slowly become more and more secretive until it became a minor shadow government which manipulates events through bribes, blackmail, psychic manipulation, disinformation, and, rarely, even violence.

The Court's history is also the story of the rise and legacy of the Court's founder, Ida Alice Flagler. Ida was born in 1848 to a poor family. She failed as an actress, so she worked as a nurse to Mrs. Mary Flagler. When Mary died, Ida became the second Mrs. Flagler. Henry was an older but active gentleman, an industrialist who had made his fortune in oil. Henry and Ida moved to Saint Augustine in 1888 where Henry was building a railroad line along Florida's east coast. They liked Saint Augustine enough that Henry decided to build hotels there and reinvent the city as a wealthy tourist destination for long winter vacations. Their first hotel was the Ponce de Leon. It was a grand structure with a state-of-the-art electrical system designed by Thomas Edison.

While Henry worked, Ida played. She exemplified the excesses of the Gilded Age, so her parties were spectacles of expense. One party, her Pearl Dance, was held to celebrate a necklace of pearls which Henry gave to her. During this dance, she received a gift which she liked even more, a new invention called the ouija board. Ida spent a great deal of time with her spirit board, and she told a maid that the czar of Russia was madly in love with her – ouija told her that.

Henry took steps to control her. He had Ida locked in the Ponce de Leon Hotel, and he told the servants to remove all sharp objects from her room. They overlooked a pair of scissors in her sewing kit. During Henry's next visit, he was stabbed in the heart. Ida instantly became the wealthiest woman in the world, so she was easily able to conceal the circumstances of Henry's death.

In the Year 1900, she officially founded her Court. At first, membership was limited to a small number of like-minded socialite men and women. The Court began accepting magicians and inventors who most impressed them. The first mystic was a mentalist, Rasputin the monk. The mad monk exploited the queen's fixation with the Russian royalty by claiming to be a spiritualist mentor to the czar's family. Other members took an early dislike to the monk, but he soon impressed them with his remarkable healing skills. She also invited Thomas Edison to return to Saint Augustine for a special project, a machine which could communicate with spirits. Within two years, Edison made a breakthrough. His machine worked perfectly and allowed communication with many types of spirits. The spirits shared their secrets with the researchers, and those discoveries, in turn, led to the development of many other discoveries and inventions.

The World of 1902

The term "Gilded Age" comes from the title of a book of social commentaries by Mark Twain and Charles Dudley. They believed that the traits of the wealthy class were needlessly ex-

cessive. 1902 was the end of this age, and there were considerable social changes taking place because of what was happening in the highest of the economic classes. United States Steel, formed by J.P. Morgan, was the world's first company worth more than one billion dollars. While the industrialists profited, an average working man's salary was about seventy to eighty dollars per month, not enough to afford even one night's stay in the Ponce de Leon Hotel. Wealth, excess, and philanthropy were three concepts which co-existed and fed off of each other. Queen Victoria of England died early in the year, marking the end of Victorian-era fashions. Teddy Roosevelt, a well known adventurer himself, was president of the United States following the assassination of President McKinley in 1901. A crater at the Tunguska impact site still awaited investigation. Technical innovations were beginning to show up in the wealthiest of homes first, so buildings were being wired for telephones and lightbulbs. Meanwhile, Harley-Davidson was producing one of the first models of motor-bicycles. The new books which people were reading while on vacation in Florida were *The Heart of Darkness*, *Hound of the Baskervilles*, *The Virginian*, and *Peter Rabbit*.

The First Court (1897-1930)

During the life of the first Queen Flagler, Saint Augustine was transformed into a haven for spiritualists. It also became a profitable destination for mercenaries, thieves, and con-artists. The greatest challenge to the Court during this time actually came from a law-abiding citizen and hero to millions, Harry Houdini.

Houdini was a masterful stage magician and escape artist. More importantly to the Court, he was also a skeptic. Harry (5th level Nega-Psychic) disproved and discredited hundreds of mediums. Before he died, he left behind instructions to his wife to listen for a certain series of code words that he would relate during a seance. Harry died tragically in 1926, and no medium was ever able to relay the correct code to his widow. This devastating blow finally ended the Spiritualism movement. Nega-Psychics began developing their powers all across the world simultaneously and disrupting the research of the Court. A decision was made to avoid the Nega-Psychics by operating in secret.

Here are some of the important members of the Court. Andrew Anderson (3rd level Ordinary Person) was the Prince of Coins, a capitalist entrepreneur in orange production, a Saint Augustine native, and long-time friend of the Flagler family. A personal friend of the Queen was Louella Day-McConnel (a.k.a. Diamond Lil, 4th level Ordinary Person), the Nine of Coins, a habitual liar, founder of the Fountain of Youth Park (one of three such tourist attractions in Saint Augustine claiming to be the Fountain of Youth), and the first woman to own a gold mine in the Yukon. Roger Black-Drink-Howler (5th level Sensitive Psychic with abilities similar to a Psi-Stalker) was the Devil of the Major Arcana, a veteran of the Spanish-American War in 1898, and a Seminole. Master Yung Yan (8th level Physical Psychic and Immortal of Sleep) was the Jack of Swords, and a Chinese immigrant mystic recruited by Rasputin.

Queen Ida Alice Flagler the First died in 1930.

Historical Note: In actual history, Ida Alice stabbed her doctor rather than her husband. Ida was sent away to an insane asylum where she spent the rest of her life, despite efforts by Diamond Lil to dispute all claims of insanity. Henry had the state law changed so that he could divorce on grounds of insanity. Immediately after the divorce, he married a third wife, Mary Lilly. Henry died in 1913 at their new home in Palm Beach. Mary Lilly gained the entire wealth, but Ida Alice outlived them all.

The Second Court (1930-1970)

When Ida Alice died, it was expected that she would will her title to one of the other officers of the Court. Instead, her will specified that her title and fortune be left to Missy Dean. This was shocking for several reasons. First, Missy Dean was a “colored woman.” Second, Dean was an occultist rather a socialite. Third, she wasn’t yet a member of the Court.

Missy Dean (8th level Arcane Detective) was born and raised in New Orleans. She had moved to Saint Augustine and into a tiny old house on Spanish Street. For years, Missy had been selling her services as a self-described Voodoo Queen to Court members. Many members assumed that her strange magic was actually psychic abilities because of similar effects, but even these skeptics were amazed by her ability to learn so many different powers. Few of her servants had seen her animate the dead or transform into a Florida jaguar, which would have been much harder to explain if seen. Missy Dean became Queen Flagler the Second, and continued to bring more diversity into the Court ranks for decades.

During her reign, World War II and the Cold War affected the Court. Hitler’s Thule Society and then a radical branch of psychics in the KGB infiltrated the Court. The Court responded by routing out the traitors and sending its own spies into these rival organizations. The Court became more and more secretive with each passing decade. Missy Dean realized this was necessary and used her powers to further obfuscate the Court’s activities. In 1967, the Ponce de Leon Hotel became Flagler College in order to better hide the Court.

The Third Court (1970-1990)

As the Cold War began to thaw slightly, a new queen was crowned. When Missy Dean died, she left her title and fortune to a researcher, Professor Charlette Handler. Handler (2nd level Techno-Shifter) had lesser interest in politics and magic than the previous queens. Queen Flagler the Third was an inventor, more concerned with developing ways to exploit the spirits than converse with them. She had a certain compassion for humans, but she was ruthless to spirits and other supernatural creatures. It was Handler who pioneered the Enchant Doll ritual.

During the early seventies, the Court experienced its first conflict with Victor Lazlo. Lazlo (1st level Parapsychologist and Latent Psychic) was a student whose studies brought him dangerously close to uncovering the existence of the Court. Professor Handler attempted to recruit the young man, but he refused her conditions of secrecy. Lazlo soon afterwards founded the Lazlo Detective Agency, and his research became a constant headache to the Court for nearly two decades.

The Fourth Court (1990 to present)

The current queen is Queen Flagler the Fourth, better known as Lady Teapot. Lady Teapot is an enchanted doll, created by Professor Handler as her greatest experiment. The tiny dictator rules her court with a porcelain fist, demanding perfect obedience and perfect manners.

In the early 1990s, Lady Teapot was contacted by a mysterious entity called Mister Green. Green claims to be an extra-terrestrial who crash-landed on this planet and was then captured. He can’t identify his captors nor his location, but the Court thinks that he is being held in a military research facility somewhere near Gulf Breeze, Florida. The Court has added a considerable deal of galactic knowledge to its lore library thanks to conversations with Mister Green. The Court is also actively searching for Mister Green’s exact location so that a rescue attempt may be conducted.

Other members of the Court worth mentioning include the following: Jackson “Buzzard” Hastings (5th level Psychic Medium), the Five of Swords and self-described Florida Cracker. Veronica Ravenbilt (6th level Ordinary Person and Minor Psychic) is a rich girl with something to prove, former U.S. Army soldier, user of psi-devices, the current Princess of Staffs, and captain of the Court’s guards. She also has a strong hatred for the Lazlo Society because her mother was killed during one of Victor Lazlo’s first investigations. Doctor Gregor Van Dragen (5th level Memory Psychic, a unique character based upon the Master Psychic from *Heroes Unlimited*TM, 2nd edition) is the Prince of Daggers, head librarian of the court’s arcane lore library, and a professional psychiatrist. Van Dragen is particularly angry with the Lazlo Society for nearly putting him in prison for his black market psychic work. Whitney “Wits” Bell (8th level Dreamer Gizmoteer from *Ninjas and Superspies*TM) is the Princess of Cups, a moody inventor, and workaholic who only wants to continue Edison’s work. Harold Dean (1st level Psi-Mechanic) is the grandson of Missy Dean and a paramedic. The Court noticed Harold after he invented a psi-device the size of a small truck which combines the benefits of multiple healing powers. Lady Bell ordered her staff to begin attempting to miniaturize his design and recruited Dean as her new Two of Cups. Anna Anderson (1st level Parapsychologist and Transcendent Psychic) is a student of Flagler College and recently inducted member of the Court, the Seven of Swords.

