

Palladium Books® Presents:

THE

# RIFTS®

Your Guide to the Megaverse®



*Inside this Issue...*

Rifts®: Dragons and Brodkil

Dyval™: "Official" Source Material

Wormwood™: The City of Worldgate™

Heroes Unlimited™: Modern Magic

After the Bomb® & HU2™: Weird Mutants!

Chaos Earth™: Blue Zones

Beyond the Supernatural™ & 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 46

## Your guide to the Palladium Megaverse®!

First Printing – April 2009

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Palladium Books® Presents:

# THE RIFTER® #46



## 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.

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– *Kevin Siembieda, 2009*

# Contents – The Rifter® #46 – April, 2009

## Page 6 – Art

We loved this page of artwork penciled by Mark Dudley and inked by Ka Xiong for the *Rifts® Shemarrian Nation™ sourcebook* so much, we just had to use it again here. Actually, all of our artists seem to be doing their best artwork ever for us. We don't know if it's just the general excitement of all the new releases coming out or whether everyone just keeps improving at their craft, but you, our fans, benefit from it all.

## Page 7 – From the Desk of Kevin Siembieda

Kevin talks about a variety of things: our skipping conventions this year to focus on releasing new RPG product, all the dynamic new books coming out, Palladium releasing PDF products, the passing of Dave Arneson, and following your dreams.

## Page 8 – News

New sourcebooks for Palladium's many role-playing game lines are starting to pour out from Palladium Books. Not only that, but we are making out of print books available again, we're offering select out of print titles online as PDFs, and we have a bunch of cool, new non-book products coming your way (coffee cups, Rifts® dice bags, new T-shirts and even color T-shirts). Read all about it here.

## Page 9 – Coming Attractions

Kevin cuts right to the chase by describing the many recent and upcoming releases of NEW products coming your way. These pages bring you up to speed on all the goodies currently available and being released in April, May and June.

There are books for **Rifts®**, **Robotech®**, **Palladium Fantasy RPG®**, **Dead Reign™**, **Minion War™** series, **Nightbane®**, and much more on the schedule. Get all the juicy details.

## Page 16 – Rifts® Dyval™ & The Minion War™

### Official Source Material

**Rifts® Dyval™** is the most recent release in the Minion War™ limited series. People are raving about it, so we thought we would give fans a little more "official" source material for Dyval while they wait for *Dimensional Outbreak™* coming this June.

*Carl Gleba* is the mastermind behind the smash hit – a unique dimension of Hell and the second chapter in the Minion War™ series. Here he presents Quick Roll NPC Villains for Dyval™ in a series of Random Tables that includes Race (Deevil or not), Rank, Powers and Abilities, Alignment, Motivation, Minions and Wealth.

The Quick Roll NPC Villains tables are followed by a couple of groups of shady Deevil henchmen known as the Double Dealers™ and Chaos Legion™. They are sure to give any player group plenty of headaches.

Artwork by *Nick Bradshaw*.

## Page 24 – The Wormwood™ Addenda

### Part Three: The Free City of Worldgate™

*Braden Campbell* continues his excursion into the dark and dangerous realm of **Wormwood™**. This issue explores the City of Worldgate, its army, their flintlock weapons, various O.C.C.s, and places of note.

Artwork by *Allen* and *Brian Manning*.

## Page 37 – Dragons in Society

### Optional source material for Rifts®

Newcomer *J. Woodman* examines how dragons adapt and behave together in large numbers in general and at key location on Rifts Earth, including Lazlo, Dragcona, Lagarto, and Freehold.

Artwork by *Nick Bradshaw*.

## Page 39 – Rebel Waltz – Brodkil™ Society

### Optional source material for Rifts®

*Mark Hall* present a comprehensive, funny and insightful look at how the bionics loving Brodkil Sub-Demons live, function and get along (or don't). Read about Brodkil society, battle for dominance, what creates a Brodkil leader, how new Brodkil are created, bionics: the great equalizer, career opportunities, and the Gearhead Brodkil R.C.C. Plus, uses of Brodkil in Necromancy.

Artwork by *Mark Dudley*.

## Page 43 – Weird Mutants

### Optional source material for After the Bomb®, and suitable for Heroes Unlimited™

*B. Caleb Goodson* offers an array of disturbing (and fun to play) mutants for your **After the Bomb®** and **Heroes Unlimited™** campaigns.

*Human Mutants* start on page 43 and include the Brute, Lightwielders, and Revenants.

*Fungal Genetic Chimeras* start on page 45 and include the Twisted and Sporons.

*Plant Genetic Chimeras* start on page 46 and include the Deciduons and Mossians.

*Rules for Creating Genetic Chimeras* start on page 48.

Artwork by *Michael Mumah*.

## Page 49 – The Scurry Scree & Scurry Talus

### Optional material for Beyond the Supernatural™

*Steven Dawes* presents two new demonic servants for BTS, 2nd Edition.

*Scurry Scree* starts on page 50. It is a demonic servant that appears as a small stone carving of any animal. It watches his master's possessions and alerts him to intruders and thieves.

*Scurry Talus* starts on page 51. It is a larger stone carving of any animal or garden object that guards the outside of a structure and can alert its master or attack intruders.

Artwork by *Brian Manning*.

## Page 53 – Why Magic is Still Alive

### Optional source material for Heroes Unlimited™

*Russ Brin* takes a look at magic and mages in the modern world of Heroes Unlimited.™ It includes Methods of acquiring new spells, success or failure table, Heightened Perception and Familiar Link, Skill Knowledge, and Special Equipment.

*The New Age Oracle* starts on page 58 and includes many methods of divination, including Tarot, Numerology, Crystal Balls and many others, Magic Abilities of the New Age Oracle, and more.

*The Digital Sorcerer* starts on page 63 and includes computer based spell casting, new magic spells, and other data.

*The Real Time Caster* starts on page 65.

Artwork by *Nick Bradshaw*.

## Page 68 – The Hawaiian Supernatural

### Optional material for many Palladium games

*Chris Perrin* presents the magic and spirit world of Hawaii, including lore, Talking with Aumakua, Life After Death, Uhane and Kahunas as NPCs, and much more.

The Kahuna O.C.C. starts on page 72.

A Typical Uhane starts on page 74

Artwork by *Paula Porter* and *Mark Dudley*.

## Page 75 – The Dark Realm of Netosa

### A short story set in Palladium Fantasy®

Aaron Corley and Aaron Deskins offer up a fantasy short story full of excitement and betrayal.

Artwork by *Paula Porter* and *Mark Dudley*.

## Page 87 – The Way Station

### Optional material for Rifts® Chaos Earth™

*Mark Vernon* presents a wealth of information about *Chaos Wizards* and *Zone Wizards*, and the struggle to learn magic and create a safe haven in Blue Zones.

## Hammer of the Forge™

Chapter 46: “And Two” – the latest installment of *James M.G. Cannon’s* epic tale set in the Three Galaxies. Things heat up and our heroes find themselves scattered across the Megaverse and put in in life and death situations. Can any of them survive?

Art by *Apollo Okamura*.

## The Theme for Issue 46

**This issue the theme is magic, monsters and the dark secrets across the Megaverse®.** A secondary theme might be dark civilizations. You have the society and secrets of the Brodki™, Hawaiian mythos, Worldgate of Wormwood™, modern mages and magic, the Blue Zones and mages of Chaos Earth™, weird mutants, familiars, BTS guardians, Deevils and other monsters and mysteries.

We think this is another concept packed issue to provoke your imagination and inspire 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 for **The Rifter®**.

## The Cover

The cover is by *Michael Leonard*, fledgling digital artist, and well known Palladium “Madman.” It depicts a battle between dark forces which seemed especially appropriate for this issue.

## 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](http://www.palladiumbooks.com) – Palladium Online

## The Rifter® #47

More great source material, adventures and ideas for Palladium role-playing games of many different settings. Fun and excitement for every taste. Due to fan requests, this will not be a swimsuit issue.

- **Material for Rifts®.**
- **Material for Palladium Fantasy RPG®**
- **Material for Heroes Unlimited™ (tentative).**
- **Additional source material not yet determined.**
- **The next, epic chapter of Hammer of the Forge™.**
- **Latest news, coming attractions and fun.**

## Rifter® Articles Wanted!

We are looking for new material from newcomers and regular contributors. We need source material and adventures for all of our game lines, especially Rifts®, Chaos Earth™, Palladium Fantasy RPG®, Heroes Unlimited™, Ninjas and Superspies™, Beyond the Supernatural™, Dead Reign™, Splicers® and Nightbane®.

Pay is lousy, fame is dubious, but you get to share your ideas and adventures with fellow gamers. First time contributors are welcomed.

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



Illustrtion by Mark Dudley. Inks by Ka Xiong.

# From the Desk of Kevin Siembieda

## Odds & Ends

Seems like a great many things have been going these past several months. Certainly we have been busy at Palladium.

• **In case you had not heard, Palladium Books will NOT be attending any conventions this year.** Not even Gen Con. Since that announcement a few people have approached us about letting them take at least our newest books to conventions for us. We haven't decided yet, but we might let them do so.

Why not go ourselves?

Simple, conventions are very, very time consuming and distracting, and we want to put ALL of our focus on *releasing new product*.

It seems like a lot of game companies have given up on role-playing, producing only 2-6 products for the year. At Palladium Books, we think that's crazy. We love RPGs. They are our livelihood and we plan on continuing to support all our game lines and the RPG hobby. We also realize we are luckier than many companies and that we have a wonderful fan base and continue to sell strong numbers of books.

That having been said, Palladium's sales have been up and down and rather unpredictable. We will have a few excellent sales days or weeks, and even some spectacular ones, and then we will have poor sales, even awful sales, so it rather balances out. New book releases have helped a great deal, and there is a lot of excitement and anticipation for new Palladium product.

• **New product from Palladium Books.** As I write this the morning of April 14th (we always wait till just before the book goes to the printer to make this page, news and coming attractions as up to date as possible), we are in production frenzy. **Robotech® The Masters Saga™** shipped about four weeks ago, **Rifts® Dimension Book™ 11: Dyval™** only shipped two weeks ago, **Rifts® Shemarrian Nation™** is at the printer, this issue of **The Rifter®** you hold in your hands goes to the printer tomorrow and the **Dead Reign™ Sourcebook** goes in on Thursday or Friday. We plan to get the **Nightbane® Survival Guide™** to the printer in the next two weeks before the *Palladium Open House*. A busy month to say the least. And we want to get 3-4 additional titles in your hands by the end of June! Nothing rushed either, these are all quality books, so I think you'll find Palladium skipping conventions this year to be well worthwhile.

• **Palladium RPG products now available as PDFs from DriveThruRPG.com!!!** Yep, it is news that seems to have surprised a lot of people. I'm not quite sure why, as I've stated many times that Palladium was looking into the medium and exploring the possibilities. As always, I never feel compelled or pressured to rush into anything. I do my homework and wait until the time feels right. Then we proceed in a way we think is best for the company and our fans.

We are all excited about working with the good people at **DriveThruRPG.com** and have high hopes for PDF sales and the future of this dynamic, budding market. As always, we will

wait to receive fan input on what they'd like to see us make available as PDF products. Right now, we are offering First Edition rules of various lines and out of print titles, including **The Rifter® #1-40**, many of which have been out of print for years. Please let us know what you think and what else you'd like to see us offer as PDFs. Meanwhile, we hope it brings many new gamers who have never tried our RPGs in the past into the Palladium family. Spread the word, enjoy these books, and keep those imaginations burning bright!

• **Sad news: David Arneson, co-creator of Dungeons and Dragons, passed away.** It was reported on Wednesday, April 8, 2009 that Dave Arneson passed away after a long illness. I met Dave Arneson a few times over the years. He was a nice fellow, very witty and always made time for his fans. I never had the privilege of gaming with the man, but heard he was an outstanding Game Master.

I had the singular honor and privilege of accepting *Erick Wujcik's Lifetime Achievement* award at the **2008 ENnies** last summer just after *Dave Arneson* gave his acceptance speech for his own Lifetime Achievement award. (Gary Gygax, David Arneson and Erick Wujcik were the three recipients.) Even pale, weak and in a wheelchair, Mr. Arneson was friendly, witty and warm. He made the entire room roar with laughter and engaged us with lighthearted words of appreciation and encouragement for people to *follow their dreams*. It was a wonderful speech and Mr. Arneson received a standing ovation as he came up to the podium and as he left. I felt honored to have been there for that moment and to be the person to follow this legendary figure on Erick Wujcik's behalf. I will never forget it.

• **Follow your dreams.** All the important people in my life, starting with my Mom and Dad to Erick and Dave, gave me those words of encouragement. I have. I have followed my dream for decades now. I've enjoyed tremendous success and faced many challenges and disappointments. It can be scary, at times, when you follow your dreams, but let me assure you, there is nothing like it. When Gygax and Arneson followed their dream, they not only gave us a great game that brought joy to hundreds of millions of people, but they gave birth to the entire role-playing game industry.

I encourage each and every one of you to follow *your* dreams. Your endeavors, whether a success or failure, large or small, will bring you fond memories and shape your life in ways you cannot imagine. Do not let the naysayers, hardships and worries of these trying economic times scare you into paralysis or to hide under your covers. These are times to be *proactive and bold!* Maybe the time is right for you to start that business you've been thinking about for years. Or maybe your dream starts with a smaller step, like submitting an article, adventure or 20 pages of source material to **The Rifter®**. Whatever it is, *believe in yourself* and take that *first frightening step*. Walk in the footsteps of the legends before you and live *your* dream. You'll never regret it.

– Kevin Siembieda, April 14, 2009



# News

By Kevin Siembieda, the guy who should know

## New Palladium products and lots and lots of them

The Palladium staff is working hard to release a lot of high quality, *NEW* role-playing game products in 2009. There should be 8-10 out by the end of June with another 6-8 released by year's end.

That's 14-18 new role-playing games and sourcebooks for the year. *More RPG releases than any other game company* that we are aware of!

Palladium is also making long time *out of print titles* available in its online store (and eventually, back in book and game stores), such as, **Rifts® Vampire Kingdoms™**, **Rifts® Mercenaries**, **Rifts® Japan**, **Rifts® Lone Star**, **Rifts® Canada**, **Rifts® Free Quebec**, **Megaverse® Builder**, **Rifts® Triax** and others.

## More new Palladium product

Palladium is releasing 8-15 new RPG related *non-book* products *starting this May*. All are available at the Palladium online store ([www.palladiumbooks.com](http://www.palladiumbooks.com)) and will include:

- 15 ounce **Rifts® coffee cup** (white logo on black cup).
- 15 ounce **Gamer coffee cup** (white logo on black cup).
- **Rifts® Dice Bags** – velvet type of material with a pull string; Rifts® logo – gold imprint on Navy Blue or Black bag; 7 x 9 inches.
- **“Gamer” T-Shirt line** starting with a white **“Gamer Logo”** on black shirt and **“Gamer Zombie”** (white and red on a black shirt).
- **FULL COLOR Rifts® Glitter Boy in Flames T-shirt** (color printing on black shirt with the words: “Palladium Books ... ignite your imagination”).
- **FULL COLOR Hades T-Shirt** (color printing on black shirt with the words “Hell was full so I came back”).
- **FULL COLOR magnets** (business card size): **Rifts®**, **Palladium Fantasy®**, **Dead Reign™**, and **Dyval™** (with the words, *Hell was full so I came back*). Every gamer's refrigerator needs them! They look awesome!! \$1.75 each or all four for \$6.00 plus shipping and handling.

**And this is just the beginning.** If fans like these items and want more, we will do more coffee cups, “Gamer” and color T-shirts, and other specialty items. Can't you just picture a *Dead Reign* full color T-shirt?

## Palladium RPG titles available as PDFs from DriveThruRPG.com

On April 13, 2009, the first 20 books became available for PDF digital downloads from **DriveThruRPG.com**. Two additional products will be made available ever day for the next 30 days!

These are PDF downloads of popular but out of print titles at affordable prices.

### The initial selections will include 80 titles:

- The “original” Rifts® RPG (out of print)
- The “original” Rifts® Sourcebook One (out of print)
- The Rifts® Index #1 & #2.
- The Rifts® Game Shield & Adventure Book (out of print)
- The Rifts® Coalition Wars® (Siege on Tolkeen™) series.
- The Mechanoid Invasion® Trilogy (1981-1982)
- The Mechanoids® (1985; a complete RPG)
- The “original” Beyond the Supernatural™ 1st Ed.
- Boxed Nightmares™ for BTS First Edition rules
- Palladium Fantasy RPG® First Edition rules and the first six sourcebooks (including *Island at the Edge of the World*).
- Heroes Unlimited™, First Edition rules (revised).
- Aliens Unlimited™ (HU2)
- Shadows of Light™ (Nightbane®)
- After the Bomb® RPG and related sourcebooks.
- The Rifter® #1-40 and more.

The initial offering includes approximately 80 titles. A few additional titles will be added every month. There are currently no plans to offer perennial sellers or new titles, but that may change depending on sales and fan demand.

## 2009 Palladium Open House

As I write this for The Rifter®, the Palladium Open House is only 17 days away (April 30, May 1, 2, 3).

In some ways we are excited and ready.

In other ways we are excited and not ready. Wish we had an extra week or two, but that is always the case.

What is the Palladium Open House? A mini-con held at the Palladium warehouse and offices. Three days of non-stop gaming with the very ladies and gentlemen who create the games. Plus those who attend get to meet 40+ Palladium creators (artists, writers, contributors, staff, playtesters and others). Plus VIP night on Thursday.

Palladium fans are coming from coast to coast, plus Canada and from as far away as Australia! This year we have a couple of people coming in from Germany and Spain. Its small and intimate too, under 300 people.

Its all grand fun. This year we are including real awards and prizes for the costume contest, a live auction (hosted by me), an Erick Wujcik memorial, panel talks and lots and lots of gaming events.

## Other news

Hmmm. There is probably other news, but with everything going on, I am probably forgetting to mention something. The big news is all the new and upcoming RPG and product releases, so I'll just get on to new book descriptions in the Coming Attractions.

# Coming Attractions

By Kevin Siembieda, the guy who should know

Let's cut to the chase: We hope to make the 2009 Palladium Books' time to shine, with an array of *new* role-playing game products that we think will knock your socks off.

## A Lot of New Product

Palladium is trying hard to live up to its promise to release a lot of *high quality*, new products. Including many books and items our fans have been asking for.

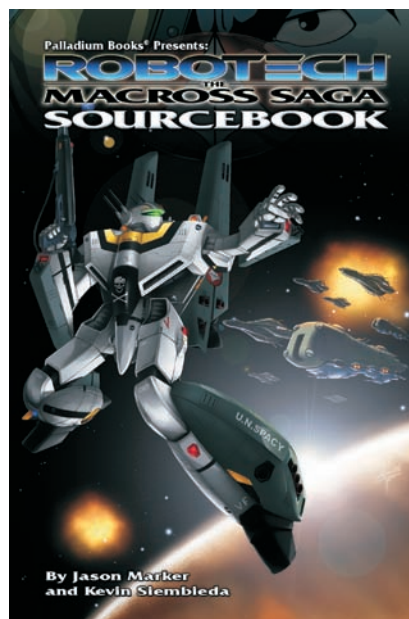
## Robotech® RPG Series



### Robotech®: The Masters Saga™ Sourcebook

The Masters Saga™ captures the era of the Second Robotech War and brings the mecha and heroes of the *Army of the Southern Cross* (ASC) to life. Adventures can start in the jungles of South America, where the fledgling ASC and the UEDF battled Zentraedi Malcontents, UEG separatists, rebels and terrorists before the UEEF blasted into outer space. Or play during the years of global Reconstruction. Or start your game the day the Masters appeared and the Second Robotech War began. Or play the days between the Masters' defeat and the arrival of the Invid. Or role-play the battle against the invading Invid swarm when they first appeared, as well as the days that followed as your ASC heroes try to rescue survivors and establish resistance groups to battle the Invid until help can arrive from the UEEF!

- The Army of the Southern Cross™ – all 15 branches.
- The Veritech Hover Tank, Myrmidon, AJAX, Logan and more.
- 4 ASC battloids plus the Golem robot.
- 6 suits of ASC power armor – never before seen.
- Other ASC vehicles, body armor, jump packs, weapons & equipment.
- The Robotech Masters, Tirolians, and their spaceships and weapons.
- Seven different Bioroids, Bioroid Hover Sled, weapons and more.
- Tirolian villains and player characters.
- History, background and world information.
- Quick Roll ASC Character Creation Tables.
- Infinite possibilities for adventure.
- Manga size for easy portability (5x7½ inches).
- Written by Jason Marker. Additional text by Kevin Siembieda.
- Cover by Apollo Okamura.
- Art by the Mannings, Majestic, Maradin and Okamura.
- 256 pages – \$16.95 retail – Cat. No. 552. Available now!

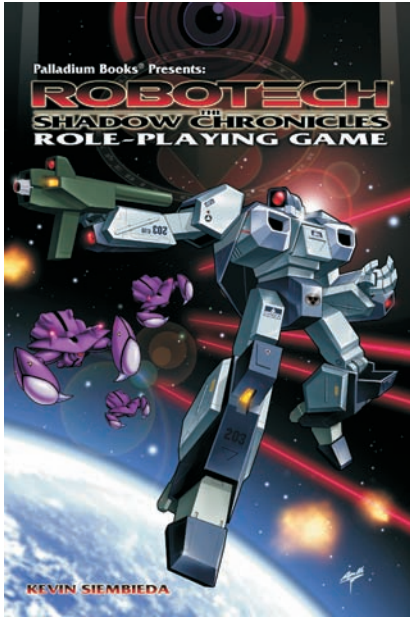


### Robotech®: The Macross® Saga Sourcebook

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, warriors, & select spacecraft and much more.
- Written by Jason Marker & Kevin Siembieda. Cover by Apollo Okamura.
- 256 pages (64 more pages than originally advertised!).
- \$15.95 retail – Cat. No. 551. Available now.



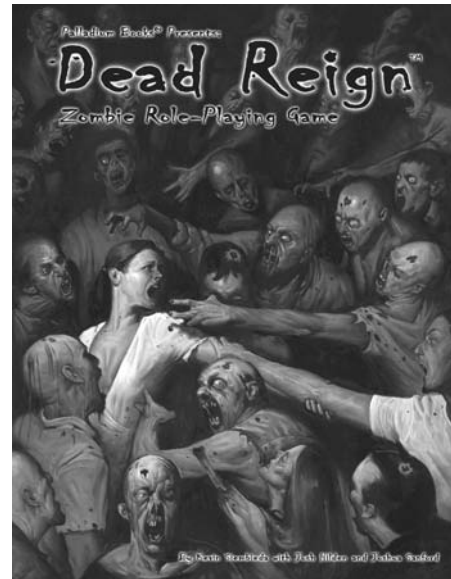
## Robotech®: The Shadow Chronicles® RPG – “Core Rules” Manga Edition

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

- Everything you need to start your Robotech campaign.
- Veritech Fighters: Alphas and Beta.
- Ground Veritechs: Cyclones and Silverback.
- Bioroid Interceptor, the Condor and more!
- The Enemy: Invid and Haydonites.
- Quick roll character creation rules.
- Core rules. Fast playing. Mega-Damage setting. ‘Nuff said.
- Manga size for easy portability (5x7½ inches).
- 336 pages – only \$16.95 retail – Cat. No. 550. Available now.
- Available at Barnes & Noble and hobby and game shops everywhere!

Or Robotech®: The Shadow Chronicles® RPG – 8½ x 11 *Deluxe Hardcover Edition* – 224 pages – \$30.95 retail – Cat. No. 550HC – additional art and text, including space combat rules.

Or Robotech®: The Shadow Chronicles® RPG *Collector’s “Gold” Edition Hardcover (8½ x 11 inches)* – 224 pages – \$70 retail – Cat. No. 5500HC – limited to 500 signed and numbered copies. Makes an awesome gift.



## Dead Reign™ RPG

### The Zombie Apocalypse

Dead Reign™ is a role-playing game where the dead have risen, civilization has crumbled, and 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 zombie infested cities, rescue other survivors, and fight without respite.

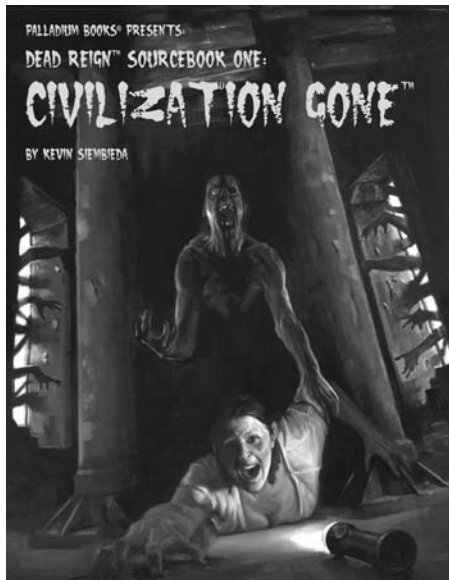
- Everything you wanted to know about zombies but were afraid to ask.
- Seven types of zombies plus the *Half-Living*.
- Six Apocalyptic character classes including “ordinary people.”
- Tips on fighting zombies and point-blank zombie combat rules.
- Death cults, adventure ideas and a powerful setting.
- 101 Random Scenarios, Encounter Tables, and much more.
- Written by Kevin Siembieda, with Josh Hilden & Joshua Sanford.
- 224 pages – \$22.95 retail – Cat. No. 230. Available now.

### Dead Reign™ Sourcebook:

## Civilization Gone™

Hot off the press! This sourcebook explores what happens when civilization is literally gone overnight, how people cope, where to find resources, ways to survive, and other menaces in addition to a few billion zombies!

- More resources and survival advice from Brad Ashley.



- More information on the world and zombies.
- Street gangs and protectors.
- Madmen & Psychopaths – new dangers and trouble.
- A few new zombie variants.
- Many random tables, including Random Building Searches, Available Resources, Building a Survivors' Camp, and more.
- Adventure ideas galore.
- E.M. Gist cover. Interior art by Nick Bradshaw and others.
- Written by Kevin Siembieda, additional text by Hilden and Sanford.
- 64 pages – \$12.95 retail – Cat. No. 231. Available now.



## Nightbane® Survival Guide

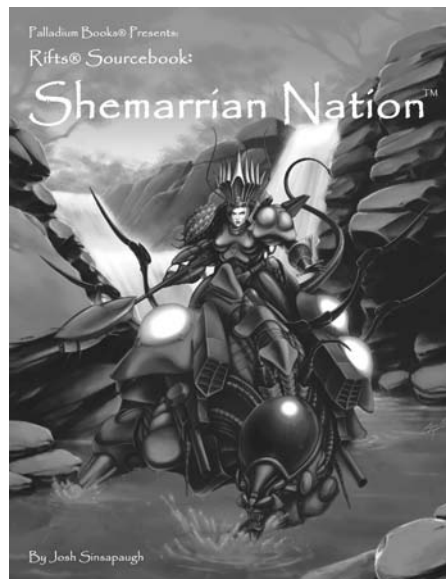
This is the first sourcebook for the ever popular Nightbane® series in five years and it is epic.

The Nightbane® setting features heroes who must transform into monsters to use their supernatural powers. They are the “bane of night” and the natural enemies of the Nightlords,

who seek to exterminate the Nightbane wherever they are found. This is a guide to help the Nightbane survive in a world of conspiracy, dark forces and monstrous invaders from the Nightlands. Invaders who have secretly taken over the governments of the world.

- Surviving the Hidden War; strategies and tactics.
- More insight to the life of a Nightbane.
- Creating Contacts, Creating Factions & Faction Recruiting.
- New factions and secret societies.
- New Nightbane Morphus Tables and new Talents.
- New Nightbane Creation Guideline Tables by education & background.
- New Nightbane history, psychology and more.
- Adventure ideas and world information.
- Cover by Mark Evans. Interior Art by Fox, Ashbaugh & others.
- Written by Mark Oberle and Irvin Jackson.
- 160 pages – \$20.95 retail – Cat. No. 735. May release. At the printer.

## New for Rifts®

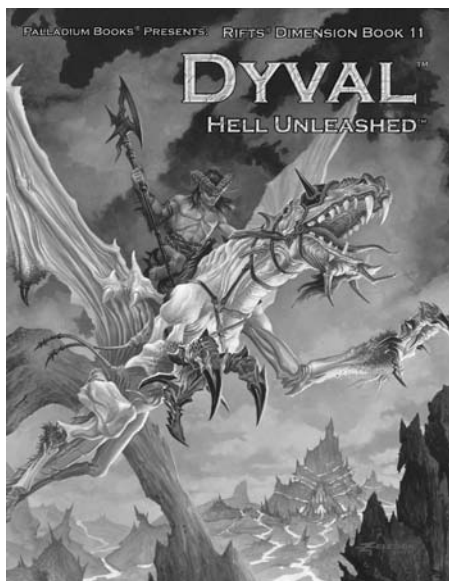


## Rifts® Sourcebook: The Shemarrian Nation™

Shemarrian Nation™ is done and at the printer. It has great artwork, is a fun read, and is packed with a lot of new information and ideas.

The Shemarrians are the phantom right arm of A.R.C.H.I.E. Three and a force to be reckoned with in the Eastern Wildlands. An in-depth look at the fabricated warrior women, their false society, and the schemes and dreams that Archie and Hagan have in store for them and the world.

- 7 types of Shemarrians, including the Shemarrian Warrior, Berserker, War Chief, War Goddess, Pariah, Spinner, and Male Shemarrian Hunter.
- New Shemarrian war mounts.
- New weapons, from energy rifles to Vibro-Blades (all Archie tech).
- Shemarrian history, society, culture and rumors.
- Shemarrian Secrets: Androids fabricated by Archie.
- Other Archie robots.
- Random Encounter Tables and many adventure ideas.
- The Shemarrians' declaration of the "Shemarrian Nation" and their place in the Eastern Wildlands. How the regional factions and power blocs view the warrior women, rumors and lies.
- Cover by Apollo Okamura. Interior art by Mike Mumah, Mark Dudley and Brian and Allen Manning.
- Written by Josh Sinsapaugh. Additional text by Kevin Siembieda and Jason Marker.
- 96 pages – \$16.95 retail – Cat. No. 878. Available now.