Suggested Campaigns

Doctor Vedder’s Museum of Oddities

Here is a quick but dangerous game set in Saint Augustine in 1902. The Game Master should probably introduce the monsters one at a time so that the players don’t put themselves into a hopeless combat situation.

Hook: Doctor Vedder is a zoologist who runs a local attraction near the Flagler hotels. His collection includes a great variety of stuffed birds and animals, a few skeletons, and even dinosaur eggs. Recently, he has begun diversifying his business by selling live exotic pets out of his museum. He sells baby buzzards, wolf cubs, and jaguar kittens. The pride of his collection is a pair of newborn tiger cubs, one male and one female. Each

pet comes with a free leather collar and a gold plated tag with the pet's name inscribed on it.

Line: Recent crimes in the city have disturbed the Court. A series of nighttime home invasions have left several wealthy citizens, including a member of the Court, dead. There is no sign of forced entry into the homes, but the thieves usually break down a door or wall on the way out. The next morning, the victims are found killed, literally torn apart. Their valuables, including their new pets, are missing. Yes, all of the victims have been recent customers of Doctor Vedder, and they have all purchased baby animals from him.

Sinker: Vedder is actually a fifth level Summoner and Witch. He is working for a Demon Lord from Hades. His pets aren't animals at all, but baby demons. The buzzards are actually Loogaroo hatchlings. The wolves are young Alu. The jaguars are really Were-Jaguars. The tigers are infant Raksashas. (All of these demons can be found in *Rifts® Conversion Book Three: Dark Conversions™*, except for the Loogaroo, which appears on page 163 of *Rifts® Conversion Book One Revised*.) His special collars are actually talismans which are charged with a remote-controlled version of the Age spell. The Demon Lord can telepathically monitor the babies and activate the talismans at will. The spell will not give the demons years of intellectual experience, but it will temporarily grant them these basic skills: Language: Demogogian 70%, Prowl 50%, Land Navigation 80%, and Hand to Hand: Basic. The Demon Lord is getting a chance to infiltrate a ripe world with hench-demons. Vedder gains the financial rewards of the sales and the crimes. Vedder himself isn't this bad of a person, but he is in way over his head. He realizes that he made a bad deal, but he doesn't see any way to get out of it.

Elemental Invasion

Hook: On November 31, 1897, a cargo ship was caught in a hurricane. The crew found itself helpless against the fury of the elements. The captain ordered the crew to search the cargo for anything useful in the disaster. One crewman found a small statue of the Madonna Mary holding a dagger. The entire crew went down into the hold and prayed in front of the statue for the virgin to intervene and for God to save them. The storm weakened and the ship survived, but no record of the statue was found in the ship's manifest. The statue was named the Hurricane Lady. Upon arriving in Saint Augustine, the captain donated the statue to the Sisters of Saint Joseph, who keep it until this day.

On May 5, 1901, a fire destroyed much of the nearby metropolis of Jacksonville. The blaze consumed 147 city blocks and over 2000 buildings. The heat was so intense that it created its own weather, including a waterspout which capsized sailboats in the river. Pages from a book depository fell like leaves in the woods twenty miles away. The paper was still burning as it floated to the ground.

Line: In 1901, Jacksonville, Florida, was consumed almost entirely by a firestorm. Four years earlier, a hurricane struck Daytona. The storm flooded streets, broke trees, and damaged every building as far north as Saint Augustine. Both disasters (the fire to the north and the hurricane to the south) weakened the barriers between universes and allowed elemental creatures

to enter the *Beyond the Supernatural* universe in great numbers. Fire Elementals arrived through the inferno, and Water Elementals entered during the hurricane. Both factions of Elementals are searching for missing royal from their perspective kingdoms. Two Elemental Intelligences, effectively like hive queens for ants or bees, went missing on Earth. Now, each faction blames the other for the disappearance of its monarch.

Sinker: The investigators can save Saint Augustine and perhaps the world by finding and releasing the Elemental Intelligences. The campaign can begin with adventures which take place during both disasters, very dynamic and memorable settings. Then, the investigators must find the missing Intelligences. The Fire Queen might be caught inside the Ectophone, and tricky negotiation with the Court would be required to gain the permission needed for dismantling this prized artifact. The Water Queen might be trapped inside a magical or faith-infused relic such as the Hurricane Lady statue. Perhaps the statue has been stolen from the sisters of Saint Joseph, and the investigators are needed to find and retrieve it. If the two alien armies do clash, the destruction will be much greater to the human world than either of the previous disasters.

Part Three

Always Darkest Before...

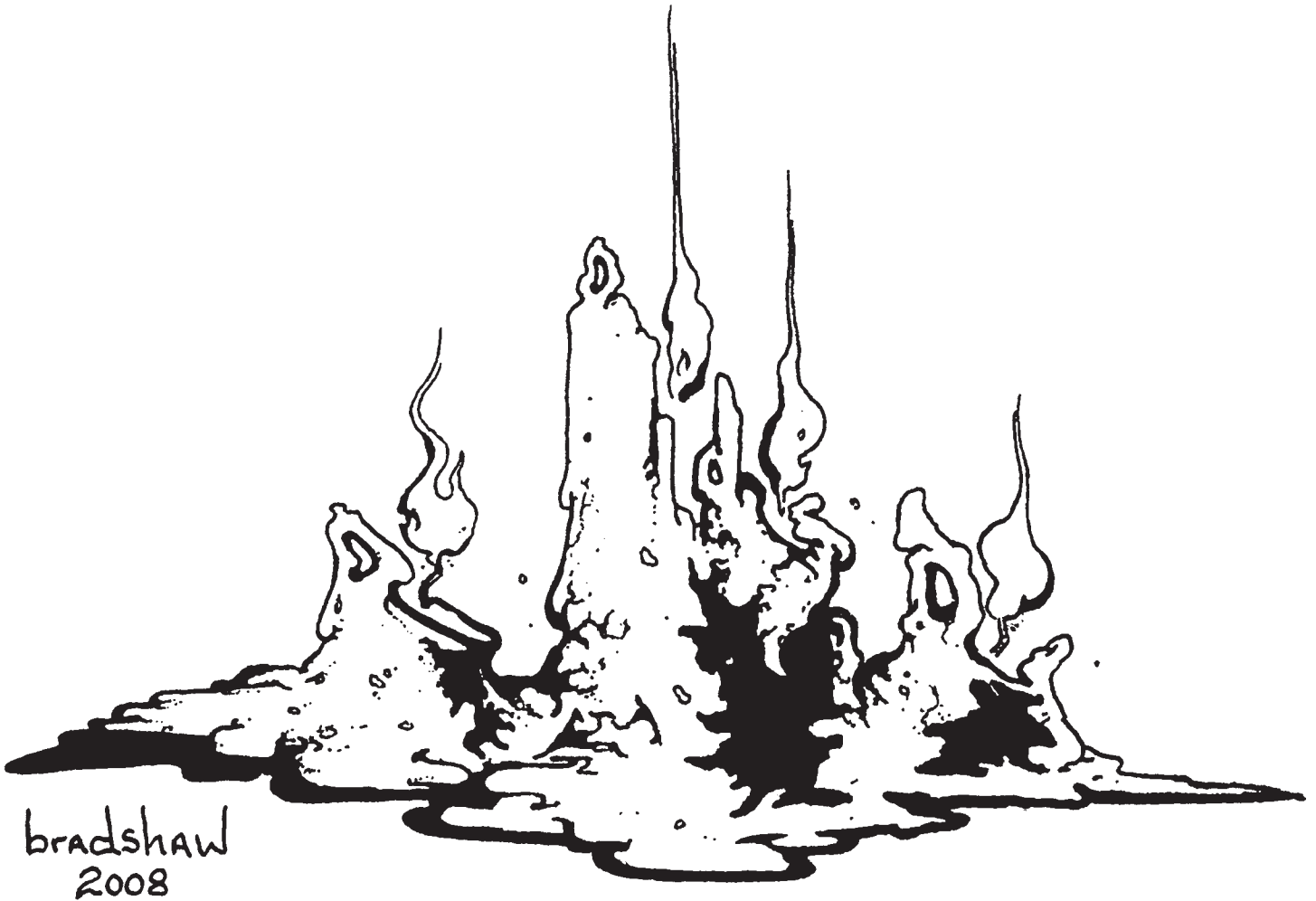
The owner-publisher of *The Tattler* sipped iced tea in the Cordova Hotel's cafe. *The Tattler* was the most scandalous gossip newspaper in Saint Augustine, Florida. She wore an expensive if slightly out of fashion Victorian dress and a tremendous amount of lace. She blended well with the other wealthy wives and mothers who brunched in the cafe. Many of those same women would have left the cafe or started a scene if they had realized that she was the same Anna Marcotte who slandered them, revealed their embarrassing moments, or insulted their fashion sense. Mrs. Marcotte ordered the key lime pie.

Uninvited, a second woman dropped into the chair across the table. Although surprised, Mrs. Marcotte kept her composure. "Miss Abbot, are you well? You look pale, dear."

Lucy Abbot was a spinster, a woman content to remain unmarried well past the common age. She was born to a wealthy family from Savannah, Georgia. Her family had abandoned the plantation shortly before the War Between the States. She settled in Saint Augustine where she sold land to the wealthy New Yorkers who had followed the Flagler family to Florida. Miss Abbot's own mansion, one of the largest and most impressive in town, was just north of the old City Gates. She had a reputation as a formidable woman, tough in business with no tolerance for sinful ways. This day, Lucy Abbot looked pale and weak.

"Mrs. Marcotte, I have something to show you. I'm sure that you've heard about Doctor Chotaw's passing on Christmas Eve. What you might not know is that he died in my own house. He was visiting for dinner when he asked to lay down. An hour later, my upstairs maid found him dead in the guest bedroom."

"Miss Abbot, it's tragic of course to lose a respected doctor like Dr. Chotaw. I do not, however, see the newsworthiness of an old man dying in his sleep. I already published his obituary



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last issue. Now, if he died while screaming and foaming at the mouth..."

"Please, Mrs. Marcotte, listen better. The doctor left his medical bag in my home. I searched it. I was looking for a mailing address so that I could send his possessions back north to his family."

"Miss Abbot, you were snooping. Good for you."

"I found his journal. It contains notes on his most memorable cases over the last ten years."

"Now that is interesting. Does anyone we know have a horrible disease?"

"It's worse than that. The doctor described Henry Flagler's death."

"Less newsworthy! Henry was also an old man who died in his sleep. He passed away in his own hotel years ago."

Miss Abbot whispered, "It was murder. When Henry took away her spirit board, Mrs. Flagler went into a fit."

"Did the doctor write that?"

"In his own hand, he did. He was very specific when he named Ida Alice Flagler as the killer. He wrote that she stabbed him in the heart with scissors from her sewing kit. The doctor even sketched the wound!"

"Monitor your tone, Miss Abbot. The best friend of Mrs. Flagler, Diamond Lil, is sitting only two tables behind you."

Miss Abbot slid a leather-bound journal across the table. "Mrs. Marcotte," she asked. "Do you know any honest detectives?"

"None I know are honest enough to be given this evidence. When Henry died, Ida became the wealthiest woman in the world. It sometimes seems that every policeman in the state is probably taking her bribery."

"I can't keep this secret any longer. It's tearing me apart. You must publish it."

"What makes you think she can't kill us and cover it just as easily? Half of my own staff is loyal to Queen Flagler and her Court. A single copy wouldn't reach the newsstands."

"Then who, Mrs. Marcotte?"

"Before you're torn apart, I'll take this to Mister Paffe. He should be getting back to town soon. He delivers bribe money to politicians around the state, so he knows better than anyone who we can trust and who we can not. We will find the last honest man in Florida if there is such a creature."

Courtly Affairs

The Court of Tarot is an organization of paranormal investigators which operates out of Saint Augustine, Florida. The town of Saint Augustine is an interesting place with several locations within it that are unique for a game. I once worked as a ghost tour guide, and our company had collected over one hundred ghost stories to share with our customers.

The natives of the Saint Augustine area lived there for thousands of years before Europeans arrived. The first settlers came at least ten thousand years ago. They were hunters who tracked mammoths, mastodons, giant sloths, and sabertooth cats. They lived in a feudal network of villages with chiefs and major chiefs. In 1564, a French colony called Fort Caroline was established somewhere north of present-day Saint Augustine. The missionary, Brother Jacques LeMoynes, described the Timucuan tribes as being powerful and healthy giants.

The Spanish arrived in 1565 to solidify their claim to Florida, destroyed Fort Caroline, and founded their own settlement. San Augustin provided safe port for Spanish treasure fleets returning to Spain from all parts of the New World. Piracy and border wars with English colonists were constant dangers during two hundred fifty-six years of Spanish rule over Florida. The Spanish introduced boars, cattle, and oranges into the new wilderness.

Spain sold Florida to the United States in 1821 for five million dollars. Florida crackers began to immigrate into the territory to hunt the herds of wild cattle which the Spanish had abandoned. Throughout the Nineteenth Century, Saint Augustine remained a small fishing town. Henry Flagler was a wealthy industrialist who moved into town in 1888 and rebuilt much of the city as a high-class vacation resort. His window founded the Court in the Year 1900.

Ponce de Leon Hotel

The hotel was built by Henry Flagler in 1888 to be the finest hotel in the United States. An architectural method called poured concrete was used to create walls which could be strong and molded into intricate shapes and designs. The four story, four hundred fifty room hotel was the first in the nation to have both electricity and running water. Henry Flagler hired Thomas Edison to design the electrical system, and Robert Lewis Tiffany was commissioned to create stained glass windows. The hotel became Flagler College in 1968, but the Court still secretly uses the hotel as its headquarters and the home of the Queen.

The dining hall reflects the dual identity of the entire hotel. During the day, it is a cafeteria for students. At night, the Court still holds many traditional social events in the main dining hall. The round walls of the dining hall are covered with priceless Tiffany stained glass windows, and those windows have been covered since the Nineteen-Eighties with bullet-proof glass (Armor Rating: 15).

On the restricted fourth floor of the hotel, the Queen resides and sees visitors. Besides the Queen's apartment, a small office exists for the Court's clerical staff. Another room of interest is the psychorium, a mirror-covered room designed by the first Queen Flagler to focus and amplify psychic energies. (Trances performed in the psychorium have double effect, and Sensitive powers have four times the range. Telepathic communication can be received in the psychorium from hundreds of miles away.)

Supernatural Encounters: Students at Flagler College sometimes claim to experience ghostly visitations from Henry in the dorm rooms. There are also reports of a woman on the fourth floor who matches the descriptions of Mrs. Flagler. The two are never seen together. These figures are quite possibly Haunting

Entities who are reenacting the events and personalities of ages past.

Alcazar Hotel

The Flaglers' second hotel is across the street from the first. It was built to accommodate clients who were just slightly less wealthy than the visitors to the Ponce de Leon. The Alcazar was built in the same Spanish Renaissance style as the Ponce de Leon, but the Alcazar featured dance halls, bowling alleys, steam rooms, and the world's largest indoor swimming pool. Today, the Alcazar is a museum which contains one of the most extensive antique collections in the nation. The swimming pool is now dry and houses a small antique mall. In the tunnels underneath the Alcazar, the Court keeps its arcane library.

Supernatural Encounters: Court guards maintain constant vigilance over the library, keeping out both human and supernatural trespassers. Most of these guards are military veterans and several also have psychic character classes. Several other guards are Minor Psychics, including Veronica Vanderbilt, current captain of the guard.

Casa Monica Hotel

This rival hotel was built by Franklin Smith, but he bankrupted himself in the process and had to sell to Henry Flagler. Henry renamed it the Cordova Hotel. This tall, Moorish-style building has recently been restored to its original function as a high end hotel, and to Smith's original name. The company which runs the hotel is secretly a front for the Court, so members can continue to stay close to the Queen while in town at no expense.

Supernatural Encounters: The Cordova, during the reign of the first Queen Flagler, was home to Master Yung Yan, better known as the Eternal Smoke. Yan was a centuries old Chinese Immortal of Sleep (from Erick Wujick's *Mystic China*TM) who was recruited by the first Court as an expert in Far Eastern mysticism. Yan developed his own martial art form based upon his observation of Entities and his copying of their movements. His form, Ghost Boxing Martial Arts, uses Ectoplasm to extend the reach of the martial artist. His secret techniques have been passed from one physical psychic to another through the Court. Master Yan's current location is unknown, so he might return at any time. Then again, he might still be in his room, sleeping through another few generations.

Villa Zorayda

This small house, across the street from the Ponce de Leon's tennis courts, was created by architect Franklin Smith. Smith built this house as a technology demonstration of his poured concrete method. The house itself is a smaller scale copy of a wing of the Alhambra Palace in Spain, and the Zorayda was copied from one of princesses who lived there. During the time of the first Court, this house was given to Rasputin by Queen Flagler to keep him close. Afterward, it became a small casino. Currently, the house is a museum of strange antiques. According to local legend, no two windows in the Zorayda are the same size and shape because this confuses ghosts who are trying to get in – or out depending on which version of the story is being told.

Supernatural Encounters: The stories are half right. An Entity does inhabit the Zorayda, but it doesn't want to leave. This spirit is a Syphon Entity who has taken residence in a unique antique rug on display. The rug was originally woven from sacred cat hairs in Egypt. Priests of Bast managed to lull the spiteful energy creature into a sleeping state within the rug, and the creature was carried with the rug to the new world. At any moment, it might awaken and start its mischief anew.

Tolomato Cemetery

Just three blocks north of the Ponce de Leon, there was once a small village called Tolomato where Timucuan converts once lived. Now it is a cemetery owned by the nearby Catholic Cathedral. This graveyard is the source of several popular ghost stories and one of the better places in town for spirit photography. Psychics have identified no less than three different spirits who inhabit the Tolomato. They are a young boy, a woman in white, and a darker, angry presence towards the back of the graveyard.

Supernatural Encounters: The dark presence in the back of the graveyard never moves because it is a Soul Tree (see *The Rifter*® #28). The tree was planted by the first Queen Flagler in 1899 and grew to its full height of 40 feet (12.2 m) in 1902. Because the graveyard is no longer being used for new burials, the tree can't feed off of any more graves to grow larger without bargaining for souls. Because it is an intelligent supernatural creature, it hopes that it can convince someone to carry its seeds to other nearby graveyards. The tree fears the Court of Tarot, however, and will try nothing to endanger itself by aggravating the Court. It remains invisible until a prospective volunteer approaches, anxious for the services and secrets of the dead that the Soul Tree can offer.

Castillo de San Marcos

In response to brutal pirate attacks and the short life spans of wooden forts, the Spanish built this large stone castle from 1672 through 1695. The walls are blocks of coral shell called coquina. These walls are thirteen feet (4 m) thick at the walls' bases and nine feet (2.7 m) thick at the top, thirty feet (9.1 m) above the dry moat which surrounds the castle. The castle successfully defended the San Augustinians from two major sieges because the porous coquina blocks would not crack under cannon fire. More often than a battle site, the castle was used as a military prison. During the American Revolution, British loyalists held rebels in the castle. After the United States gained Florida in 1921, the castle housed Native American prisoners from the Seminole and Apache tribes. The castle is currently a national monument administered by the National Parks Department.

Supernatural Encounters: Park rangers have reportedly heard footsteps in the old fort at night but have never found trespassers, and witnesses in the street claim to sometimes see figures in period dress walking the gun deck before dawn. These figures are a pack of Haunting Entities. The spirits latch onto the psychic memories of soldiers and prisoners from different historic periods who lived, fought, and died there. Sometimes, the spirits will take on the personas of soldiers from rival factions and hazardous combat will result.