### Rifts® Dimension Book™ 11:

## Dyval™, Hell Unleashed

Dyval™ is a dimension of Hell that is completely unique and different from Hades. The Deevil Host, evil monsters and minions, Deevil society, monstrous War Steeds, magic, adventure settings and more make this another welcomed addition to the Palladium Megaverse®. Moreover, it advances the Minion War™ and offers endless hours of potential adventure. Suitable for use with **The Palladium Fantasy RPG®**, **HU2™**, **Nightbane®**, **BTS-2™**, **Phase World®** and **Rifts®**.

- 18 Deevils and 5 of them new.
- 7 Infernal War Steeds and other monsters.

- 5 Host races, inhuman minions, plus Ice and Magma Golems.
- Deevil Lords and their plans for war.
- Magic weapons, Soul Gems, ancient magic and more.
- Key locations, weird phenomena and citadels of Hell.
- Encounter tables galore and countless adventure ideas.
- The hellish dimension of Dyval™ mapped and described.
- 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.
- 224 pages – \$24.95 retail – Cat. No. 873. Available now.

## Hades & Dyval™ Map Pack

– 19 Color Maps – available online only

The color versions of the maps of Hell are available only as downloadable files directly from Palladium Books. The order process works the same as it did for **The Rifter® Zero**: you order it like you would a book, using a credit card. It may take up to 48 hours for the order to be processed and made available to you for download, though most orders will be processed within 24 hours or sooner.

- 19 maps total.
- 8 color maps of Dyval™.
- 9 color maps/floor plans of Hades.
- 2 grayscale Hades maps/floor plans.
- Created by the author of Hades and Dyval, *Carl Gleba*.
- \$6.00 – Cat. No. E001 – 19 pages total. Available only as color PDF files for digital download exclusively from Palladium Books® ([www.palladiumbooks.com](http://www.palladiumbooks.com)).

### Rifts® Dimension Book™ 12:

## Dimensional Outbreak™

We want to be realistic with this release date, and with preparations for the Palladium Open House coming up, we can't see Outbreak coming out until June.

Another exciting and surprise filled book in the Minion War™ series as 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.
- 192-224 pages – \$24.95 retail – Cat. No. 875. June release.

#### 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.**
- **July or August release.**

## Coming this Summer & Fall

- **More Rifts® World Books.**
- **More Minion War™ books.**
- **More Robotech® sourcebooks.**
- **More Dead Reign™ sourcebooks.**
- **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 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. Size and price yet to be determined.

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

- **Warpath™: Urban Jungle™ RPG** is Palladium's new game of modern combat inspired by Jeffrey Scott Hansen's novel and additional ideas. It is in the early stages of development and coming along nicely. Shooting for a June or July, Summer release.
- **More Robotech®** – Many more Robotech® sourcebooks are coming. What are they? All we are willing to tell you at this time is **Robotech® New Generation™** and **Robotech® Spacecraft sourcebooks** are only two we have on the drawing board.

**Note:** Other titles may be added or substituted.

## Back in stock

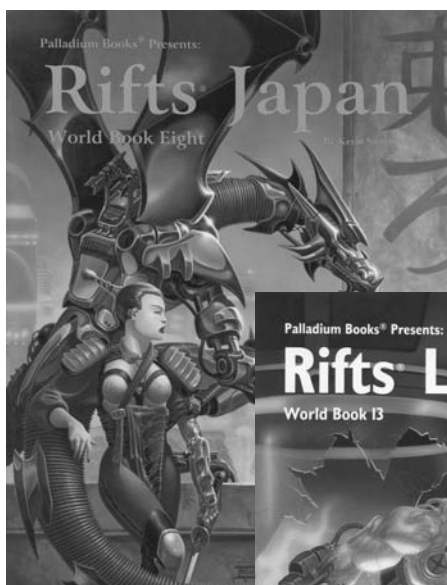
### Rifts® World Book 8: Rifts® Japan

– Back in Stock – Available Now

This fan favorite title is absolutely brimming with high-tech weapons, power armor, and giant robots, magic weapons and items, TW weapons, Glitter Boys, Ninja, Samurai, Japanese demons, history, world information and everything you would ex-

pect from **Rifts® Japan**. No wonder fans have been screaming for us to bring it back in print!

- 20+ unique O.C.C.s including the Demon Queller, Ronin, Mystic Ninja, Tech-Ninja, Ninja Juicer, Ninja Cyborg, Traditional Samurai & more.
- 50+ types of weapons, including tech, TW and magic items.
- 23 types of power armor and robots!
- Five Martial Arts types of Hand to Hand Combat.
- 19 Mystic Martial Arts Powers!
- Dragon Cyborgs and other cyborgs and bionics of Japan.
- ArmaTech Industries and H-Brand high-tech manufacturers.
- Monsters, world information and MORE! Written by Kevin Siembieda.
- 216 pages – \$24.95 retail – Cat. No. 818. Available now.



## Rifts® World Book 13: Lone Star

– Back in Stock – Available Now

Source material on Dog Boys and the Coalition State of Lone Star, Dog Boy variants, Dog Boy training, and other CS mutant animals. Plus, the CS Death Wing, hovercycles, weapons and equipment, Doctor Desmond Bradford, Pecos Bandits and more.

- 22+ O.C.C.s and R.C.C.s.
- Everything you wanted to know about Dog Boys, their creation and training.
- Other mutant animals, including Kill Hounds and Rats and Bears.

- The Lone Star Complex, notable characters & Xiticix Killer.
- The Pecos Empire and Pecos Bandits.
- Many notable places in and people of Lone Star.
- Monsters, bandits, Psi-Stalkers, world information and more!
- Written by Kevin Siembieda. Art by Perez, Breaux and others.
- 176 pages – \$20.95 retail – Cat. No. 825. Available now.



## Rifts® Mercenaries™

– Back in Stock – Available Now

An all-time favorite, **Rifts® Mercenaries™** is back as a short-run printing available online. This book is crammed with details about mercenaries, mercenary companies and the weapons manufacturers that provide them with combat vehicles, tanks, aircraft, watercraft, weapons, explosives, armor, force fields, special ammunition and more! This book has it all.

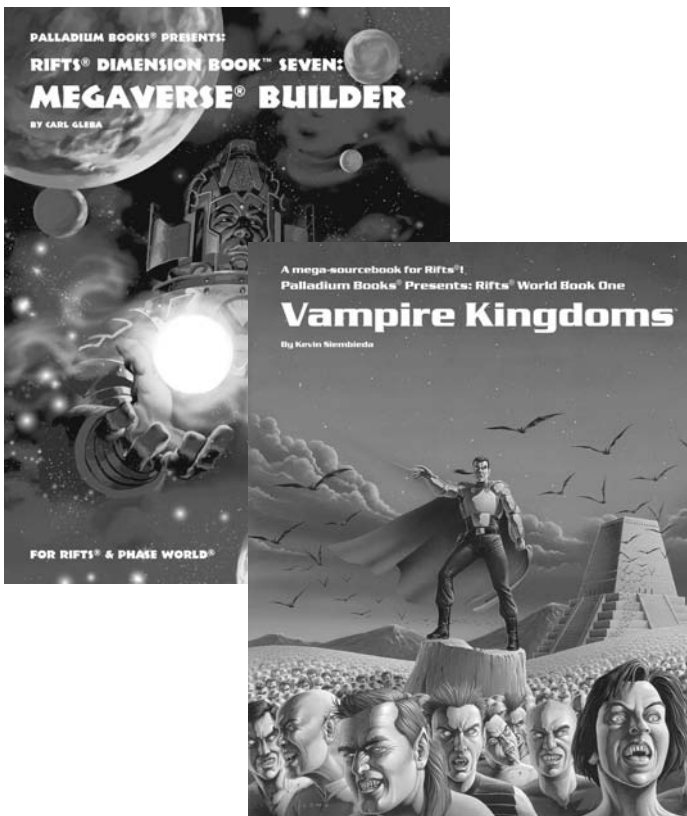
- 9 Mercenary O.C.C.s including Assassin, Bounty Hunter, Professional Thief, Smuggler, Super-Spy, and others.
- Notable mercenary groups, including Larsen's Brigade.
- Rules for creating your own Mercenary Company.
- Golden Age Weaponsmiths' weapons and vehicles sold to mercs.
- Wellington Industries' weapons they sell on the open market.
- Iron Heart Armaments' weapons and combat vehicles.
- Naruni Enterprises and their weapons, armor, vehicles & gear.
- Overview of mercenaries in North America.
- Ancient gods, demons, monsters, freaks, D-Bees and more.
- Written by C.J. Carella. Cover by Kevin Long.
- Art by John Livesay, Wayne Breaux, Vince Martin and others.
- 160 pages – \$20.95 retail – Cat. No. 813. Available now.

## Rifts® Megaverse® Builder

– Back in Stock – Available Now

Rifts® Megaverse® Builder helps explain how the Megaverse works. Create your own worlds and dimensions, travel across the Megaverse. A perfect companion for the *Minion War*™ series and *Phase World*® campaigns.

- Dimension creation rules, Dimensional Storms & anomalies.
- Tolkien Artifact Hunter and Scavenger O.C.C.s, plus more on the Shifters, Dimension Riders, & dangerous dimensional monsters.
- New Summoning Tables and exotic new Familiars.
- The Great Machine dimensional setting.
- The Dimension of Spires and the Garbage Pit dimension.
- Written by Carl Gleba.
- 96 pages – \$16.95 retail – Cat. No. 859. Available now.



Rifts® World Book One:

## Vampire Kingdoms™

One of Palladium's most popular and famous Rifts World Books ever is back in stock.

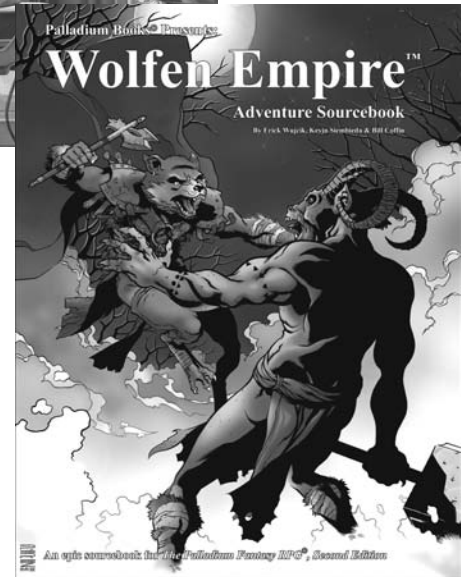
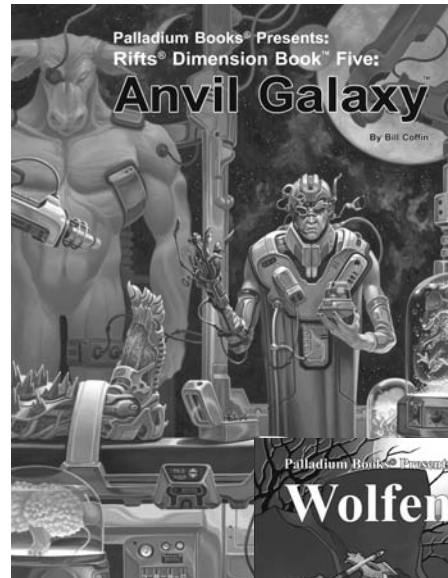
- Vampires, Vampire Intelligences and their Kingdoms.
- Vampire Hunters, Dragon Slayers and weird characters.
- Creation rules for Traveling Shows.
- The Yucatan Peninsula and much more.
- Written by Kevin Siembieda. Cover by Kevin Long.
- 176 pages – \$20.95 retail – Cat. No. 802. Available now.

Rifts® Dimension Book™ 5:

## Anvil Galaxy™

An entire galaxy is put at your fingertips, offering additional alien races and countless adventure ideas.

- Nearly 20 alien races, including the Ratanoid and Star Elves.
- Key planets, races & civilizations (scores of them).
- Planet creation rules and much more.
- 160 pages – \$20.95 retail – Cat. No. 847. Available now.



## Wolfen Empire™

It is truly an adventure sourcebook with monsters, adventures, adventure ideas, history and info about the Wolfen and more.

- Wolfen history, government, military, rank, religion and more.
- 13 notable animals/monsters common to the north.
- Six fully fleshed out adventures plus 101 Adventures Table & more.
- Written by Erick Wujcik, Kevin Siembieda, Bill Coffin & others.
- 160 pages – \$20.95 retail – Cat. No. 471. Available now.



# Rifts® Dyval™ and the Minion War™ Series

## Official Source Material

By Carl Gleba

Additional Text & Ideas by Kevin Siembieda



## Quick Roll

### NPC Villains for Dyval

For Game Masters who want to roll a quick Non-Player Character (NPC) villain, or need ideas for a reoccurring villain, roll on the tables below or select from the choices presented on those tables. *Reoccurring villains* make memorable experiences, and Game Masters should consider coming up with a nemesis for their group of characters. It can be fun, exciting, motivating and galvanizing when a *reoccurring villain* makes an appearance, especially when the player characters least expect it or thought they had seen the last of this fiend in the past.

**Note:** The **Rifts® Conversion Book One** contains many mortal creatures originating from the **Palladium Fantasy RPG®** who make willing servants and worshipers of demons and Deevils. See **Rifts® D-Bees of North America** for a host of potential D-Bee races who could become embroiled in the Minion War. Meanwhile, **Rifts® Dark Conversions** contains a multitude of supernatural beings who may fight on one side or the other in the Minion War as friend, ally, worshiper, slave or opportunist. **Phase World®**, **Aliens Unlimited**, **Aliens Unlimited Galaxy Guide**, both **Rifts® Atlantis** books, **Rifts® Mystic**

**Russia**, **Rifts® China One**, **Mindwerks**, and a host of other sourcebooks across the Palladium Megaverse®, all offer a large number of evil supernatural beings, alien life forms, slave races and people who could become embroiled in the Minion War. Remember, mercenaries, cultists, and opportunists of every race and world may join the forces of infernal darkness, demonic evil or the champions of light in this unfolding free-for-all across the Megaverse. Have fun with the possibilities.

### Step 1: Determine Type of Deevil or Non-Deevil

The Minion War is going to produce all kinds of scoundrels who stand out. For some reason, they've received the favor of one of the Deevil Lords. The possibilities are endless and could even cause a lone evil individual to rise up as high as a Deevil Lord.

**01-10% Non-Deevil Worshiper or Henchman:** Any Deevil Worshiper or willing henchman of any race, from humans to D-Bees. This may include Witches, Shifters, Necromancers, Bio-Wizards, and other evil practitioners of magic, priests of darkness or any of the monster races that tend to find the selfishness, treachery and power-mongering that Deevils promote to be appealing.

**11-30% Other Non-Deevils, but evil beings who may join in the service of dark forces** (Deevil, demon or other), because the supernatural beings offer them a way to exact bloody revenge or because they accept, even encourage, their wicked or depraved ways. Deevils and demons often embrace madmen and encourage their aberrant, destructive, and antisocial behavior, provided it serves the infernals' purpose. Likewise, they encourage selfishness and fan the flames of jealousy and hate in order to win obsessed and angry agents to serve them or their cause. The selfish, hate-filled and power-hungry can often find allies among the demonic and infernal.