Edison Park

A mile north of Castillo is the campus of the world-famous Florida School for the Deaf and Blind. The large campus and iron gates also shelter a secret facility established by the Court for Thomas Edison. Edison Park was an exact copy of Menlo Park, Edison's personal research and development facility in New York State. The purpose of Edison Park is the paranormal with emphasis on psi-mechanics and similar areas of research. It was here that Mister Edison built his "Ectophone," a huge device which enables researchers to communicate directly with spirits. The Ectophone has been the source of hundreds of exciting discoveries and other inventions made by the Court over the following hundred years. Even today, the facility has been upgraded to contemporary technological standards, but a good deal of the research is still performed with Edison's Ectophone.

Supernatural Encounters: Spirits with something to say know that Edison Park is the place to go if one wants to be heard. Consequently, there is always a group of spirits nearby waiting for a turn in the Ectophone. On rare occasion, one of these spirits will actually be a dead member of the research team, driven to continue research even from beyond the grave. As a more tangible threat, Gremlins often appear at Edison Park to cause mischief and hamper the progress of the researchers. For some reason, Gremlins are drawn to the facility like moths to a flame.

Fort Mose

Fort Mose (shortened from Fortress Moses) was the first settlement of free blacks in the area which is now the continental United States. From 1738 to 1763, this small community three miles north of the Castillo was home to a small but vibrant community who enjoyed the legal protection of the Spanish governor of la Florida. If a slave could manage to escape from the British plantations in the north and reach Saint Augustine, the governor would grant citizenship to the escaped former slave. The only two requirements for citizenship were willingly swearing loyalty to the Spanish royal family and conversion to Catholicism. Part of the deal was that any able-bodied man with at least two teeth in his mouth could join the Spanish army, thus gaining a job, a weapon, and a uniform. Women and those men who didn't meet these requirements could still become citizens and settle into Fort Mose or San Augustin, where their plantation-learned skills were valued. Walls of earth and wood were erected at Fort Mose so that it could be an actual fort and defend San Augustin from enemies from the north. That is exactly what happened in 1740, when Admiral Oglethorpe's invasion overran Fort Mose. The residents retreated to the Castillo de San Marcos, where they fought with other Spanish soldiers to repel the siege and eventually retake Fort Mose. Today, only marshland remains of the community, and park rangers have restricted access to the archaeologically sensitive island where the fort walls stood.

Supernatural Encounters: Part of the reason that access is restricted is due to the unnaturally aggressive animals which prowl the marsh island. A Possessing Entity uses the local animals to scare other wildlife and harass any humans who invade its territory at night. Most Possessing Entities prefer human victims, but this particular Entity is a weakling and dullard among

its own kind (I.Q. 10, Hit Points 100). It was bullied by other Entities in town to the point where it fled into the wilderness, where it mistook the animals for the dominant native life forms. It began possessing poisonous snakes, alligators, and wild boar. It would only attempt to possess a human after building up its own confidence by killing a few.

Lighthouse

The Saint Augustine Lighthouse is actually just across Matanzas Bay from Saint Augustine. The lighthouse towers 165 feet (50 m) over Anastasia Island. The tower itself was completed in 1874, making it the oldest brick structure in the county. The tower is painted with black and white diagonal stripes with a red crown. In that crown, an observation deck wraps around a lens room from which a rotating Fresnel lens sends light up to 20 miles away across the sea. Next to the tower, there is the Lighthouse Keeper's House which is a large, two-story home restored to its 1888 appearance.

Supernatural Encounters: The lighthouse is a hotspot for supernatural activity, especially as documented by spirit photographs and electronic voice phenomena. This is because it also marks a small ley line nexus. The major ley line of the area runs north to south over an underground river called the Saint Augustine Aquifer. A lesser ley line runs west to east from the San Sabastian River, over the Flagler hotels, across the bay and lighthouse, and then slightly into the ocean. Many supernatural creatures and magicians are attracted to the nexus, so finding an Air Elemental circling the tower is almost common. In 1901, summoners from a secret society called the Order of the Golden Circle attempted to use the entire tower as a summoning circle to invite the dark god Loki into this world. They were foiled by a band of mercenaries working for the Court and led by Roger Black-Drink-Howler. Ever since that event, the Court has kept the lighthouse under close observation.

...the Light

Jack Davis sat at the side of the largest indoor swimming pool in the world. Isabella, his spirit guide, happily splashed in the water nearby. Their new friend, Frank Paffe, sat beside Jack. The electric lights above gave the illusion of warmth, but Jack was suddenly feeling cold. Less than a day after meeting him on the train ride towards town, Frank was already bringing them bad news. "Can we simply go over his head? We should warn Mrs. Flagler and let her fire him before things get out of hand."

"We could try going over his head and warning Queen Flagler, but I think she already knows. We now know that she is as murderous and bloodthirsty as him." Frank waved the leather-bound journal for emphasis. "How do we know the other information is accurate?"

"We don't," confessed Frank. "The information wasn't even meant for us. I've been keeping the Manatees' books for them for months, and they also had me inventory all of the loot they took off those Golden Circle boys last night. The list was detailed. It specified the locations of two dozen powerful relics currently in Florida. I don't know how the Circle found it all,

but it was correct about the Hurricane Lady Statue. It looks like the Circle is planning to steal everything."

"So Black-Drink-Howler is thinking to move fast and beat them to the relics?"

"He's leaving tonight. Mister Rasputin has already bank-rolled the mission with funds he borrowed from the Queen."

Jack asked, "Where is the Mayan effigy?"

Frank took a paper out of his pocket and unfolded it. "I copied the entire list. Here it is: 'Spider Goddess Statue, carved white jade and gold with Mayan hieroglyphs, buried with the treasure of the pirate Black Caesar, Long Key Beach, twenty paces inland from the southernmost tip of the island, under the western shade of the tallest palm.' That's quite specific. It is the statue you went south to find, isn't it?"

Jack said, "It has to be. If the Russian is financing this expedition, can we eliminate him and stop the money?"

Frank shook his head, "No, Mister Howler is determined to go after every item even if he has to walk. Furthermore, you can't move against the Court. If you kill one member, the entire Court turns against you. The price on your head will be too high for you to get twenty paces."

"We can't let Howler get that statue. If I can take down Howler, the Russian will simply send someone else. I'll have to settle for that."

"Jack, you have options. You can exploit the infighting in the Court. I know that some members hate Mister Rasputin, and they would fund a rival expedition just to prevent him from gaining more power. Roger hunts men, not antiques. With your psychic talents, you might be able to beat him to the prize."

Isabella swam to the edge of the pool and asked, "Senor Jack, why are you so sad?"

"Isabella, do you remember the statue that we went to find in Mayan country, but it was already gone? Mister Frank thinks he knows where it is, and it's not far. Roger is going after it again."

The young girl shouted, "No, we're going to New York City!"

"This is just a detour, Isabella. It's a chance to see more of Florida."

"You promised that you would retire after the last mission! You promised me no more treasure hunting!"

Frank backed away as the discussion became more heated between the Medium and his guide. "Isabella, you know how dangerous it is. If Roger gets that statue, it would be bad for everyone."

"You promised, Senor Jack! No more! You promised you would retire and take me around the world!"

"I'm sorry, Isabella. I'm breaking that promise."

Using the Court of Tarot and Saint Augustine with Other Palladium Games

Ninjas and Superspies™ & Mystic China™: These games work extremely well together. Filling a monster hunting campaign with martial artists is a tempting idea, but *Beyond the Su*

pernatural already covers this character concept quite well with the Physical Psychic P.C.C. Bionics and gadgets could give investigators an interesting edge against monsters and summoners. If you do include martial artists with Chi Powers, then allow the Nega-Psychic to affect their Chi just as he or she could affect a psychic's I.S.P. A Gizmoteer would be a welcome addition to the researchers at Edison Park. A Feng Shei expert, Blind Mystic, or Arcanist would offer a valuable different perspective to a team of investigators. The Entrepreneur Industrialist O.C.C. is the best character class for one of the wealthy patron characters in the Court. A Reformed Demon or Fox Spirit character would be a very welcome recruit to the Court, but I suggest restricting such characters to at least three experience levels lower than the psychic player characters so that the supernatural characters don't dominate too much. In my playtest, one of the player characters was a Fox Spirit attending Flagler College. Check out the Demon Hunter O.C.C., who uses psychology and lore against the supernatural. In the world of *Mystic China*TM, the Court would be another superspy agency with a strong interest in the occult.

Heroes UnlimitedTM: Introducing mutants and mega-heroes into a game of *Beyond the Supernatural* could quickly unbalance the campaign. I would restrict hero characters to the non-super power using and non-alien classes like Hunter/Vigilante and Hardware. The Stage Magician could be a Nega-Psychic in the Harry Houdini tradition. Magic Item superheroes would be very welcome within the Court, but I would restrict their abilities to spells and minor superpowers. Borgs and Ancient Masters share the same guidelines as superspies and martial artists above.

Nightbane[®]: A secret war between the Court of Tarot and the minions of a Nightlord would be epic. Each side is almost perfectly equipped to counter the advantages of the other. Bringing in Nightbane monsters, therefore, to a *Beyond the Supernatural* campaign is encouraged. Be careful to not overwhelm the player characters, because these monsters are intelligent and powerful, and even a lone Hound can be too much for a party of humans. Another option is using the Court in a *Nightbane* campaign. In that case, the Court would be a rival to the Seekers Faction instead of the Lazlo Society. As the occupation of the Nightlords continues on Earth, the resources of the Court will be steadily dwindling as the Night Princes slowly dismantle and steal their wealth. Nightbane R.C.C. characters, Guardians, and Vampires would all be eagerly recruited (or hunted) by the Court for study.

Rifts[®], After the Bomb[®], and Systems FailureTM: All of these games have interesting character classes, but they mostly lack the subtlety needed to be effective in a campaign of *Beyond the Supernatural*. Only mutant animals with full human or full animal appearance could hope to function in Saint Augustine with a good chance of success. If the Court were introduced into one of the post-apocalyptic games, it would be as an isolationist society. The Court's Mediums, Diviners, and Clairvoyant agents would predict the impending disaster, and the Court would take steps to secure its own continued survival. Saint Augustine would become a refuge from the chaos by use of a large scale version of Psychic Invisibility to hide the entire city. Outsiders would only be allowed in by invitation, and the Court would

have no interest in attempting to re-establish order until well after it was certain that the dark age had past.

Other Resources

Here are some suggested resources for players who are interested in using Saint Augustine as a setting. *The 1892 Standard Guide, St. Augustine* is an amazing book with stunning artwork. It was published by Charles B. Reynolds in 1892 as a visitor's guide to the city. It was re-published in 2004 by Historic Print and Map Co. *The Oldest City, St. Augustine Saga of Survival* is the definitive resource for local history. It's a nice, thick little book jam packed with historic details. It was edited by Jean Parker Waterbury, copyrighted 1983, and published by the Saint Augustine Historical Society. *A Land Remembered* is a favorite Floridian novel. Written by Patrick D. Smith, the book follows the adventures of three generations of Florida Crackers. Beginning during the American Civil War, the family survives war and bandits, explores the wilderness, befriends Seminoles, and hunts wild Spanish cattle. The book is copyrighted 1883 and published by Pineapple Press. *A Ghostly Experience* by Suzy Cain is a collection of local ghost stories. This short book could provide adventure hooks to keep ghost hunters busy for weeks. It is published by City Gate Productions and distributed through Tour Saint Augustine, Inc.

Notable NPCs

Lady Teapot

Empress of Major Arcana, Leader of the Court, Queen Flagler the Fourth

Lady Teapot's story begins in 1990, when the third Queen was experimenting with new techniques in creating enchanted dolls. The third Queen was a Summoner who trapped Entities in specially constructed dolls and exploited the powers of these energy beings. She decided to try something more ambitious, creation of a living doll which was more human in its intelligence. For this purpose, she first constructed a unique doll. Incorporated into the design were Diabolism symbols, celestial cartography, amulets, and talismans donated by various members of the Court. In the second phase of the experiment, she slowly entrapped a series of Entities into the same doll body, blending their energies together as she worked. In the third phase of the experiment, she brought in a psychic who specialized in memory manipulation to erase the individual identities of the Entities. In the fourth and final stage, the memory psychic implanted a vast collection of human knowledge and skills into the newly merged mind of the doll.

The experiment was considered a complete success. The doll possessed tremendous potential magic energy, enough to fuel many of the spells that the Court's scholars had discovered but never had power to test. Although somewhat unstable in its personality, the doll joined the court as the new High Priestess of the Major Arcana. The doll developed an ironic fondness for tea parties, and named herself Lady Teapot.

The third Queen died, so she left her rank and title to the doll. The Court was surprised by this move, and several challenges were made to Lady Teapot's authority. The doll proved to be a crafty politician with a Machiavellian intellect and a megalomaniac hunger for power. After securing her position in the Court, Lady Teapot turned her attention outward. The Court became more ambitious than ever, aggressively seeking out new research and recruiting members.

Due to Lady Teapot's small size, she has hired an assistant to carry her around everywhere. The two of them live together with several bodyguards in an apartment in the restricted fourth floor of the Ponce de Leon Hotel.

Alignment: Aberrant but sweet.

Attributes: I.Q. 18, M.E. 16, M.A. 17, P.S. 1, P.P. 5, P.E. 10, P.B. 13, Spd 3.

Hit Points: 10, **S.D.C.:** 22, but it may be possible for her to be saved even if her personal S.D.C. and Hit Points are destroyed. Another casting of the Enchant Doll spell within 24 hours could bind her energy into a new doll body. If her body is destroyed and her energy is then exorcised, she will be permanently killed.

Age: Created in 1990. **Sex:** Female.

Appearance: Lady Teapot stands at twelve inches tall (0.3 m) and weighs about five pounds (2.25 kg). She has the appearance of exactly what she is – a fancy doll. Her skin is porcelain and her hair is long, red, and curly. Her clothes are always elaborate and frilly, and she usually wears them with an over-sized, matching hat. Her eyes are painted slightly askew.

Disposition: After receiving her first taste of political power, Lady Teapot has relentlessly acquired more. She strongly believes that her purpose in life is to make the world more civilized. People who don't conduct themselves to her standards are considered "unwashed barbarians," and she has no respect nor patience for them. She is generous with people who impress her, but she tends to think of servants as less than human tools who don't matter much. She can be ruthless to anyone who betrays her trust. When speaking about herself, she always uses the royal "we."

Insanities and Addictions: Delusions of grandeur, obsession with manners, addicted to caffeine, and feels a strong compulsion to stop everything at precisely noon for tea time.

Attitude Towards the Lazlo Society: Mild revulsion, she sees the swarms of Society members as servants of Robert Mach, current head of the Lazlo Agency. Her personal prejudice against servants colors her view of the entire Society as unrefined troublemakers. Ironically, she is one of the doves in the Court who has opposed open conflict against these commoners. Yet it is not sympathy for the Society that has defined her position. Instead, she worries that the Court would over-extend itself in a campaign that would result in too few rewards.

Skills of Note: She has extensive access to skills due to the way that information was implanted in her mind. Entrepreneurship 96%, Languages: English and Elven/Dragonese 98%, dozens of other languages 75%, Public Speaking 79%, Wardrobe and Grooming 82%, Detect Concealment 64%, Intelli-

gence 64%, Parapsychology 74%, Astrology 64%, Lore: Magic Arcane 59%/79%, all other lore skills 64%, Prowl 64%, I.D. Undercover Agent 62%, all science skills 55%, Appraise Antiques 69%, all other Technical skills (except Ventriloquism) 59%, and W.P. Knife (+3 to Strike & Parry).

Occupation: Business Person (based on the Capitalist Entrepreneur in *Mystic China*TM).

Hand to Hand Skill: None.

Experience Level: 8th level Homunculus (unique Creature of Magic).

Magic Knowledge: Knows and can cast Etch Aura (new! 10), Charismatic Aura (7), Energy Field (7), Eyes of Thoth (8), Domination (10), Heal Wounds (10), Tongues (12), Words of Truth (15), Charm Weapon (15), Wind Rush (20), Minor Curse (30), Negation (30), Luck Curse (35), Wards (90), and Enchant Doll (new! 150). She also has access to an excellent arcane library which she can use to quickly find a specific spell. If she finds it, she can instinctively and instantly learn the spell.

P.P.E.: 100

Psionics: She can communicate with spirits, including spirit guides, as a Psychic Medium, she can open herself to the supernatural as a Psychic Sensitive, and heal as a Psychic Healer. She also has Total Recall (3), Telepathy (4), Mind Block (4), Mask P.P.E. (4), Mask I.S.P. and Psionics (5), See Aura (6), Precognition (8), Mind Bond (10), Dispel Spirits (10), Group Trance (15), and Group Mind Block (22).

I.S.P.: 21 (x2, x4, x6, x10). For the purposes of determining the proximity of the supernatural, Lady Teapot counts as a Haunter or Prankster Entity, resulting in the x4 tier for nearby psychics. She does not respond to her own proximity, so a multiplier bonus to her own I.S.P. pool wouldn't apply until she encountered another supernatural creature.

Attacks per Melee: 2, and 5 non-combat actions.

Bonuses of Note: +2 to initiative, +1 to dodge, +3 to Perception Rolls, +1 to save vs Horror Factor, +1 to save vs psychic attacks and insanity, +1 to save vs all forms of mind control including possession.

Finances: She owns extensive financial holdings and investments scattered in banks around the world and totaling roughly \$1,000,000,000. These investments include controlling interest in a major railroad and an oil company. She has a fondness for insurance and antiques, so she owns a few smaller corporations and businesses which are oriented toward these interests. She also owns everything the Court owns. However, her cash is difficult to access without exposing herself, so only about \$250,000 is available at a moment's notice.

Transportation: When she travels, she uses either the Court's fleet of horse-drawn carriages, one of the Court's two stretch limousines, her personal luxury railroad car, or her personal sailing yacht.

Other Possessions: Lady Teapot loves collecting dolls and doll clothing. She doesn't carry many weapons because she prefers to rely on her magic and psychic powers, but she does carry a razor blade hidden in her dress (1 point of damage).

Queen Flagler the First

Empress of the Major Arcana, founder and patron of the Court

Real Name: Ida Alice Flagler (maiden name Shrouds).

Alignment: Miscreant.

Attributes: I.Q. 11, M.E. 3, M.A. 19, P.S. 8, P.P. 10, P.E. 10, P.B. 7, Spd 8.

Hit Points: 40, **S.D.C.:** 20.

Age: 54 in the Year 1902. **Sex:** Female.

Disposition: Elitist but still somehow charming, confident and generous; paranoid, and prone to fits of anger. Despite her impressive wealth, she is a tough negotiator.

Insanities: She is delusional, believing that she is in a romance with Czar Nicolas of Russia. She is also a little paranoid and a little obsessed with spirits and occultism.

Skills of Note: Business and Finance 80%, Languages: English 98% and Russian 55%, Public Speaking 75%, Dance 75%, Gemology 70%, Astrology 70%, Streetwise: Weird 75%, Lore: All 50%, Horsemanship: General 75%/55%, Boat: Sail Types 80%, and W.P. Knife (+4 to strike, +4 to parry, +5 to strike when thrown).

Hand to Hand Skill: None!

Experience Level: 10th level Ordinary Person.

Occupation: Business Person (based upon the Capitalist Entrepreneur in *Mystic China*TM).

Magic Knowledge: Queen Flagler understands the existence of magic, psionics, and the supernatural and knows a little about them. Much of her knowledge is actually faulty or oversimplified, but she is an eager student. She is not herself capable of performing spells.