**The list below is just *some* of the possibilities:**

- 01-05% Vampire (see **Rifts® Vampire Kingdoms**).
- 05-10% Other Undead (**Rifts® Dark Conversions**).
- 11-15% Giant (**Rifts® Conversion Book One**).
- 16-20% Melech (**Rifts® Conversion Book One**).
- 21-25% Gromek (**Rifts® Conversion Book One**).
- 26-30% Minotaur (**Rifts® Conversion Book One**).
- 31-35% Ratling (**Rifts® Conversion Book One**).
- 36-40% Goblin (**Rifts® Conversion Book One**).
- 41-45% Ogre (**Rifts® Conversion Book One**).
- 46-50% Mucker (**Rifts® Conversion Book One**).
- 51-55% Loogaroo (**Rifts® Conversion Book One**).
- 56-60% Troll (**Rifts® Conversion Book One**).
- 61-65% Lizard Mage (**Rifts® Conversion Book One**).
- 66-70% Orc (**Rifts® Conversion Book One**).
- 71-75% Za (**Rifts® Conversion Book One**).
- 76-80% Beast Dragon (**Rifts® Conversion Book One**).
- 81-85% Boogie-Man (**Rifts® Conversion Book One**).
- 86-90% Sphinx (**Rifts® Conversion Book One**).
- 91-95% Gosai (**Rifts® Conversion Book One**).

96-00% Angel-Demon Serpent (Rifts® Conversion Book One).

**31-70% Deevils and their Host:** Roll on or make selections from the Lesser Deevil Table below.

- 01-04% Tiger Beast
- 05-08% Boneling
- 09-14% Cryxon
- 15-18% Naga Deevil
- 19-22% Shock Dragon
- 23-26% Ice Wraith
- 27-30% Stalker
- 31-35% Deevil
- 36-40% Devilkin
- 41-44% Dire Harpy
- 45-48% Fenry, Demon Wolf
- 49-53% Fiend
- 54-59% Gorgon
- 60-65% Imp
- 66-70% Nexus Deevil
- 71-75% Arch Fiend
- 76-80% Beast
- 81-85% Deevil Dragon
- 86-87% Deevil Wraith
- 88-92% Horror
- 93-96% Pandemonium
- 97-00% Serpent

**71-80% Other Supernatural Beings** who have chosen to fight on the side of the Deevils (or demons, unless stated otherwise).

**81-90% Renegade Gargoyle:** 01-20% Gargoyle Mage, 21-40% Gurgyle, 41-60% Gargoyles, 61-80% Gargoylite, 81-00% Gargoyle Lord. An enemy of demons.

**91-92% Thornhead Demon** (Rifts® Sourcebook One).

**93-95% Brodkil** (Rifts® Sourcebook One).

**96% Witchling** (Rifts® Sourcebook One).

**97-00% Daemonix** (Rifts® Coalition Wars®: Siege on Tolkeen™ Book Three); An enemy of demons.

## Step 2: Determine Rank

Game Masters may wish to select a rank or roll randomly. Keep in mind that even Greater Deevils can, for some reason, be demoted. Most of the time it's for insubordination, or even failure. Perhaps they are disgruntled and trying to get their rank back. Or, a Lesser Deevil or even a Minion has done outstanding work and is on the fast track and has attained a high rank such as Sovereign or higher. The Rank table is just to spice things up and if you're not pleased with random results, select the rank that best fits your campaign. At the very least, Game Masters can assign the default rank as discussed under the Deevil Hierarchy.

- 01-10% Slave, Worshiper or Willing Ally.
- 11-20% Abomination
- 21-40% Minion

41-50% Master Minion

51-75% Sovereign

76-90% Sub-Regent

91-99% Regent

100% Deevil Lord

## Step 3: Powers and Abilities

Aside from the powers and natural abilities of each of the beings listed above, when a creature attains a certain rank they gain a measure of power. This power can be bestowed by having a select group of worshipers, or it can be granted from a Deevil Lord. This step should only be rolled for those who have attained the rank of Sub-Regent or higher. Typically, a Sub-Regent will have one ability, and a Regent can have two or three powers. At the discretion of the Game Master a Deevil of lower rank could have one of the powers below, perhaps bestowed as a boon. Select from the table below or roll randomly to determine.

**01-15% Arcane Power**

**16-25% Psionic Power Increase:**

01-20% Healing

21-40% Sensitive

41-60% Physical

61-80% Mind Bleeder

81-100% Mind Melter. Select 8 Super and 3D6 Minor.

**26-35% Combat Prowess**

**36-45% Invulnerability:**

01-20% Fire

21-40% Cold

41-60% Electricity

61-75% Magic

76-90% Psionics

91-100% Physical S.D.C. attacks.

**46-55% Metamorphosis:**

01-60% Humanoid

61-100% Animal

**56-65% Deific Power:**

01-13% Bio-Regeneration: Deific

14-25% Create Deific Portal

26-38% Deific Curse: Pox

39-50% Deific Curse: Pestilence

51-62% Mobile Sphere of Destruction

63-74% Manifestation

75-87% Agonize Followers

88-100% Corrupt Holy Water

**66-85% Power Boost:**

01-20% P.P.E. increased by 1D6x100.

21-40% I.S.P. increased by 1D6x100.

41-60% Two attributes increased by 1D6+4.

61-80% M.D.C. increased by 2D4x100. (In S.D.C. environments add 2D6x10 Hit Points, and S.D.C. Base Armor Rating of 14 or increased by 2 if 14 or higher.)

81-100% Knowledge Boost: Add 10% to 4 skills, and add four additional skills.

#### **86-95% Summon Lesser Deevils or Minions:**

01-50% Can summon 2D6 Minions.

51-90% Can summon 2D4 Lesser Deevils.

91-100% Can summon 1D6 Greater Deevils.

**96-100% Mutation** - Varies; see the examples in this book, create your own or even use powers from the Heroes Unlimited™ RPG.

## Step 4: Alignment

While these beings are all evil, the alignment may become relevant during game play. An aberrant Deevil may make a deal with characters, while a Diabolic one is liable to kill them outright, and a Miscreant is likely to use them to his advantage. Game Masters should feel free to choose an alignment that they feel is appropriate, or roll randomly.

01-15% Anarchist.

16-50% Miscreant.

51-85% Diabolic.

86-00% Aberrant.

## Step 5: Motivations

What are the Deevil's motivations? What drives it? Most Deevils, like humans, desire a purpose in life, and most fit many of the personalities below. This will be their driving motivator and they will even pursue it when under the orders of a superior. Game Masters, feel free to determine your own motivations or roll on the table below.

**01-15% None** – The Deevil could have been thrust into power unknowingly, or got lucky. Whatever the case, it has not yet determined its own motivations and is feeling its way around like a blind man. It could take years to discover what it desires or even never develop a true motivation.

**16-25% Power Hungry** – Power is the motivating factor. The more, the better. As power comes in many forms, this Deevil will try and amass powerful magic items, spells, scrolls, or other arcane knowledge. It may even go as far as to try and make a deal with a powerful Alien Intelligence, or even try to wake the Old Ones!

**26-35% Greed** – All this Deevil cares about is amassing wealth. It can be in any form, but gold, silver, and gems are preferred, especially in expensive jewelry like crowns, tiaras, and necklaces. Other items include powerful magic items, or rare artifacts, and even expensive art. This Deevil is likely to have already amassed 1D4 million in various treasure.

**36-45% Vengeance** – The Deevil has a score to settle. It's likely against a demon who wronged it in the past or possibly a mortal who, at some point, banished it. This Deevil will do anything in its power to have its vengeance.

**46-55% Fame** – That's right! This Deevil loves the limelight and is a showboat who likes to hear his praises sung. This type of Deevil often takes risks that are uncharacteristic of these beings so that in the end it shines like a hero, at least among its own kind.

**56-65% Devotion** – This particular Deevil has some type of underlying devotion. It could be to fulfilling the wishes of its master or even a particular Deevil Lord. This devotion is the ruling factor and the Deevil is a willing devotee, not some blind follower.

**66-75% Destruction** – All this Deevil cares about is how much it can destroy. From civilizations to small communities, its driving force will be to wipe its enemies from existence. This Deevil is also likely to have grand schemes to produce the maximum amount of destruction. Most will be doomsday style scenarios that are all or nothing. Depending on the Deevil's appetite, these could be long-term plans or quick and dirty schemes.

**76-85% Chaos** – Anarchy and chaos are all this type of Deevil cares about. It will do anything in its power to cause as much chaos and mayhem as possible. The larger the chaos the better. At the very least it will try and cause fear and panic in cities and small communities, however if it can entangle whole nations or worlds, all the better. Large scale chaos often entails a grand scheme or design, and if they aren't careful their well laid plans will come falling down.

**86-00% Puppet/Controlled** – This Deevil is actually the puppet of a more powerful being. It could be another Deevil, or even an Alien Intelligence. This Deevil pretty much has no will of its own and does as it is instructed.

## Step 6: Minions

When a Deevil or similar being achieves a rank of Sovereign or higher, he will have a small following of loyal minions. First roll to determine the number of followers/minions and then the type. Keep in mind that this is only for those who are Sovereigns or higher in rank. It's very unlikely that anyone of lower rank will have any true minions, just those vying for more power themselves and who are perhaps trying to ride the coattails of a higher ranked Deevil.

**01-10% No Minions** – This Deevil has not amassed any followers at all. No one has heard of this Deevil nor his deeds, or perhaps he is too paranoid to work with anyone else and turns all would-be followers away.

**11-30% Local Celebrity** – The Deevil has managed to win over a group of 4D6 various beings.

**31-60% Medium Notoriety** – 2D4x10 beings have sworn fealty to this particular Deevil.

**61-85% Major Notoriety** – This particular Deevil is moderately popular and has amassed a small following of 1D4x100 members. They are likely to be beings that served with this particular Deevil in the Minion War or can be a small cult.

**86-95% Well Known** – Popular and well known, this Deevil has a group that is 2D4x100 strong! Many more flock to his banner each week.

**96-00% Infamous!** – This Deevil has dominion over 1D6x1000 beings. Many have rallied to his cause and are all faithful followers. If the Deevil has any additional powers, it's possible that they could be bestowed from this particular group.

## Step 6A: Breakdown of Minions

This is a rough breakdown of the beings following the Deevil. Mortals are non-supernatural beings like Orcs, Ogres and Trolls. Minor/Lesser Beings can be any of the lesser supernatural minions that are not Deevils, such as Brodkil, Sowki, or legions of undead. Or they can be Lesser Deevils. Greater Beings/Deevils are likely to be Greater Deevils, or can be Dragons, Lizard Mages, C'ro Demon Mages, and beings of similar power.

**01-30%** 100% Mortals.

**31-40%** 90% Mortals, 10% Minor/Lesser Beings.

**41-50%** 70% Mortals 20% Minor/Lesser Beings, 10% Greater Beings/Deevils.

**51-60%** 50% Mortals, 30% Minor/Lesser Beings, 20% Greater Beings/Deevils.

**61-70%** 20% Mortals, 50% Minor/Lesser Beings, 30% Greater Being/Deevils.

**71-80%** 10% Mortals 50% Minor /Lesser Beings, 40% Greater Beings/Deevils.

**81-90%** 50% Minor/Lesser Beings, 50% Greater Beings/Deevils.

**91-96%** 60% Greater Beings/Deevils, 40% Minor Beings/Deevils.

**97-00%** 70% Greater Beings/Deevils, 30% Minor Beings/Deevils.

## Step 7: Wealth and Magic Items

Most notable beings have amassed a small fortune. It was either stolen, inherited from a predecessor, or given as tribute. This treasure may not be on the individual in question, but rather safely stored away in a treasure chest in a particular dungeon, or secured in a vault in some hidden lair or even at a shrine/temple dedicated to this Deevil. While a value in credits/gold is given as an indicator of the Deevil's wealth, Game Masters should feel free to substitute magic items such as weapons, scrolls, or Techno-Wizard weapons as they see fit.

**01-20%** None!

**21-30%** 1D4x10,000

**31-40%** 2D6x10,000

**41-50%** 1D4x100,000

**51-60%** 2D6x100,000

**61-70%** 1D4x1 million.

**71-80%** 2D6x1 million.

**81-90%** Roll again and double the results.

**91-00%** Roll again and triple the results.

## Deevil NPC Groups

### The Double Dealers

Deevils have always delighted in capturing demons. Over the centuries, many demons have ended up in Mephisto's prison. Most are tortured endlessly and kept on the brink of death for many years. While demons most certainly have supernatural stamina, eventually even their wills can be broken. As a result,

Mephisto has formed an elite squad composed of demons who now serve him. This squad is known as the Double Dealers. Even the most desperate of demons would seldom agree to actively work against their own people, especially in a time of all-out war, consequently, most of the Double Dealers are those whose "true names" are known. Dangerous knowledge that forces them to serve a hated enemy and compels them to obey their despicable Deevil master.

The Double Dealers have proven their worth to Lord Mephisto and Supreme Lord Sahtalus a dozen times in the Minion War. The squad is used to infiltrate and attack their fellow demons, cause confusion among their ranks, and otherwise assist the Deevils in gathering intelligence, acts of sabotage, assassination of demon leaders, and wholesale slaughter of demon troops.

What other plans the Deevil Lords have for the Double Dealers remains shrouded in secrecy for now. However, rumors around Dyval suggest a hit directly on Hades, possibly against one of the Demon Lords themselves, or to cause internal chaos and strife and force the Demon Lords to recall some of their troops and deplete the front lines all the more.

### Regent Dread Gore

#### Leader of the Double Dealers

The Deevil in charge of the Double Dealers is Regent Dread Gore, a Deevil Horror. For years he served Mephisto, helping to



torture prisoners, extract information, and perform many mundane functions that a prison warden would be needed for. It was actually his idea to use the demons in this capacity. It was something he contemplated for the longest time, but there was nothing that could benefit him directly. Then the Taut Offensive forever changed the Deevil Lords' outlook on their longtime enemies. Dread Gore saw advancement in his future and quickly rose from a simple Sovereign to a Regent seemingly overnight. He chose his timing perfectly, right when Sahtalus was demanding more from the other Deevil Lords. Each had little to offer, including Mephisto. Initially, Sahtalus was opposed to the idea and commanded Mephisto to destroy all demon prisoners who had yielded all the information they knew. Not seeing eye to eye in this suggestion, Mephisto went ahead with his plans anyway. If caught he would write it off as a failed experiment. As it turned out, he was not, and Dread Gore was commanded to take a force behind enemy lines and destroy the demon in charge of attacking Dyval from the Great Rift. The attack went off without a hitch, and when the Deevils once again held their own in the Great Rift Mephisto once again made his pitch for the Double Dealers. Finally, Sahtalus agreed and with that, Dread Gore was granted the power of a Regent, despite having hardly any followers.

Dread Gore is a harsh taskmaster and constantly berates and belittles the demons under his command. He treats them as the lowest of the low and never gives them a moment's peace. The only time the demons are left alone is in the field, and then only if they are on a mission that involves thwarting the demons. Any other time they are being tortured and broken to remind them who their true masters are, and this is something that Dread Gore takes great pleasure in. The demons are helpless to make a move against their master and Dread Gore knows it.

**True Name:** Bezial.

**Alignment:** Miscreant.

**Disposition:** A very cruel taskmaster who delights in the pain and suffering of others. He is often sarcastic and very blunt in his reports, and on more than one occasion has crossed the line with Mephisto. His sudden increase in power has made him very arrogant and sure of himself, lowering his inhibitions and increasing his appetite for even more power!

**Attributes:** I.Q. 20, M.E. 22, M.A. 9, P.S. 34, P.P. 18, P.E. 22, P.B. 2, Spd 35.

**M.D.C.:** 800 (On S.D.C. worlds, Regent Dread Gore has 72 Hit Points, 25 S.D.C. and an A.R. of 16.)

**Horror Factor:** 17

**Height:** 20 feet (6 m).

**Weight:** 2000 pounds (900 kg).

**Age:** Unknown, at least several hundred thousand years old.

**P.P.E.:** 198. **I.S.P.:** None.

**Natural Abilities:** Nightvision 120 feet (36.6 m), see the invisible, turn invisible at will, impossible to blind or sneak attack due to his many eyes, can leap 100 feet (30.5 m), dimensional teleport 90%, impervious to poison, impervious to normal fire and cold, resistant to magic fire and cold (half damage), bio-regeneration 4D6 per melee, regenerate eyes within 24 hours, and magically knows all languages. His granted Regent powers are Metamorphosis: Superior Humanoid and a Power Boost. See M.D.C. (Hit Points). Unlike the

normal Metamorphosis: Humanoid, Dread Gore can assume the shape of supernatural humanoids, typically other demons and similar creatures. It should be noted that he only appears like them, and does not get any special powers or abilities. He commonly assumes the shape of a Baal-Rog or Raksasha when having to infiltrate demon camps. The duration of the metamorphosis is unlimited; however, it requires a measure of concentration and control. As a result, he is unable to hold the shape while in combat. He can ambush but after the first melee, he reverts back to a Deevil Horror. Finally, when transformed, he loses the sight of his many eyes and must rely on those from the shape that he has assumed.

**Skills of Note:** Streetwise 72%, Intelligence 85%, Land Navigation 94%, Track Humans 98%, Recognize Weapon Quality 86%, Military Etiquette 91%, Demon and Monster Lore 91%, Basic Math 98%, Climb 98/96%, Swim 98%, Literate in Elven, American, and Dwarven 96%.

**Vulnerabilities/Penalties:** Those common to Deevils and supernatural beings. Also, his confidence in his having absolute control over his team could also be a weakness. If he is not careful a minor slip-up could spell his doom and his team wouldn't hesitate to tear him to shreds.

**Experience Level:** 9<sup>th</sup> level Horror.

**Psionic Powers:** None.

**Magic Knowledge:** All level one and two Air Elemental Magic, plus Electric Arc (8), Lightning Arc (30), Call Lightning (15), Turn Dead (6), Exorcism (30), Banishment (65), and Heal Wounds (10).

**Attacks per Melee:** Six.

**Bonuses:** +5 on initiative, strike, parry, and dodge, +6 to pull punch, +2 to roll with impact/fall, +7 to save vs magic, +3 on all other saving throws, and +12 to save vs Horror Factor.

**Weapon Proficiencies:** Chain.

**Alliances and Allies:** He has earned an honored spot as one of Mephisto's Regents. This makes him privy to all kinds of perks that the Deevil Lord might dish out.

**Enemies:** Dread Gore has made numerous enemies from the demons still kept in captivity within Mephisto's prison-like fortress in Inferno. Any one of these demons would love nothing more than to skin him alive. If ever these demons were released it goes without saying that a few would gun for him, especially members of his own team.

**Weapons and Armor:** The only notable item Dread Gore owns is a Splugorth Talisman of Armor. He wears it all the time and never takes it off. He has it on a special demon-size chain that goes around his neck.

**Money:** None! He has little desire for wealth as that comes with power.

**Description:** A large, hideous monstrosity with a gapping maw with pools of saliva and spittle oozing out of his mouth. He has iridescent blue veins bulging all over his body and his eyes glow a light blue color like that of a ley line.

## Krin'Jor, Raksasha, Quickstats

Krin'Jor was a faithful follower of Abdul-Ra. That was many years ago. When he learned that his liege had been taken prisoner by the Deevils, he made it his personal mission to seek out

his master and free him. He and a select group of demons managed to infiltrate Dyval and made it as far as Tundra. However, their timing was terrible. It took them years of careful planning to get as deep as they did, but by the time they got there Rhada had freed Abdul-Ra, and the Deevil Lords were on to her. Her realm was effectively sealed off and Krin'Jor and his team were surrounded, and most of them killed. Only Krin'Jor and a few others remained alive, only to be brought to Mephisto's prison, where they spent the next two hundred years being tortured on a daily basis and brought to the brink of death often. Krin'Jor was beaten until he was forced to reveal his true name. While he welcomed the cold embrace of death, the Deevils never let him have it. And so for a moment of peace he sold his deepest secret.

Krin'Jor feels all but abandoned by Abdul-Ra. Surely when he was freed he learned of Krin'Jor's efforts. For many years Krin'Jor held on to hope, but even that faded away. Now he is forced to do the Deevils' bidding. At one point he would have tried to do everything in his power to warn his fellow demons, but now he could care less. These days, all he cares about is avoiding the next beating, which comes all too often from Regent Dread Gore.

**Alignment:** Was Aberrant, however years of abuse have made him lose any thread of honor he had and he is now Miscreant.

**Attributes:** I.Q. 15, M.E. 12 (was 18 prior to having been beaten for so many years.), M.A. 15, P.S. 40, P.P. 18, P.E. 17, P.B. 12, Spd 10.

**M.D.C.:** 1000 (On S.D.C. worlds Krin'Jor has 77 Hit Points, 60 S.D.C., with an A.R. of 10.)

**Effective Level:** 10th level Raksasha.

**Note:** In most missions against demons, Krin'Jor is supposed to play the role of the advisor to Gulag.

**Disposition:** He used to be gung-ho, guts and glory. However, now he is more cynical and cares very little about anything except himself.

**Description:** He used to be a regal looking Raksasha, but now he looks pretty mangy, with matted and dirty fur.

**Skills of Note:** Intelligence 98%, Land Navigation 60%, and Demon and Monster Lore 92%.

**Weapons and Equipment:** None, he only has whatever Regent Dread Gore assigns to him for a particular mission.

### Neemin, Fire Jinn, Quickstats

Neemin was a prisoner long before the Taut Offensive. He was captured by Deevils in the Land of the Damned in the Palladium World. During one engagement he noticed that the Deevils were using some new type of weapon. As it was in his nature to steal things, he was ordered to sneak into the Deevil encampment and take a weapon so the demons could study it. His mission was going well and all he had to do was leave the Deevil camp. However, he had the opportunity for a little mischief and he let that get the better of him. His plan was to release a few of the Deevil Infernal Sprites. Unfortunately for him, the Sprites, being trained to attack demons, immediately turned on him, alerting nearby Deevils. He was quickly captured and brought back to Dyval, where he has been in Mephisto's prison-like fortress ever since.

**Alignment:** Anarchist.

**Attributes:** I.Q. 11, M.E. 18, M.A. 14, P.S. 34, P.P. 15, P.E. 18, P.B. 7, Spd 40.

**M.D.C.:** 1100 (On S.D.C. worlds Neemin has 68 Hit Points, 60 S.D.C., with an A.R. of 14.)

**Effective Level:** 6th level Fire Jinn.

**Note:** Neemin is the group procurement specialist. He is good at sneaking into locations and robbing people blind. His thieving has gotten him into trouble on more than one occasion, and it's the reason that he is stuck serving the Deevils.

**Disposition:** Natural provocateur and loves to push people's buttons. Even after all these years he still likes to infuriate the Deevils, especially Dread Gore. It is often worth the beating that soon follows.

**Description:** Looks like your typical Fire Jinn.

**Skills of Note:** Prowl 60%, Streetwise 65%, Land Navigation 85%, Locksmith 80%, and Pick Locks 90%.

**Weapons and Equipment:** None, although his thieving abilities often allow him to procure a weapon, or even armor when needed.

### Gulag, Baal-Rog, Quickstats

Gulag was a promising demon who had earned a position within the Brass Guard II. He received the full training that those demons normally receive and then decided to set out on his own, despite the nature of the Brass Guard to work as a unit. While he was trained in such tactics, he saw himself as a solo savior for the demons and once the Taut Offensive commenced, he found a way to sneak into the battle. His intent was to cause a little destruction, and gather some intelligence while in Dyval. He had hoped that by doing so he would be given a chance to lead and take the Brass Guard II directly to the Deevil Lords' citadels. His plans were cut short and like numerous other demons, he was rounded up and captured.

It's fortunate that he was so new to the Brass Guard II that he knew very little about the unit, especially concerning their future plans. He was seen as someone important and he received an especially harsh hand from his captors. His true name as well as his training and the existence of the unit were divulged to the Deevil Lords, and that's because those were the limits to his knowledge. However, it was because of his training and knowledge of small group tactics that he was selected to be a member of the Double Dealers. He is also used as the group's leader when they are on solo missions, or there is no Deevil handler around. It's a position he always coveted, but not under these circumstances. He longs for the day that he can rip Dread Gore to pieces and has told him that on many occasions. Of course, each time he still receives a beating.

**Alignment:** Diabolic.

**Attributes:** I.Q. 14, M.E. 15, M.A. 18, P.S. 38, P.P. 20, P.E. 26, P.B. 8, Spd 40, 100 flying.

**M.D.C.:** 600 (On S.D.C. worlds Gulag has 126 Hit Points, 40 S.D.C., with an A.R. of 14.)

**Effective Level:** Fifth.

**Note:** Gulag was trained under a Senior Brass Guard member (see E'Ell in **Rifts Dimension Book 10, Hades** for details) back in Hades. His specialty is espionage.

**Disposition:** At one time he was very cocky and arrogant, full of spit and vinegar, ready to take on the Megaverse. Now he is broken and only does his best so he can avoid a beating, which comes often. Given the chance, he would kill the wretched Deevil, however with his shame of being captured, he would be an outcast in Hades. So now he feels all is lost.

**Description:** He used to look like any other Baal-Rog. However, Mephisto and his jailers used certain magical torture devices that despite the Baal-Rog's impressive regenerative abilities, have left him covered in ugly scars.

**Skills of Note:** Intelligence 58%, Pick Locks 60%, Prowl 55%, and Locate Secret Compartments/Doors 45%.

**Weapons and Equipment:** None. He is forced to find weapons on the battlefield, otherwise he is stuck using his own natural abilities.

### Rhal Blood Gore, Gallu Demon Bull, Quickstats

Rhal had the misfortune of being summoned by a human wizard. This wizard and his group of fellow adventurers roamed the Megaverse, going from one adventure to the next. Despite not liking the fact that he was summoned and controlled by a human, he was actually treated with an amount of dignity and respect. This group of adventures eventually came across a group of Deevils who wiped them all out, except for Rhal. Rhal was taken as a prisoner and turned over to the local Regent. Eventually Rhal ended up in Mephisto's prison with the other demons of Hades.

**Alignment:** Diabolic.

**Attributes:** I.Q. 11, M.E. 12, M.A. 11, P.S. 33, P.P. 15, P.E. 23, P.B. 9, Spd 160.

**M.D.C.:** 450 (On S.D.C. worlds Rhal Blood Gore has 28 Hit Points, 50 S.D.C., with an A.R. of 15.)

**Effective Level:** 4th level Gallu Demon Bull.

**Note:** Rhal is the group's weapon specialist, and he can pick up just about any weapon and use it with some proficiency.

**Disposition:** Tends to be a lone wolf and doesn't talk much. He seems to hate his role in this and hates the Deevils even more. This causes Rhal to hold a lot in, giving him a really short fuse. All too often he must vent it on his fellow demons in service to the Deevils.

**Description:** A large, ebony skinned humanoid with the head and legs of a bull. His horns are often covered in demon blood and he always appears to have just been in a fight with someone.

**Skills of Note:** Land Navigation 85%, Intelligence 88%, W.P. Energy Rifle, W.P. Heavy M.D. Weapons, W.P. Pole Arm, W.P. Sword, W.P. Battle Ax, W.P. Blunt, W.P. Knives, W.P. Archery, W.P. Targeting, and W.P. Spear.

**Weapons and Equipment:** None. He is forced to find equipment in the field and make do with that, otherwise he must rely on his own natural abilities.

### Other Members of the Double Dealers

Of the Double Dealers, among the demons, Krin'Jor, Neemin, Gulag, and Rhal are seen as the defacto demons in charge. There are 26 other members of the Double Dealers, including a Gargoyle Lord, a Gargoyle Mage, 2 Gargoyles, 2

Gurgoyles, 6 Alu, 8 Shedim, 2 Demon Flies, and 4 Tauris. Regent Dread Gore knows all of the demons' true names and has complete control over them.

## The Chaos Legion

The Chaos Legion is the personal retribution squad of Mephisto. They are his elite team of problem solvers. He rarely uses them in the Minion War, although with recent events he has had little choice lately. Originally the legion was used to gather information about the other Deevil Lords, and it was their handiwork that ultimately revealed Rhada's betrayal. The team is actually much larger than Mephisto lets on, and they have agents nestled in each of the Deevil Lords' courts. They excel at espionage and infiltration, not at brute strength and power. Each member is fairly intelligent and capable of working on his or her own. As a team, they are quite effective and no doubt their skills will be in high demand with the Minion War spreading everywhere.

### Regent Stassus, Serpent, Quickstats

Regent Stassus has long been a favorite minion of Mephisto and it was one of the reasons he was given command of the Chaos Legion. The Serpent befriended Rhada long ago and even today he still visits the Deevil Lord and the two have long conversations. Stassus has been able to learn much, even from Leviathan, who often comes to vent and berate Rhada. Stassus is very smooth and his style is usually to become your friend, and this allows him to not only learn a lot about a potential enemy, he even gets them to volunteer information about themselves without them even knowing it.

**Alignment:** Miscreant.

**Attributes:** I.Q. 25, M.E. 23, M.A. 25, P.S. 23, P.P. 18, P.E. 21, P.B. 24, Spd 15.

**M.D.C.:** 745 (On S.D.C. worlds Regent Stassus has 161 Hit Points, 172 S.D.C., with an A.R. of 14.)

**Effective Level:** 10th level Serpent.

**Note:** When not on assignment for Mephisto, Regent Stassus often spends his time in the company of Rhada. He knows she has more information that has yet to be revealed to Mephisto, and the Regent is determined to get it from her. His Regent Powers are Power Boost: M.D.C. and Psionic Powers. He has 300 I.S.P. and has the following powers: Empathic Transmission (6), Group Trance (15), Hypnotic Suggestion (6), Mentally Possess Others (30), Mind Wipe (special), Telekinesis (super) (10+), Alter Aura (2), Induce Sleep (4), Empathy (4), See Aura (6), Telepathy (4), and Total Recall (2).