P.P.E.: 4

Psionics: Queen Flagler, because of her exposure to other psychics and their coaching, has learned how to open herself to the supernatural. When she chooses to be open, she can detect the presence of certain energy concentrations. These disturbances include supernatural evil, large amounts of magic (20 P.P.E. or more), opening dimensional portals, arrival of Ancient Evils, ley lines, electromagnetism, and underground streams. She also gains +3 to Perception Rolls involving the supernatural during this time. Range: 1600 foot radius (487.6 m). No I.S.P. cost.

I.S.P.: None.

Attacks per Melee: 3 attacks or 6 non-combat melee actions.

Bonuses of Note: +1 to initiative, +1 to dodge, +1 to save vs Horror Factor, +2 to save vs mind control and possession, +1 to Perception Rolls, 55% bonus to trust/intimidate.

Financial Holdings: The Queen is loaded. She personally owns all of Florida East Coast Railroad, a series of high-end hotels from Jacksonville through Key West Florida, most of the new city of Miami, a significant fraction of Standard Oil, extensive real estate holdings, a fleet of horse-drawn carriages, a private sailing yacht, a private railroad car, and too many small businesses to list.

Finances: Her resources are effectively unlimited. As of 1902, she is currently the richest woman in the world, even more

wealthy than the recently deceased Queen Victoria of England.

Roger Black-Drink-Howler

Devil Card of the Major Arcana (first Court), Psychic Scout and Mercenary

Roger is a man with a murky past. It is known that he was born in Florida to one of the native Seminole tribes and that he was herding Florida cattle from an early age. He fought in the Spanish-American War of 1898. He won't say, however, which side he took in that war. Roger is a mercenary who has been selling his combat services to the highest bidder for years. He is also an excellent tracker and a psychic with extensive Sensitive powers. He answered Queen Flagler's call for mercenaries, and he quickly became recognized as her best monster hunter. He was rewarded with a high rank when she founded the Court, a large financial budget, and the authority to interview and hire any mercenaries applying for employment with the Court. He also leads a small, elite band of mercenary soldiers called the Manatees. This name is ironic, because the ruthless band of veterans is anything but gentle like the animals for which they are named.

Real Name: Roger Osceola.

Quote: "I prefer the English translation of my Creek family name, 'Black Drink Howler,' because it scares the white men more."

Alignment: Diabolic.

Attributes: I.Q. 10, M.E. 14, M.A. 14, P.S. 11, P.P. 10, P.E. 15, P.B. 9, Spd 16.

Hit Points: 19. **S.D.C.:** 24.

Age: 30 in the Year 1902. **Sex:** Male.

Appearance: Roger is a lean and toned man of average height who looks to be in his early twenties. His eyes are very dark black-brown, and his complexion is a tanned reddish-brown tone. Recently, all of his hair fell out; he has decided that he likes this creepy look. He wears a wide-brimmed hat most of the time to prevent his scalp from sunburning. In the wild, he wears typical cowboy gear, but in town he dresses in dark suits. He sometimes wears the bright colors of his Seminole heritage; a sash, turban, or some other ornament; especially if he thinks it will lead to a fight.

Disposition: Mean as a snake and twice as sneaky. Roger thrives on conflict. He carries a grudge against all white people due to the persecution of his ethnic people, but he's perfectly willing to suspend that racism and become a good friend of anyone who pays him. He doesn't specifically enjoy harming or torturing his victims, but he loves to scare them. Roger is most at home in the wilderness, but he is wise enough to maintain some manners when rubbing elbows with the rich and generous.

Skills of Note: Native Language: Creek 98%, Language: English 70%, Intelligence 58%, Horsemanship: Cowboy/Elite 93%/77%, First Aid 65%, Camouflage 50%, Lore: American Indians 45%, Prowl 82%, Athletics: General, Outdoorsmanship, Kayaking and Canoeing 80%, Track & Trap Animals 60%/70%, Track People 55%, Land Navigation 59%, Wilderness Survival 85%, W.P. Knife (+2 to Strike & Parry),

W.P. Handguns (+2 to Strike), W.P. Archery & Targeting (+3 to Strike, 5 shots per melee), W.P. Rifle (+3 to Strike), W.P. Whip (+2 to Strike, Disarm, or Entangle; +2 to damage), and W.P. Paired Weapons: All.

Occupation: Survivalist.

Hand to Hand Skill: Assassin.

Experience Level: 5th level Proto-Stalker (unique, see psionics below for details).

P.P.E.: 3

Psionics: Roger is a mutation who has developed into a unique variation of a Sensitive Psychic. He can track supernatural or magic creatures and feed off of them similar to the Psi-Stalkers of Rifts Earth, but his abilities aren't as potent. If his abilities are inherited, his descendants might one day become the Psi-Stalker race. His abilities include the following:

Sense Supernatural Evil: 45%, range of 500 feet (152 m), works automatically and with no I.S.P. Cost.

Open Oneself to the Supernatural: Range of 1000 feet (305 m), works same as for all Psychic Sensitive and includes ability to track P.P.E. sources of 20 points or more.

Recognizes Possession 70% and Magic Enchantment 50%.

Psionic Empathy with Animals (no I.S.P. cost).

He does NOT become a Mega-Damage creature in the presence of the supernatural.

Nourishment: Roger does require food and water, but he must feed on the P.P.E. or I.S.P. of others in order to empower his own psychic abilities which require I.S.P. to use. He is a living sponge of psychic energy. By injuring or killing a fellow psychic, he can release the victim's I.S.P. Half of the released I.S.P. spills out into the environment, and Roger can absorb the other half. He can also feed on P.P.E., but the system isn't as efficient. If he injures a practitioner of magic, creature of magic, or supernatural monster, he can release the creature's P.P.E. and absorb half of it. His body then transmutes this absorbed P.P.E. into I.S.P. at a 2:1 ratio. Roger can store this I.S.P. indefinitely or use it immediately. This parasitic nourishment is the only way for him to gain the psychic energy he needs for his other psionic powers (listed next).

Other Psionic Powers: Dispel Spirits (10 I.S.P.), Empathy (4), Group Mind Block (22), Mind Block (4), Object Read (6), Psychic Invisibility (12), See the Invisible (4), Sense Magic (3), Sense Time (2), Sixth Sense (2), Resist Fatigue (4), Resist Hunger (2), and Resist Thirst (6).

I.S.P.: Up to 100 points, see Nourishment power above. He does NOT regain lost I.S.P. through rest nor meditation.

Attacks per Melee: 6

Bonuses of Note: +2 to initiative, +2 to strike, +2 to parry, +2 to dodge, +2 to roll with impact, +4 to damage on all physical attacks, kick 2D6 damage, +2 to save vs magic and Horror Factor, and the bonuses from Sixth Sense when applicable.

Finances: He owns several thousand dollars which he has distributed among various bank accounts under various names. He also has a steamer chest full of Spanish gold coins (roughly \$1000) hidden under the floorboards of a cabin near the Saint John's River.

Other Possessions: Roger has an older house west of Saint Augustine with a stable full of six horses. His favorite weapons are his bullwhip (2D6+2 damage including the W.P. bonus) which he uses with his right hand and his antique gunblade which he uses in his left. The gunblade is his prized possession, a 17th Century Spanish weapon which combines a black-powder pistol (2D6 damage, single shot) with a dagger (1D6) in the same weapon. At some point in the past, the gunblade developed a minor magical or supernatural taint. It is capable of injuring even invulnerable or intangible supernatural creatures. He also likes to carry a large hunting knife (1D6 damage), and he keeps a Winchester 40-82 hunting rifle nearby (5D6 damage). The gunblade, knife, and whip all receive the damage bonus from Hand to Hand: Assassin Combat Training.

Suggested Plot Complication: When the Hurricane Lady statue was stolen, the Court of Tarot realized that the timing could not be worse. A hurricane was approaching the city, and without the protection of the statue, the entire community could be washed away. Roger and his men, the Manatees, were ordered to track and recover the statue. They found it at the Saint Augustine Lighthouse nearby. Cultists from the Order of the Golden Circle were intending to use it as a P.P.E. battery for empowering a tremendous summoning spell which would bring forth the ancient and evil god, Loki. These white supremacists were expecting the Aryan god to put "right" what had gone wrong when the Confederacy lost the American Civil War a generation earlier. The Manatees were able to recover the statue before it was ritually smashed, but in the process they uncovered a larger conspiracy to steal a long list of powerful relics and artifacts all around the Florida peninsula. When this information is leaked to investigators outside of the Court, a three-way race could develop between the Golden Circle, the Manatees, and the investigators.

The Hammer of the Forge

Chapter Forty-Five

“Montage”

By James M. G. Cannon

The western half of the second level of Center, the massive arcology that serves as Phase World’s capital, is a place colloquially known as “Gateland.” Over a thousand individual gates connect to nearly eight hundred separate locations across the Megaverse, and nearly every one of them is in constant use, with a steady stream of immigrants and emigrants filing in and out of each gate. Keeping watch over this system is a veritable army of Prometheans supported by mercenaries armed with bleeding-edge Naruni tech and a special brigade of wizards and super-powered dimensional beings. Interdimensional conquerors, Alien Intelligences, and cosmic invaders have never stood a chance against such combined might. Yet they try, with alarming regularity, to invade Phase World through Gateland. And they are destroyed for their trouble.

No such excitement was present when Geryon, Royal Kreeghor and late an admiral in the Imperial Navy of the Transgalactic Empire, passed unceremoniously through the gate from Splynn’s Atlantis to Phase World. The massively built,

black-scaled reptilian humanoid paused briefly to survey the impressive expanse of Gateland, at the thousands upon thousands of multi-dimensional travelers, the myriad and varied styles of gates, and the heavily armed soldiers protecting the level. Behind Geryon came a Kittani scientist escorted by two Kydian Powerlords, and the Kreeghor was forced to step off the platform and join the stream of visitors filing through customs and into Center proper.