**Disposition:** Suave and smooth as ice. He always has a sympathetic ear for the ladies, and is a great drinking buddy for the guys.

**Description:** A large, golden serpent with brown eyes. When taking a human form he assumes a variety of guises, but all are handsome human males.

**Skills of Note:** Prowl 91%, Intelligence 89%, Surveillance 96%, Interrogation Techniques 98%, and Escape Artist 96%.

**Weapons and Equipment:** Nothing! If he requires something the Regent can usually get his hands on it if needed.

## Sub-Regent Rul'la, Beast, Quickstats

Rul'la, at one time, was a loyal follower of Sahtalus. Time and again he served his lord for centuries. However, numerous times he was passed over for choice assignments and finally, when several Beasts (those to whom he considered himself to be superior) were selected over him for duty to “guard” the other Deevil Lords, he left Sahtalus, feeling betrayed. Regent Stassus happened to witness Rul'la's departure and followed him, even offering some friendly advice. Over time, Stassus was able to win Rul'la's loyalty and gratitude. While he could not promise much, he did give the Beast the rank of Sub-Regent and recruited him into the Chaos Legion. All Rul'la had to do was reveal small tidbits of information. Most information was stuff already known by both Mephisto and Stassus, however he did confirm the Beasts' intentions, which were to spy on each of the Deevil Lords. That alone was enough, and ever since, he has been a member of the Chaos Legion. His affiliation was initially a secret, but over time he received additional notoriety and it eventually became known that he was working for Mephisto. Whether Sahtalus knew this all along or didn't care is unknown. However, Rul'la's days of learning information about Sahtalus are over, as now even his fellow Beasts won't allow him entry into Sahtalus's citadel.

**Alignment:** Diabolic.

**Attributes:** I.Q. 12, M.E. 15, M.A. 19, P.S. 39, P.P. 20, P.E. 26, P.B. 7, Spd 29.

**M.D.C.:** 190 (On S.D.C. worlds Rul'la has 56 Hit Points, 59 S.D.C., with an A.R. of 15.)

**Effective Level:** 7th level Beast.

**Note:** Rul'la may lack some of the more subtle skills needed for the Chaos Legion, but that's alright. Muscle is needed now and then, and that's right wear he fits in. Also, Mephisto has not granted Rul'la any powers, nor has he amassed any followers from which power could be gained. He may well prove himself during the Minion War, at which point he will receive his just reward.

**Disposition:** A dedicated gung-ho attitude which would have served Sahtalus well, but now it serves Mephisto.

**Description:** Rul'la has a thing for piercings. He has loops of chain piercing the bottoms of his wings that swing around and connect to two large piercings on his chest. He also has a small length of chain between his horns that connects to two large bolts that seem to be screwed into his horns.

**Skills of Note:** Land Navigation 96%, W.P. Sword, W.P. Pole Arm, W.P. Heavy M.D. Weapons, W.P. Energy Rifle, and Lore: Demons and Monsters 75%.

**Weapons and Equipment:** He wears about 4000 credits worth of magical gold chain. (The chain is M.D.C. instead of S.D.C. and takes a lot more to break.) He also has a T.W. Plasma Rifle, and a newly acquired Techno-Wizard chain saw which he is endeavoring to learn to use.

## Sovereign Fullen, Arch Fiend, Quickstats

Sovereign Fullen was recruited because of his numerous contacts throughout the Megaverse. It is rumored that he even has contacts in Hades! He is able to get juicy pieces of information that always help with their current assignment and he seems to have a contact just about everywhere.

He also saw action during the Siege on Tolkeen, and instead of joining in the chaos, helped several prominent individuals, exactly who he's not saying, although one of them is rumored to be someone in the Circle of Twelve. Because of his work in Tolkeen, he has several contacts who now reside in either the Magic Zone or New Lazlo.

**Alignment:** Aberrant.

**Attributes:** I.Q. 22, M.E. 19, M.A. 24, P.S. 19, P.P. 20, P.E. 24, P.B. 14, Spd 22.

**M.D.C.:** 150 (On S.D.C. worlds Sovereign Fullen has 59 Hit Points, 47 S.D.C. with an A.R. of 14.)

**Effective Level:** 6th level Arch Fiend.

**Note:** Sovereign Fullen has assumed his human identity so often over the last few years that it is the form he is most often seen in.

**Disposition:** Silent and observant, and always seems to be probing for weakness.

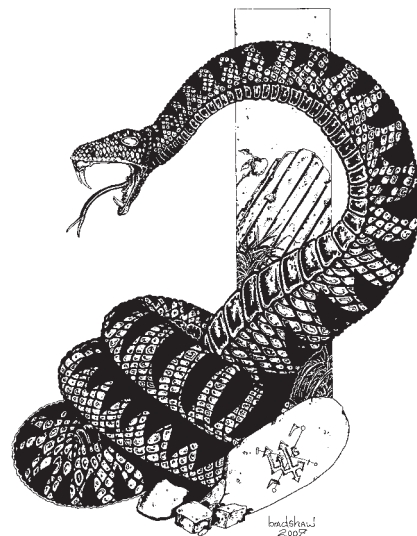
**Description:** Sovereign is indistinguishable from any other Arch Fiend. In his human form, however, he favors a moderately built human male with brown hair, beard, and red robes.

**Skills of Note:** Streetwise 64%, Intelligence 75%, and Locate Secret Compartments/Doors 53%.

**Weapons and Equipment:** He carries a corrupted Millennium Tree Staff. It has the following spells: Words of Truth, World Bizarre, Power Bolt, Domination, and Trance. A total of 8 spells can be cast per 24 hours. The Staff does 4D6 M.D.

## Chaos Legion - Other Members

Regent Stassus is in command of the whole squad. However, he will often use his lieutenants (those mentioned above) to take on various tasks, or lead various smaller missions. The Chaos Legion also has 6 Deevils, 4 Fiends, 3 Imps, 3 Devilkins, 2 Gorgons, 2 Serpents, and 1 Deevil Wraith. From time to time, other Deevils are selected for various tasks as needed. Only those who show a fair amount of initiative and support for Mephisto are asked to join the squad. Regent Stassus always has the final say on new recruits, and Deevils often try to bribe and coerce their way on to the squad. It never works, because Regent Stassus wouldn't be where he is if not for his own cunning and intelligence.







# The Wormwood™ Addenda

## Part Three

### The Free City of Worldgate™

By Braden Campbell

*"I've been here for five weeks, and no matter how much I explore Worldgate, I know that it will always be a city of secrets. How could it not, with all its winding alleys, cavernous shop interiors, and easily missed doors hiding who knows what and leading who knows where?"*

- Erin Tarn, "Wormwood, a Distant World"

## City Overview

Home to a quarter of a million people, Worldgate is the third largest Human city on Wormwood. It lies in the midst of a large, circular valley. High walls surround it on all sides, and the Northern Mountains form a natural barrier between it and the Dark Domains. Worldgate is most famous for the *Suq al Dimeteri*, the dimensional market, but there is far more to it than just an open-air shopping mall.

Worldgate is commonly called the Free City, because for as long as anyone can remember, it has remained politically neutral. It has never, in all of the recorded history of Wormwood, been a part of any Kingdom, nor has it ever been attacked or occupied by any invading force. Even in the days of the Unified Realm, Worldgate was its own, small, independent city-state. Ostensibly, it is ruled over by **King Luke Shrombek** and his Ruling Council, but any who come to stay in the Free City for long soon learn that the true power lies with the mysterious Lords of the Exchequer. In fact, the creation of the city itself is credited to these nine beings whose faces no one has ever seen.

According to legend, the city of Worldgate was founded when the Unified Realm was in its infancy and the Northern Mountains didn't even exist. The earliest recorded mention of the city comes from the memoirs of Cirtalcrus the Younger, an explorer and cartographer who lived over two thousand years ago. In his book he describes a vast and empty land far to the

south of Charun, notable for three things; an area where the skin of the Living Planet seemed purple and bruised, a crater in the center of this area which measured nearly a mile (one and a half kilometers) in diameter, and a strange spiraled pattern of clouds that overhung everything. Cirtalcrus also wrote that there were “strange flashes of lightning all about the ground,” and that “thrice we did witness the opening of small dimensional doorways.” These random Rifts caused the explorer to turn back immediately for Charun.

Another two hundred years would pass before anyone from the Realm would again venture into these lands. This time it was a group of resiners wandering the land in search of new deposits. When they came upon the lands where Worldgate now lies, they discovered that Cirtalcrus had been correct, at least about a few things. The land here looked dark and bruised in sharp contrast to the usual pink, tan, and brown colors of Wormwood. The spiral pattern of clouds remained as well. As for the crater, there was no sign, but a massive castle of some kind now dominated the landscape, surrounded by walls thirty feet high (9 m). Outside the walls, a number of other buildings had apparently sprung up, but none of these, the castle included, had been made from Wormwood. These were rough and unnatural stone, wood, and metal. Truly, this was a strange and alien land, best to be avoided.

When the Unified Realm was at the height of its expansionary period, an envoy of one thousand knights led by Emperor Jhagus II, marched into the purple lands surrounding the city (which by this time had swelled to a population in the tens of thousands). Approaching the gates of the massive castle, the Emperor demanded palaver with whoever claimed authority over this region. He was met by nine beings that the world would later come to know as the Lords of the Exchequer.

The Lords are just one of many enigmas in the Free City. In the two thousand years that they have called Wormwood their home, no one has ever seen their faces. Each and every time that the Lords make a public appearance, they are covered head to toe in long robes. They wear black leather gloves and boots that cover their hands and feet, and their faces are hidden behind a mask of black porcelain. All that can be said about them with certainty is that they are not human. Each of the Lords stands eight feet tall (2.4 m), with long arms and clawed fingers. Although they look thin and gangly, each of them must weigh several hundred pounds. When they move, there is a slight distortion in the air, almost like an afterimage that trails along behind them. In general, even when being honest and friendly, they make everyone quite uncomfortable just by their presence.

The Lords of the Exchequer invited the visitors into their keep, and shut the gates once more. Exactly what then took place is an utter and total mystery, but within a few days time the Emperor and his knights were on their way back to Charun. Obviously, some kind of deal had been struck between the two parties, for the expansion of the Unified Realm went right around Worldgate, leaving it independent and free from the authority of the Emperor. As well, the order of the Sentinel Knights came into existence shortly afterwards; was it coincidence that Jhagus II had taken one thousand knights into the Lords’ keep, and that there were only ever an equal number of Sentinels afterwards? Many think not. Lastly, the fantastic Soulstuff Blades, wielded exclusively by those same one thou-

sand warriors, made their first appearance in the years following the secret meetings. Again, even though there is no direct proof, many believe that these incredible weapons were forged and offered to the Emperor by the nine Lords.

From that day forward, the business of Worldgate was trade. Twice a year, the Realm sent massive caravans loaded with food, water, crystals, and stones to the Free City. Now, one might wonder why the Lords needed to import such basic necessities when the Living Planet would provide them all for free. The answer lies in the uniqueness of Worldgate’s location. When Cirtalcrus the Younger recorded that the land here was bruised, he was exactly right. Worldgate sits in the midst of three hundred square miles (768 square km) of damaged Wormwood. It is almost as if a giant fist once pummeled the land, leaving it bruised but not destroyed. Whatever may have caused this is yet another of the city’s mysteries, but the end result is certain; Wormwood tries to provide for the people living here, but cannot quite succeed. The food in Worldgate’s caves is bland and colorless. The water that bubbles up from the city’s many wells and faucets is alright for bathing, but is otherwise brackish and unfit to drink. Magical stones and crystals simply cannot be created or summoned forth here, nor can Battle Saints, Orbs, or the Spirits of Wormwood. Any buildings conjured up from the Living Planet are small, stunted, and like the surrounding countryside, are varying shades of blue, purple, and black. Things are not nearly as bad as are found in parts of the Reorith Province, but to say that the Wormwood beneath the city is broken or poisoned would be very apt.

Whatever caused this huge injury to Wormwood left yet another side effect behind; one that, in a strange way, made up for the lack of local resources. The entire area is magically powerful. Any priest or man of magic who enters the confines of the Old City will gain all the bonuses of being in close proximity to a ley line (range and duration of spells and prayers is increased by 50%). It is also dimensionally weak. Tiny Rifts constantly flare up within the *Suq al Dimeteri*, spewing out strange items and confused travelers. In fact, Worldgate seems to be an interdimensional magnet of some kind, pulling in a full half of any and all random Rift activity on Wormwood. (So, if one comes to this world by pure chance, the odds are that person will arrive in Worldgate.) Combined, these factors have made the Free City a natural transdimensional hub just as surely as a sheltered harbor would make for a thriving sea port.

It would seem that Aeon Keep, the personal abode for the Lords of the Exchequer, was the first building to be constructed here. Over time, the random Rifting brought in enough off-world travelers to found a small town. From there, merchants, tradesmen, and mercenaries, some drawn here by accident and others by design, came to call this strange place their home. However, Worldgate attracted another type of person in large numbers: those who did not wish to be found. Because it exists in a “cosmic blind spot,” once a dimensional traveler arrives on Wormwood they are all but impossible to track down. They have literally dropped off the Megaversal map. This made Worldgate a natural refuge for escaped slaves, criminals, fugitives, persecuted refugees, religious fanatics, assassins, and smugglers from an infinite number of realities. Simply put, Worldgate was (and remains) a great place to get lost in.

When Lord Reorith invited all the powers of Wormwood to meet and discuss a plan to destroy the Unholy, the overseers of Worldgate were included. Surprisingly, the nine Lords accepted, leaving Aeon Keep in a machine like an armored locomotive and arriving in Watchtower within a few days of travel. As usual, their true natures were disguised behind layers of robes, cloaks, leathers, and masks. They sat without saying so much as a single word, listening intently to everything that was said. Then, when Ezud, the Cathedral, and the Sentinel Knights clasped each other's hands in agreement, the Lords rose, bowed deeply, and left. Worldgate chose not to partake in the Congregation. It could be that since Worldgate was a den of thieves, merchants, and refugees, that the Lords had no armed force to donate to the cause. It is also possible that through some kind of oracular means they knew the Battle of Khulam Plains would be lost. Regardless, the Congregation carried on without them, and did indeed lose the fight before the gates of Charun. The Unified Realm vanished entirely, and as they retreated southwards toward Nanuz, the Cathedral survivors cursed the Free City for its abstention.

Even though they had sent no soldiers into the fray, the Congregation's loss dealt the Lords of the Exchequer a harsh blow regardless. With the extinction of both the Unified Realm and the Sentinel Order, and having earned the Cathedral's eternal enmity, Worldgate now found itself high and dry. Literally. The caravans that brought food and water into the city were no more, and by the fifth year of the Great Tribulation, anarchy reigned in the streets. The Lords refused to simply let a thousand years worth of work self-destruct so easily. So, they came up with a two-fold solution. Firstly, they announced to the throngs of rioters outside the walls of their keep that they would hand control of the city over to an appointed King and a civilian Ruling Council. Secondly, Worldgate had to reestablish trade with the other Wormwood powers. But with what could it do business? What indispensable product was it that only the Free City could provide? Depending on one's point of view, the solution was either diabolically clever, or simply diabolic.

## The New Model Army

The first appointed King of Worldgate was a man named Micah Labord. Originally an interdimensional merchant trader, he had managed to become as wealthy as any Wormwood citizen could hope to be. He was familiar with many other dimensions, including Earth and the Palladium World, and it was his experience and greed that brought him to the attention of the Lords. Labord had gone as far as he could go in life without receiving some kind of boon, and was thus only too happy to accept control of the Free City. Whether it was King Labord who came up with idea, or whether it was the will of the Lords may never be known, but in the fifth year of the Great Tribulation, the **Worldgate Impress Service** was founded.

Headed up by experienced members of the Zacchaeans (see *The Rifter*® #39), the Impress Service had a simple mandate: to find suitable volunteers and to bring them back to Worldgate so that they could be folded into a massive army. What this really meant was that agents from the Free City, under the direct authority of the Lords of the Exchequer, would travel throughout the Megaverse and kidnap people. For the most part, they went

to places with a relatively low technology level. This somewhat lessened the shock for the impressed people, who were simply going from one medieval fantasy world to another. Sometimes this was done with subtlety; the Impressment Officers might disguise themselves as police, walk into a tavern, and haul out all the drunks. Only, instead of putting them in the stocks, they would toss them through a Rift. When the poor beggars awoke, they were not only hung over, but they were hung over on Wormwood. Other times, the Impress Service acted far more boldly. On one occasion, over three thousand soldiers, Impressment Officers, and Zacchaeans operatives surrounded the town of Cersam (Land of the South Winds, Palladium World). They stormed through every street, home, pub, and place of business, gathering up eligible men between the ages of fifteen and fifty-five. At sword point they marched them through a dimensional portal while the women screamed and begged for mercy. Finally, perhaps to hide the fact that they had ever been there, they set fire to the town.

Once in Worldgate, the conscripts were told that they were now in the service of their new King, and that there was no way for them to get back home. As incredible as it might sound, almost everyone accepted their fate. Again, this is because of the worlds the Impress Service chose to raid; low-tech, fantasy realms whose people were well used to being taken advantage of by powers greater than themselves. They were put through a basic program which originally included training with a sword and shield, and long-distance formational marching. Finally, they were outfitted with a few simple weapons and a suit of resin armor. They were not soldiers in the least. They were little more than fodder. Its military force in place, Worldgate then entered into talks with the other kingdoms, which by that time were hunkering down in the Reorith Province. In exchange for water, food, crystals, and stones, the Free City would rent out its army. Desperate to fill the gaps in their crumbling front lines, the nations of Men agreed. Tens of thousands, never born on Wormwood, were sacrificed to preserve it. Thus, for the next eight hundred years, Worldgate prospered so long as the Impress Service kept up the good work.

Even with a myriad of dimensions at their disposal however, the Lords of the Exchequer eventually discovered that their kidnaping schemes simply could not keep up with the slaughter to defend against the Host, especially when many of their conscripts ended up coming back from the dead as Worm Zombies! Moreover, the Impress Service was coming back with fewer and fewer suitable fighting men. It requires a certain level of strength and agility to use a sword and shield after all, and after eight centuries, Worldgate had burned through many of the Megaverse's most eligible candidates. The Worldgate army, as it was, would not be able to continue for much longer, and when it could no longer provide for the forces of the Light, the Free City would once again starve and ultimately self-destruct. The nine Lords realized that what was needed was a modernization, and they looked to one of Wormwood's closest neighbors for inspiration. At once, they dispatched spies to Earth through their permanent dimensional portal in Romania. Not long afterwards, Worldgate copied the tactics, weapons, and even the uniforms of what, from their perspective, was a very high-tech feudal society: continental Europe as observed during the Napoleonic

Wars. The old ways of thinking and training were left behind, and the New Model Army was created in their place.

## Conscript O.C.C.

When they first began to build the New Model Army, the ruling powers of Worldgate saw that, on Earth, the need for pikemen had disappeared. In medieval-era warfare, these armored foot soldiers were indispensable. Using extremely long spears, pikemen were an army's front line, protecting it from enemy cavalry charges and leading any push into the opposing ranks. However, in Napoleonic Europe, soldiers with a musket and bayonet could take on both offensive and defensive roles. Moreover, they were far more mobile because their weapons were less unwieldy and they could get by with lighter suits of armor. In short, an army of musketeers required less training, less physical stamina, and less materiel, all of which made it very attractive to the efficiency-minded Lords.

Instead of kidnapping only the strong and the agile, the Impress Service could now take almost anyone. Within a few weeks, they could be trained to march in formation, load and fire a flintlock musket, and fight in close combat if needed. The numbers of the New Model Army swelled with cheap, disposable soldiers, as they continue to do this very day. First time travelers to Worldgate had best be on their toes, as fresh recruits are often swept up from the Bab el Fna and find themselves in training before they know what happened to them.

In battle, Conscripts are deployed in large formations to compensate for their slow reload times and long-range inaccuracy. Each consists of a platoon (80 men) arranged in three ranks. The men in the front rank kneel down so that every man can fire. Depending on the situation, the guns may be ordered to fire in a single, devastating volley, or their shots may be staggered in what is called "platoon fire." This tactic was directly stolen from the British Army, and has the men firing one after the other from right to left. By the time the soldiers on the left flank have squeezed off their round, the men on the right should have successfully reloaded, resulting in one continuous hail of bullets.

When on the march, the New Model Army uses the French "attack column": a tightly-packed line of up to 2000 men, ten abreast. Often the sight of this is enough to make the demon armies scatter and run. However, if the column falls under attack its forward progress can be blocked by its own dead, and assaults on its flank can be especially devastating.

### O.C.C. Skills

Speaks Barter (+15%) or Wormwoodian English (+5%)

Forced March

W.P. Wormwood Flintlocks

Military Etiquette (+10%)

Lore: Demons and Monsters (+10%)

### Background Skills

Most Conscripts were simple peasant folks from medieval/fantasy worlds before they were brought to Worldgate and forced into the army. The following skills reflect their past life. They are frozen at 1D4th level (the level that the character was when they were impressed) and will not increase until their Conscript level surpasses their background level.

Speaks Native Language at 98%.

Animal Husbandry (+5%)

Cook (+5%)

Physical Labor

Wilderness Survival (+5%)

W.P. two ancient of choice



General Repair (+10%) OR Horsemanship: General (+5%)

Hand to Hand: Basic

Hand to Hand: Basic may be upgraded to Expert at the cost of two other Background Skills, or to Martial Arts at the cost of three.

**O.C.C. Related Skills:** None! Everything that the Conscript needs to know about his new role in life has already been covered by his basic training. So long as he can walk, follow orders, and shoot a musket somewhat straight, then he requires no further related skills. At 5th level, if he is still alive, the Conscript may take the skill W.P. Siege Weapons. He will then carry a rank of sergeant and will be eligible to command a gunnery crew in the use of cannons.

**Secondary Skills:** Conscripts tend to pick up an odd collection of skills as they fight in battles, travel across Wormwood, and encounter a myriad of new people. Select six skills at first level, plus one additional skill at levels 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, and 13. All new skills begin at the base level and may be found on page 300 of **Rifts® Ultimate Edition**.

**Standard Equipment:** The standard uniform of the New Model Army is a dark blue suit; forage hat, pants, jacket, and overcoat. It's made of heavy angel hair and it itches like hell. Other equipment includes a blanket, a haversack (worn on the hip, it contains things like hardtack, salt, coffee, dried bugs, and scraps), a resin cup, and some kind of canteen or water skin.

Each conscript carries a smooth-bore musket, and enough paper cartridges to provide him with twenty shots.

**Money:** Not applicable on Wormwood, where valuables, weapons, food, and services are given in exchange for other goods and services.

**Cybernetics and Bionics:** None to start.

**Symbiotes:** None to start, but might become available as the game progresses.

## Hussarley O.C.C.

The Lords of the Exchequer had known for some time that the New Model Army was terribly slow. All of its soldiers were on foot, and because of this it could not reposition itself very easily. What it needed was some kind of military unit that could dash from place to place on the battlefield, deliver a quick but powerful blow to exposed targets such as an enemy's flank or supply trains, and act as forward scouts. Of course, what they were looking for was cavalry. For years, the Lords had been enviously eyeing up the armies of both the Palladium World and European Earth, and had seriously considered stealing vast numbers of horses. The problem was that horses required water and imported food (Wormwood produces nothing that horses can eat), two things that Worldgate had in short supply. So, the idea of making a cavalry unit was put on the back burner in favor of importing flintlock weapons.

Then, a little over a century ago, Zacchaeus operatives discovered that because of some all-encompassing war, Earth's technology was taking another leap forward. One of their kingdoms was in the midst of producing a "mechanical horse," which would soon be shipped in vast numbers to yet another kingdom. An elaborate scheme of forgery and misdirection was

soon underway, by the end of which the city of Worldgate had in its possession nearly 9000 Harley-Davidson motorcycles. At last, the New Model Army had a cavalry unit which could be powered by magic alone. All it needed were men to ride them.

The Army's bizarre combination of 20<sup>th</sup>-Century motorcycles and 18<sup>th</sup>-Century military doctrine gave birth to the Hussarleys. Like their Napoleonic namesakes, these men are trained to engage in missions ranging from reconnaissance to supply raids. In battle, their job is to attack enemy skirmishers, charge weak positions in the enemy line, and run down anyone who flees. Unlike the Conscripts, these riders are almost always native Wormwoodians. Moreover, because they have a tradition as being Special Forces, the Hussarleys often feel superior to the common soldier, including knights and freelancers from other lands. They have a reputation for being the dashing, if unruly, adventurers of the New Model Army. Their image abroad is that of a reckless, hard-drinking, hard-swearing, womanizing, moustachioed swashbuckler. Less romantically, the Hussarleys are also known (and feared) for their poor treatment of local civilians in whatever community they might be passing through or fighting in. In addition to commandeering local food-stocks for the Army, they are also known to use the opportunity for personal looting and pillaging.

## O.C.C. Special Abilities

**1. Ride to Live.** The Hussarleys are intensively trained compared to many other Wormwood men-at-arms. As scouts and flank attackers, speed is both their ally and their armor. This also means that, above all else, they must maintain control over their machines else they will surely die. The motto for the Harley-Davidson Company, "Live to ride, ride to live," has been taken quite literally by these men. Their focus and passion for combat while mounted atop their bikes translates itself into the following bonuses and abilities. Note that this skill is separate from their regular Pilot: Motorcycle percentage. Ride to Live is best thought of as special "maintain balance" or "roll with punch/fall/impact" skill. The Hussarleys can also use it to recover from a failed Pilot Motorcycle roll.

- Gain +1 to their initiative when on a bike, and receive another +1 at levels 4, 8, 12, and 15.
- Are +2 to roll with fall/impact when thrown from their bike.
- Are +2 to parry and dodge when on their bike (in addition to hand to hand and P.P. bonuses).
- **Base Skill** is 50% + 5% per level.

**2. Charge Attack.** Despite having motorcycles instead of horses, these men are cavalry, and are best used in a flat-out charge against an enemy. They will ride in a very tight formation ("knee to knee," as it is called), and with swords drawn, will crash into the enemy's ranks, lopping off heads and hewing limbs. Any charge attack requires a Pilot Motorcycle skill roll at -10% (because they are driving with only one hand). The charge will add 1D4 points of damage to the weapon being used and is considered to be a critical strike, but takes up the equivalent of 2 melee actions. Don't forget to add in any damage bonuses gained from the motorcycle's speed as well. Once the strike roll for a charge has been made, whether it was successful or not, the rider must then roll under his Ride to Live skill to remain in the seat.

### O.C.C. Skills

Speak: Native Language at 80%  
Speak: Barter or Wormwoodian English (+20%)  
Pilot: Motorcycle (+20%)  
Land Navigation (+20)  
Automotive Mechanics (+15%)  
Recognize Weapon Quality (+15%)  
Wilderness Survival (+10%)  
Boxing  
Athletics General  
W.P. Sword  
W.P. Wormwood Flintlocks  
Hand to Hand: Expert, which can be upgraded to Martial Arts or Assassin at the cost of two O.C.C. Related Skills.

### O.C.C. Related Skills

Cowboy: None.  
Communication: Any.  
Domestic: Any +5%.  
Electrical: None.  
Espionage: Intelligence and Escape Artist only.  
Mechanical: Basic only (+10%).  
Medical: First Aid only.  
Military: Any (+5%).  
Physical: Any.  
Pilot: Horsemanship, Horsemanship: Exotic, and Hover Cycle only (+10%).  
Pilot Related: Any.  
Rogue: Any except Computer Hacking (+5%).  
Science: Math and Astronomy only (+5%).  
Technical: Any (+10%).  
W.P.: Any.  
Wilderness: Any (+5%).

**Secondary Skills:** The character may also take two Secondary skills at first level, plus one more at levels 4, 8, 12, and 14. All new skills begin at the base level, and may be found on page 300 of *Rifts® Ultimate Edition*.

**Standard Equipment:** Two Wormwood flintlock pistols, 1D6 reload wads for each pistol, one enchanted resin saber (inflicts 2D6 points of damage, and is +2 to initiative, +1 to strike, and +2 to parry), one additional bladed weapon of choice, leather boots and gloves, riding goggles, sleeping bag, blanket, tin of moustache wax, and 2D4 weeks of food rations. Armor is kept light; usually a half suit of plate (60 M.D.C. and -10% to Prowl) or enchanted leather (40 M.D.C., but no Prowl penalty).

The uniform of the Hussarleys is directly copied from the Hungarians, circa 1790. It has a short cloak, dark blue in color, adorned with braids and buttons, worn on top of a chest plate. The pants are reinforced breeches with leather sewn to the insides of the legs, tucked into a pair of knee-high leather boots. Hussarleys also tend to sport long moustaches, but never beards. Their hair may be worn long and braided, but younger riders often cut their hair ragged and short.



**Vehicle:** Traditionally, the Hussarleys ride a Harley-Davidson model 42WLA. The majority are magically powered, with gasoline engines usually reserved for use in off-world raids/missions. Recently, the fashion among younger members has been towards more modern bikes stolen from places like Center and Rifts Earth. However, these are still relatively few in number.

**Money:** Not applicable on Wormwood, where valuables, weapons, food, and services are given in exchange for other goods and services. However, as sometime dimensional bandits, and given their penchant for thieving raids, a Hussarley will start out with 1D4x1000 credits worth of additional items from across the Megaverse.

**Cybernetics and Bionics:** None to start.

**Symbiotes:** None to start, but might become available as the game progresses.

## Places of Note in Worldgate

Worldgate is a paradoxical city. Those in the Megaverse who even know of its existence see it as a scummy, backwater dimensional port; a remote and desolate place in the middle of nowhere. When they compare it against more cosmopolitan cities like Splynn, Center, and Cibola, Worldgate is, quite simply, a dump. However, those with an open mind and an adventurous spirit will soon find that Worldgate does have its own unique, and oddly alluring, culture.