It took Geryon an infuriating three hours to make it through the immigration. Not only was the Atlantis gate a busy one, but it appeared that the Prometheans were suspicious of anyone coming from Splynn’s city. But at last he was free, and he made his way via tram to the eastern half of Center’s second level, to the largest space port in the Three Galaxies.

After a voice print, retina scan, and a scale verification, Geryon was able to withdraw a hundred thousand credits from one of the secret bank accounts he kept squirreled around the Three Galaxies, and with cash in hand he went to find the most luxurious and well appointed hotel on the entire level. He rented a suite, ordered a gigantic meal, and then settled down at the com terminal to see what had happened while he had been stuck on that backwater planet Erp, or whatever it was called.

He ate while he worked, his pale eyes scanning trid broadcasts and wave pages for news of the current state of affairs in the TGE and CCW. He was irritated to see that the strained peace which held when he left was still in place. The CCW had clearly broken a number of treaties, sending their tame Cosmo-Knights into TGE space to destroy Geryon’s Shadowstar project, and yet there was no mention on any of the news waves of any increase in antagonism between the two intergalactic superpowers. It was true that intelligence regarding the state of affairs within the TGE would be difficult to come by, but he still expected to see reports of CCW ships massing in the neutral zone. Instead, most of the news he saw concerned the massing of Cosmo-Knights in the Anvil Galaxy and the search for the Cosmic Forge.

After his meal and another bottle of bloodwine, Geryon finally attempted what he had been dreading since arriving on Phase World. He tried calling home. He sent a sub-space hypernet transmission to his uncle, Axum. While he waited to hear back from the family, he started another search. This time he was more concerned with the activities of a single individual rather than the state of politics. The Cosmo-Knight known as Caleb Vulcan had captured Geryon, defeating him handily, and took custody of him, intending to bring Geryon to trial in the CCW. But in the wild badlands of Erp, Caleb grew distracted trying to save a few pathetic life forms, and Geryon was able to escape. He fled to Atlantis and bartered his way through a gate to Phase World. But Caleb Vulcan had reached Atlantis ahead of Geryon, and left a swath of destruction in his wake before disappearing. Geryon figured that Vulcan had returned to the Three Galaxies, and he planned on finding the whelp and exacting a brutal, drawn-out revenge upon him.

Geryon learned that Vulcan had only operated in the Three Galaxies for a few years, mostly within the borders of the Consortium of Civilized Worlds and the United Worlds of Warlock. Initially he operated as an apprentice of the famed Lothar of Motherhome, but after Lothar’s death at the hands of the Draconid wizard, Quajinn Huo, Caleb operated with a ragtag



band of mixed-race adventurers. Some of them were probably present at the destruction of the *Shadowstar*; Geryon would have to find them as well. His eyes hit something interesting, *very* interesting, just as the comm channel chimed with in an incoming call. Making a mental note to return to the file, Geryon shifted in his seat, picked up his glass of bloodwine, and answered the comm.

A screen flickered to life before Geryon, showing the mottled gray and black scales of his uncle, Axum. "Greetings, Uncle."

"You're supposed to be dead," Axum said, sizing up his nephew. There was a slight lag in the connection, but considering the distances involved, it was nothing to complain about.

"I survived," Geryon said, allowing a bit of pride to enter his voice.

"Better if you had not," Axum said. "You're not popular at court these days, and the only thing keeping you from a fate worse than death is . . . well, your death."

Geryon's jagged teeth worked at his upper lip. "Is this why the Empire has not retaliated against the CCW's attack?"

"The Emperor has better things to do than clean up your mistakes, Geryon. Your *Shadowstar* was destroyed, and along with it seven Invincible Guardsmen and your escort ship. To make matters worse, a section of the *Shadowstar*'s bulkhead materialized in the midst of Grozknk City on Vrkokis. It destroyed several factories and killed thousands as it tore through the city. Singularities don't work the way those holes in space you were making did; in the wake of your failure, your work was looked at more closely, and it was discovered that your *Shadowstar* was making Rifts, not singularities. Impressive, admittedly, but too random and dangerous for the Emperor to condone."

Throughout his uncle's summary, Geryon's jaw had tightened and his hands made fists. The glass of wine shattered, but Geryon didn't notice.

"It might be a century of two before it's safe for you to come back to the Empire. Even then, I don't think there will be a rush to give you back your admiralty."

"What would you have me do?" Geryon said through gritted teeth.

"Wait. Observe. Prepare. Your redemption may come sooner, particularly if you render some extraordinary service to the Empire which makes up for your folly. I will make inquiries in your name. Those who should know will be informed of your survival."

"Very well, uncle. Thank you for the information. I will be in touch soon."

Axum looked at Geryon for a long moment, or perhaps it was the lag, and then the screen winked out. Geryon suppressed a sigh. He had expected to return to a righteous war, not the current state of affairs. He turned back to the com screen he had been reading before his uncle called. One of Caleb Vulcan's earliest cases within the CCW had involved a former Invincible Guardsman, an invulnerable Elf named Elias Harkonnen. Geryon knew of this Harkonnen. It was said that he deserted the Guard and went renegade because his station didn't allow him to cause enough death and destruction. Further, Harkonnen had recently escaped from the CCW prison world, Hala, and was currently on the lam.

Like Geryon.

The Kreeghor smiled slowly, as a plan began to form in his mind.

* * *

In a distant dimension, orbiting a lush jungle world, Ariel the Titan contemplated her next move. Only days before, she had appeared on the planet below her, encountered the natives, and defeated the remnants of a TGE platoon that had arrived at the same time she did, along with a portion of the dreadnought *Shadowstar*. Among them were three Invincible Guardsmen who were now dead. Ariel had left the remaining TGE troops with the natives, a species of barbaric but honorable serpent people. After spending some time among them to be certain that the troops would be treated well and that the serpent people wouldn't be overwhelmed by their new charges, Ariel had summoned the silver hoplite armor that was the badge of her office as a Cosmo-Knight and left the bonds of gravity behind her.

Now she hung in geosynchronous orbit over the village and considered her predicament. Ariel's cosmic awareness reliably informed her that the stars around her were strange. She was not in the Three Galaxies any longer. The destruction of the *Shadowstar* had launched her and the TGE soldiers into another dimension. As a Titan, Ariel had some small skill in transporting herself between dimensions. She was reasonably certain that she would be able to make her way home to the Three Galaxies.

But for some time now a feeling had been growing within her, a feeling at the edge of her cosmic awareness that she perhaps had some purpose yet to fulfill in this reality. She felt drawn to a star that hung in the sky some distance from the jungle planet, a short jaunt for her at full speed. Perhaps she would put off the return to home for a little while. Ariel concentrated, and her body disincorporated into a beam of silver light that flashed away from the jungle world and towards the distant star.

Even traveling at several times the speed of light, it still took Ariel three relative days to reach the star in question. Ariel enjoyed the flight. She always did. Like most Cosmo-Knights, she reveled in her ability to travel unaided through the void of space. She felt a sense of cosmic unity, of oneness with the universe, whenever she traveled like this. Unfortunately, she found time to do it only rarely.

Silver light transformed into three and a half meters of Titan above an angry red moon orbiting a gas giant. The slight but inexorable pull she felt drew her towards the moon. Whatever she was looking for, she would find it here. With a mental shrug and toss of the dice, Ariel dropped down into the moon's thin atmosphere and flew over its barren, pockmarked surface. Although apparently lifeless, the moon appeared to have active plate tectonics. Mountains rose and fell as she flew over the surface, and she saw the gleaming red of volcanoes here and there. The wind carried ash and red dust into the air.

After several hours of reconnaissance, Ariel stumbled across what she had been unwittingly searching for. On a high, barren plateau in a remote corner of the world, she glimpsed something unnatural, something that could only have been created by intelligent minds. It was the first such sign she had seen, and she dropped out of the sky to investigate.

Ariel landed lightly on the plateau surface with a puff of red dust. Before her rose a massive structure that dwarfed even her considerable height. A circle of stone plinths wrapped around a gigantic, blocky stone arch. Each stone was carved with runes of power. She couldn't translate them, but she recognized their inherent magic.

As she surveyed the strange scene, the runes on the plinths began to glow. Ariel shifted on the balls of her feet, suddenly uncertain. A low hum joined the glow, rising in volume as the energy output increased. Arcs of light erupted from the crowns of the plinths to connect with the arch. The arch's runes answered, glowing as well. A swirling curtain of blue light formed within the archway.

Ariel watched for a long moment, thinking. Then, carefully, she picked her way through the glowing circle towards the gateway and stepped between the arch. In a flash of cerulean light, the Titan disappeared.

* * *

The CCW space station possessed the clean, antiseptic quality of a hospital. No one seemed to mind it except Caleb. But like most people he knew back home, he had always hated hospitals. His reaction was a visceral one, no doubt linked to his mother's illness, and he tried to ignore it. The team wasn't planning to remain at the station very long.

Having captured Blue Bennie and his gang on Center, Caleb and his companions rushed back to CCW space to hand them over to the authorities. Caleb, Doctor Abbott and Kassy had been disappointed to learn that their secondary quarry, the Elf Elias Harkonnen, was not among Blue Bennie's crew. So now, while Sammadar Orak, intergalactic bounty hunter, was counting her reward money, the rest of the team was trying to find some word of Harkonnen's presence or intentions somewhere in the press.

Caleb, a compactly built human with a shock of red hair, and Doctor Abbott, a shadowy being in a trench coat and a fedora, sat at a computer terminal in the depths of the space station, poring over news items and intelligence reports, searching for some hint or news of Harkonnen's presence. So far, they had not had any luck. Frustration was beginning to set in.

Caleb rubbed at his eyes with the heels of his hands. As a Knight of the Cosmic Forge, he didn't get tired any more, not in the conventional sense, but his eyes were beginning to ache and there was a dull throb forming in his temples. *Immune to laser beams*, he thought, *and I recover from missiles blowing me up, but I still get headaches. Totally lame.*

"This is pointless," Doctor Abbott said. "Clearly, Harkonnen has gone to ground. The Three Galaxies are simply too vast. We won't find him unless he wants us to find him."

"What about magic, Doc?"

"A possibility. But I can't do it alone, and I can't do it from here. We'll have to head into the UWW, maybe even as far as the Celestial Brotherhood's monastery."

Caleb frowned. "Kind of a detour. But we may have to take it."

Both looked up as Kassiopaea Acherean, Atlantean Undead Slayer, stepped into the terminal lounge. She looked as annoyed as Caleb felt, but not nearly as tired. Kassy swept a tattooed hand through her midnight colored tresses. "Any luck?" she asked.

"No," Abbott said. "And I surmise by your query that your own search was fruitless."

"Squiddy claims he hasn't heard from Harkonnen recently." Squiddy was a Monro-Tet information broker who operated out of Center. Harkonnen had used him before, as had Kassy and Abbott. Kassy hoped she might be able to convince Squiddy to help them find the Elf, or at least pay him enough money to provide the information. "But for a hefty fee, Squiddy will let us know when Harkonnen calls him."

Caleb shook his head. "I don't like relying on guys like that. He'll take our money and give us leads that are days or weeks out of date. Doc and I were just talking about detouring into the UWW and using a nexus point to do a magic search."

Kassy arched an eyebrow. "Of the entire Three Galaxies? Even for you, Doc, that would be like looking for a needle-shaped something in a moon sized haystack. It only worked that one time because your target was a Shadowen like you."

"Perhaps," Abbott said. "But I believe it is worth the effort. And I shall feel like I am doing something, rather than sitting at a computer screen waiting for something to happen."

No one mentioned that "waiting for something to happen" meant "waiting for Harkonnen to kill someone."

The gloom was lightened somewhat by the entrance of a fourth figure. This one wore a suit of insectile power armor, sleek and well fashioned, which was painted a riot of day-glo colors. "Cheer up, folks," said Sammadar Orak, her voice a mechanical buzz. So far, her identity was a secret known only to Caleb. No one else knew who or what lay beneath the power armored exterior, and most assumed her to be male and probably insectoid. Nothing could be further from the truth. She was a slight, green haired and very attractive near-human, and the fact that he found her so attractive was beginning to bother Caleb.

"We just made a whole lot of cash," Orak continued, "and saved the Consortium of Civilized Worlds a whole lot of grief by putting Blue Bennie and his gang away. Harkonnen will turn up soon enough. I have contacts and feelers scattered all over the Three Galaxies. Soon as he's spotted, we'll find him."

"In the meantime, I just received a flash from the Fraternity of Stars. They want me to investigate something weird and possibly dangerous. Anyone else interested?"

Caleb, Kassy, and Abbott exchanged a look. Caleb finally spoke. "What kind of weird and dangerous?"

Orak's helmet was expressionless, but Caleb could almost see her pixie like grin. "They said it's some kind of arch."

* * *

"Nine Hells and Seven Devils."

Vodal Kee's waldoes waved ineffectively in the air. The Sinestrian scientist was a humanoid snake, but made up for the lack of limbs by using a set of thin robotic arms affixed by a frame to his back, just below his head. Sinestrians were not

common within the Consortium of Civilized Worlds, and he still occasionally received strange looks when he went out in public. But today, not one pair of eyes was watching Vodal. Today, every eye in the city was locked on the huge arch.

Fourteen hours earlier, the arch had appeared in the heart of the city of Orsk on the planet Dravidia, one of the core CCW worlds. A rumbling in the largest of the city's parks heralded the arrival, and as park goers scattered and emergency responders mobilized, a circle of stone plinths erupted from the ground, rising high into the morning sky. Moments later, the plinths were joined by a magnificent stone arch, blocky and carved with runes.

The city watched and waited. But nothing further happened.

News 'bots and first responders flooded the park, while crowds of onlookers filled in the rest of the available space. Aircraft clogged the sky. Camera flashes came from everywhere.

Within four hours, Vodal had been summoned to the site. He had been on the other side of the planet, settling into a new university post offered to him by the Consortium's Fleet Command following the whole *Shadowstar* incident. He still wasn't sure why he had been singled out to examine the mysterious arch, or indeed why he had agreed to fly to Orsk and do the examining in the first place. Yet there he was, waving his waldoes and swearing indiscriminately while a cadre of other scientists took readings and muttered cryptic things and attempted to look like they knew what was happening.

They didn't know what was happening. No one did, least of all Vodal Kee. He had no experience with this sort of thing. He wondered if the local authorities had confused his background in the Transgalactic Empire for one in the UWW. Vodal assumed that this sort of thing happened all the time in the UWW. Although he had to admit that he had no real idea. Which brought him back around to the inescapable fact that he was completely out of his depth facing this arch puzzle.

The runes carved into the arch and the plinths defied all the available translation programs. The stone appeared to be natural stone, and in fact seemed to have come out of Orsk's bedrock. Potential Psychic Energy levels had spiked in the area, but that wasn't surprising considering that a magical event had just occurred. The CCW had no ley line maps for Dravidia; although they recognized the existence of magic, they didn't like to play with it.

Vodal looked around again. The scientists continued to make noises as if they understood the situation, the CAFFCO marines stationed around the perimeter looked bored, and the huge rock structures loomed menacingly. Vodal pursed his lips and picked up his datapad once more. This whole show was a farce, put on to reassure the citizens of Orsk and Dravidia that the Consortium of Civilized Worlds had everything under control and could keep its people safe from any danger.

Having grown up in the TGE, Vodal never had that feeling about his government. He wasn't sure he felt that way about the CCW now, or that he ever would. The fact that they had turned to him in a crisis certainly suggested they weren't as on-the-ball as they pretended to be.

Vodal's datapad beeped at him. He looked down, noticing peripherally that the scientists and marines around him were be-

ginning to get agitated about something. The datapad showed that psychic energy levels were spiking again. A blue glow illuminated the surface of Vodal's datapad. He looked up, into the arch, and saw that a blazing light had formed within it.

"Nine Hells," Vodal Kee whispered as the light seemed to reach out and *take* him.

* * *

Romana Vorishcenko ne Usckios, junior member of the Time Council, that enigmatic collection of time travelers that operated in the Three Galaxies, climbed another set of crumbling stairs. She picked her way carefully over the blue vines that threatened to trip her. A slim woman, she wore a black jumpsuit equipped with a survival pack and a laser pistol slung low on her left hip, butt forward in order to allow her to draw with either hand. She didn't expect trouble here in these ruins, but she had learned that life in the Three Galaxies could be unpredictable.

There were still remnants of the Todamma peoples who had once inhabited this part of the Burschian Dominion, but they were a degenerate, backwards race now. Most of their ancient cities, like this one, were empty of intelligent life. But that did not mean nothing could be learned from them.

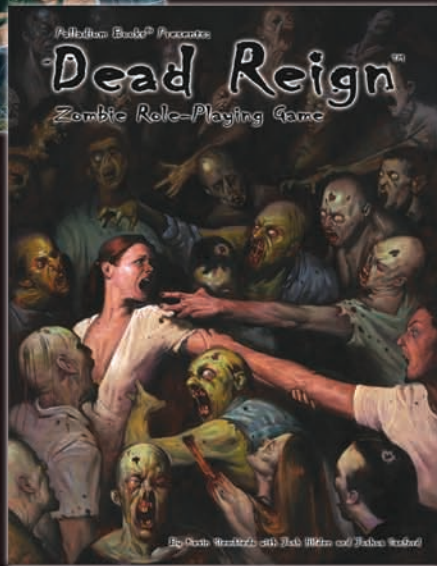
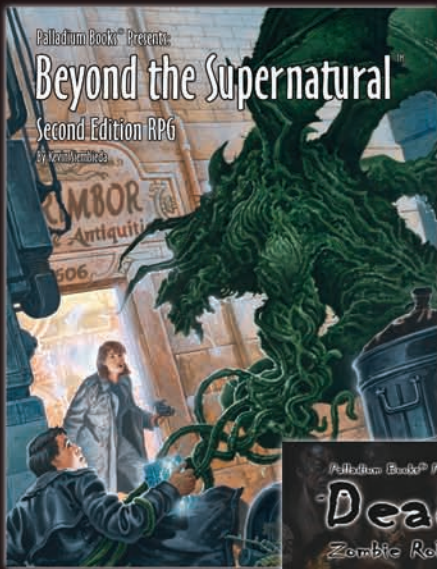
Romana touched the device on her left forearm briefly. She wore the Singularity Watch, a powerful artifact of Temporal Magic, once stolen from the Time Council and recently recovered from the clutches of the Draconid wizard, Quajinn Huo. Romana's reward for aiding in the recovery of the watch, and for graduating from apprentice to Time Master, was to become the keeper of the watch. She had spent the last few months experimenting with the device, familiarizing herself with its functions, and now she was about to give it its first field test.

The Burschian Dominion had once been one of the brightest lights of the Three Galaxies during its existence, an enlightened society of philosophers, scientists, and explorers who had spread their knowledge across their corner of the Corkscrew Galaxy. Eventually it all collapsed, as the philosophers lost their way and the scientists began building genetic weapons that consumed the Dominion from the inside, but while it lasted, it was a glorious civilization. Romana planned to use the Singularity Watch to travel back to that golden age and observe its wonders firsthand. But first she had to find a good spot to materialize on.

As Romana reached the top of the stair she saw an open courtyard, and in the midst of it, a circle of carved plinths and a huge arch. Although made from the same stone as the rest of the ruins, it was clearly not built by the Todamma peoples. For one thing, the runes carved into the rock were the wrong language entirely.

The Singularity Watch made a sound, somewhere between a squawk and a ping. Romana lifted her arm – she had never heard the watch make a noise before. She looked up in alarm as the plinths and arch began to glow.

But then Romana smiled. Her life was about take a weird turn. She hoped she would have some fun.



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