The first thing one must take note of is the local language. The majority of people here do not speak Wormwoodian English primarily, and so first time visitors can be at a great disadvantage. Worldgate's common tongue is called Barter. It is a rapid, consonant-heavy dialect that is actually derived from Berber (a group of languages native to northern Africa). Other languages of note include Demongogian, Gobblely, and on occasion, Ezudesh and Galactic Trade Tongue One.

Because of its withered food caves and bland-tasting bugs, Worldgate cuisine has copious amounts of spices added to it. For example, *haleela* is a thick, hummus-like paste served with almost every meal. It is made of ground bugs, garlic, oil, and lemon juice. It tastes much like a mild curry and is traditionally served with large pieces of flatbread for dipping. On the other end of the scale is *fiquah*, a lamb which is slow-roasted for ten hours in a covered pit. Every hour, the meat is slathered with a thick sauce that itself is a cross between horseradish and hot mustard. The end result is a very tender dish that makes the eyes water just to smell it. In fact, many Worldgate chefs make it a point of pride to see just how much they can make their diners cry.

Another item newcomers must become familiar with is mint tea. This sweet and aromatic brew is offered for, with, and after breakfast, lunch, and dinner. It's served as an icebreaker for everything from rug selling in the souk to matchmaking. Sometimes called "Worldgate whiskey," the tea is brewed using a stubby plant that grows in the local food caves and which tastes strongly of peppermint (in fact, it's one of the only things in the caves that has any distinct flavor at all). Once ready, it is loaded up with sugar, and poured from on high to aerate it and release the aromas. Mint tea is the symbol of hospitality in the Free

City, to the point where not drinking three small glasses when a host or business contact offers it is nearly a declaration of hostilities. Incidentally, it is recommended in both cold weather and blistering heat as a refresher, tonic, and digestive.

The weather on Wormwood is generally stable and clear, with temperatures remaining around the 80 degree Fahrenheit (26.6 Celsius) mark. Typically, the breeze is gentle and blows under ten miles per hour (16 km). However, Worldgate's proximity to the Northern Mountains changes things a bit. When the sun sets, a chill wind comes sweeping down, and everyone suddenly wraps themselves in additional layers or dons heavier cloaks. Worldgate is not immune to the Misting, and roughly once a week the humidity rises sharply as a thick fog envelops the entire valley. A few times a year, an especially strong wind will become channeled between the Northern Mountains and the large hills that lie north of Stone Haven. Blowing in from the battlefields of the Reorith Province, and crashing headlong into Worldgate, the end result is what can only be called a dust storm.

**1. The Hall of Ages.** Fancy name aside, this large building is the official museum of the Free City. It is run by a group of thirty-two men and women who diligently record the history of Worldgate, and preserve important artifacts. Each of the curators are fully literate (a rarity on Wormwood), and will gladly offer their services as a reader for those who cannot. They can also, for the right price, assist treasure hunters and scholars in the deciphering of ancient maps and texts. Deep beneath the museum is a monastery which helps develop the Inner Spirit. Sixteen monks call this place home and secretly operate from out of it.

**2. The Bab el Fna.** Translated into English, the name of this huge, open area literally means "the Place of the Doors." It's fitting, since the square is filled with periodic Rifts and dimensional portals. Not only are strangers deposited here on a regular basis, but some powerful local Shifters have actually mapped out the cycles of the various portals (this is how Erin Tarn's benefactor knew that his next available Rift would lead to England, on Earth). Over the centuries it has become surrounded by bazaars, temples, and terraced cafes, all catering to the newly arrived and the dimensionally outgoing. During the day the square is filled with acrobats, wormcharmers, henna tattoo artists, fortune-tellers, apothecaries, and musicians. One can also buy a shot of cool, fresh water from one of the roving water sellers, dressed in bright colors and adorned with water skins and polished brass drinking bowls. At night, when the food stalls set out tables and chairs, it becomes the largest outdoor grill on Wormwood. Meats, bugs, fungi, and vegetable fronds cook through the night while torches blaze and entertainers dance.

For all its fun and frivolity, the Bab el Fna can also be a dangerous place. Press gangs and thieves prowl here at all hours of the day, and not all of Worldgate's dimensional visitors are friendly when they first arrive. Not only is it feasible that monsters and supernatural horrors might suddenly appear in the square, but attacks from extradimensional raiders, while not an everyday occurrence, do happen frequently enough to warrant a posting of guards. About once every five years or so, the square will be ravaged by a ley line storm that lasts for 2D6 hours.

**3. Suq al Dimeteri.** This is the Dimensional Market of Worldgate, a convoluted labyrinth of stalls and buildings selling

all manner of local and imported goods. Rugs, clothing, weapons, and spices are all available here, as are magical components and enchanted items. Certain services can also be hired in the Suq, from the mundane (porters to carry one's newly purchased goods) to the clandestine (the place is crawling with spies, thugs, and assassins). The Suq is described in more detail below.

**4. The Grand Hammam.** Connected to a series of water pools, this large building is a unique kind of steam bath. It will surprise many to learn, especially given its reputation as a filthy den of iniquity, that the people of Worldgate have one of the highest standards of hygiene in all of Wormwood. Because the local water tables are not fit for much more than washing clothes and bathing, an entire ritual has evolved around these two things. There are separate facilities for men and women, although it is much the same for both. In brief, water is heated from underneath the building and released as steam. Bathers sit for a while until their pores open up, then douse themselves with very hot water. They shave if necessary, and then scrub themselves vigorously with a dried, sponge-like plant that grows in the foothills of the Northern Mountains. Finally, they rinse with cold water, and apply lotions and oils to their skin. If one is so inclined, they may hire a *tayeba*; a personal assistant who will not only scrub them down, but for the men, will help with stretching of limbs and cracking of joints.

**5. Church of Light.** Directly north of the Suq al Dimeteri is a large, dilapidated building adorned with crosses. This is a Church of the Light whose foundations date back to the last days of the Unified Realm. Over the centuries, the church has been destroyed and rebuilt several times. Currently, twenty priests calling themselves the Order of Saint Pelki live there. Every morning, they can be seen carrying large pots of soup to the unfortunates who gather in the slave market. Of particular note, the building acts as a genuine sanctuary. Demons may not step on its hallowed ground, nor may they come within three hundred feet (91 m) of the building itself. This is a most unusual power that many attribute to the particular piety of the Order (normally, there is nothing stopping the dark forces of the Unholy from ransacking a church of any denomination). Also, anyone who enters here is legally safe from Impressment for as long as they remain in the building.

**6. Magi Medersa.** One of the largest institutes of magic in all of Wormwood, this impressive building teaches as many as 900 students annually. Arranged around the central courtyard are their sleeping quarters, which are really little more than small cells cut into the second story wall. Only "standard" magical incantations are taught at the Medersa. Those wishing to learn the secrets of Temporal Magic must plead their case before the gates of Aeon Keep, and one can only become a Techno-Wizard through years of apprenticeship in the marketplace.

**7. Aeon Keep.** Home of the nine Lords of the Exchequer, this imposing edifice dominates the city. In fact, there is a long-standing decree that no other buildings in Worldgate may be taller than the Keep's spires. Very, very few people have ever been inside it. It is heavily enchanted and the solitary entrance, a massive arched gate twenty feet (6 m) high, is under constant guard (usually by a combination of Temporal and Symbiotic Warriors). Unwanted children may be left on the entry steps if

their parents cannot bear the thought of simply dumping them out onto the streets. These children are always taken in, but rarely seen again. The most able of them will undergo years of training and schooling to join the ranks of Zacchaeans. Others are taught Temporal Magic and trained to be private guards. Aeon Keep contains one of the four permanent Rifts connecting Wormwood to Earth: in this case, it leads to Eastern Europe, in the ruins of Brasov, Romania.

**8. Tanneries.** People will smell this particular neighborhood long before they actually see it. A rancid mixture of chemicals fills the air every daylight hour, as well as the scent of blood and charcoal. There are thirteen tanneries operating in the area. Each can have up to six hundred skins sitting in its vats at any one time, resting there for as long as two months amid constant soaping and scrubbing. Clothing and leather armors can be purchased here, but none of them will be enchanted. Magical leathers are only found in the Suq, where Alchemists and Wizards put additional spells on them. Mages and men of letters should take note as well that it is only in the tanneries that one can find vellum, the animal skin parchment most often used for scrolls and tomes.

**9. City Ramparts.** Worldgate is completely enclosed by a series of walls that would make any Ezudite proud. Each one is 33 feet (10 m) tall, and 7 feet (2.1 m) thick. A ten foot (3 m) area of the wall has 50 M.D.C., but one would have to inflict 700 Mega-Damage in order to cut clean through from one side to the other. All told, the walls around Worldgate are 9 miles (14 km) in diameter. Fourteen large gates, called *babs* in Barter, allow for entry into the city. The gates are made of enchanted pillar wood (impervious to fire) and have 400 M.D.C. each. Each bab is guarded by a small garrison of Conscripts (2D6 +14 men). 16-pound cannons are built into defensive positions here as well (5D6x10 per shot, 4500 foot/1371 m range maximum but really only effective up to a half a mile). The gates are closed at sunset and reopened at dawn.

**10. Council House.** Built like a large hotel, this is the building where the Worldgate Ruling Council meets to discuss all of its business. There are several suites within reserved for visiting dignitaries, and each of the Council members maintains a permanent residence here as well.

**11. Palace of Worldgate.** King Shrombek lives here along with his wife, Rahela and her personal guard. (see The Rifter #43 for more details about the Free City's new Queen).

**12. Lost Tombs.** Built 500 years ago during Worldgate's first (and so far, only) civil war, when the royal family divided into two camps, each backing a different successor to the late King Harick III. Every time one of the nobles was killed in the fighting, they were lavishly entombed here, in this family plot. Finally, after seven years of conflict, Clarence of Cobey became King (mostly because all the other royals had been killed). A meek and fearful man, King Clarence sealed off the tombs for fear that the ghosts of his dead ancestors would try to murder him. It has only been during the reign of King Shrombek that the crypts have been unearthed. They remain off limits to the public while the 166 separate underground catacombs are mapped and explored. Rumors abound that the wealth of kings lies hidden within them.



## The Suq al Dimeteri

Wormwood is unique for being a world without any kind of monetary system. None of its dominions or kingdoms mint their own money because the Living Planet has no precious metals, such as gold or silver. Having no money makes it difficult to engage in interdimensional commerce. Crystals, stones, and symbiotes cease to function and will turn to dust shortly after leaving Wormwood, making them unsuitable for trade, and no one in the larger Megaverse sees any value in resin. Unable to buy what they want from other worlds, Wormwoodians usually have to resort to trickery or theft. This has given rise to several powerful organizations (the Zacchaeans being the biggest) whose specialty is the acquisition and sale of off-world imports.

Worldgate, with its multitude of Rifts, alien races, and criminal entrepreneurs, naturally has far more of these guilds than anywhere else. Over time, each has come to specialize in one or two particular areas of expertise. For example, one guild might be very good at identifying fruits and vegetables to bring back to the Free City, while another group might focus solely on the traffic of machinery or energy weapons. Regardless, because they are stealing whatever they can get their hands on, and not buying wholesale from a manufacturer, their stockpile of items is typically very small and limited.

In order to prevent these groups from wiping each other out in hostile takeovers and destroying the city in the process, the Lords of the Exchequer established a special kind of bank, called a Trade Exchange. Each guild and business buys each other's (ill-gotten) goods through the Exchange using an internal currency called a *seleh*. These trade credits can be used to buy what they want with no obligation to purchase from whom they sold to and vice versa. Transaction fees apply and this is how the Exchange (and the Lords of the Exchequer) makes a profit. Businesses and guilds are required by Worldgate law to deal with each other through the Exchange. If they do not, then they are engaged in a black market that will eventually see them tracked down and dealt with by the minions of the Lords.

Smaller transactions, such as one person buying something from another, or a customer buying an item or service from a business or guild do not deal with the Exchange. They will have to haggle with each other in the millennia-old traditional way.

**1. Fruit and Spice Kissaria.** A large covered market containing off-world imports like dried fruit, herbs, spices, essential oils, and kohls in differing colors. (Kohl, pronounced "ko-haul," is a kind of makeup worn on the eyes. The majority of users are women, but men sometimes also wear it to decrease the glare of the sun. In fact, the Confessor is wearing some in his portrait on page 58 of *Wormwood*.)

**2. Restaurant District.** North of the Bab el Fna and east of another, smaller square, is a tightly packed collection of eateries. The atmosphere is loud, smoky, and crowded, but for freshness the food cannot be beat. The numerous outdoor patios and cafés also make this a perfect spot for people watching or for a secret rendezvous.

**3. Slave Market.** This open square is a bit of a misnomer. Many people arrive in Worldgate absolutely destitute, and since the welfare state isn't even a concept on Wormwood, they can either turn to thievery in order to survive or they can starve to death in the streets. However, if neither of those options seems

appealing, the down and out of Worldgate can gather here every day where they contract themselves out as some of the cheapest labor around. Many will simply work for food. Need a guide to the city or a porter to carry all your new purchases through the Suq? Stop by the slave market and point someone out. Keep in mind though, that if these poor souls were fit and healthy, they would have been impressed into the New Model Army long ago, so the infirm, the elderly, the crippled, and the diseased are the norm here.

**4. Spice Souk.** Pushier and more mass-market than many parts of the Suq, this is the main spice center in Worldgate. As mentioned previously, even though Wormwood provides perfectly nutritious meals for its inhabitants, those produced in Worldgate are bland and flavorless. Thus, the demand for cooking additives is great. There are also lots of woven baskets and hats for sale here. One of the more popular stopping points in this part of town is *Peppercorn Black*, a three-story café specializing in *kahwa*; a gritty, thick, north-African style coffee. It is also interesting to note that coffee is a forbidden substance in both Ezud and the lands of the Cathedral because it is associated with revolutionaries.

**5. The Weapon Bazaar.** The Lords of the Exchequer and the Ruling Council of Worldgate try their best to keep all the weapon merchants in one place, where it's easier to observe them. At least, that's the theory. In reality, this building, three blocks long, is often so busy that it's impossible to record who is buying what from whom. The bazaar sells all manner of new and refurbished weapons from swords and maces, to energy rifles and rail guns. However, those looking to have something newly crafted or made to order will have to look elsewhere in the Suq. The merchants here are under no obligation to inform a customer as to exactly whence their wares came from, but it is widely known that several gangs of thieves and scavengers pawn whatever they steal or find here. Buyers must beware. Stolen, broken, and cursed items have been known to find their way through here more often than people would like.

One large portion of the bazaar deals specifically with the sale of Wormwood flintlocks, and is the only place in the building where a customer can purchase a never-before-used firearm. One of the most common, and more interesting patrons here is a Sowki who goes by the name of "Old West." It's as fitting a handle as any, because he dresses like an extra from a Roy Rogers movie and speaks with a heavily affected American drawl. Old West buys flintlock weapons in lots of twenty, and then disappears for months at a time. What he does with all of those pistols and rifles is anyone's guess.

**6. Souk el Attarine.** Traditionally, this is the market street for oils and perfumes. Many magical powders and potions can also be obtained here. So can talom.

**7. Carpet Souk.** Surrounded by boutiques, this open area is notable for a floor of shiny resin tiles upon which the merchants lay out rugs of every size and shape. Angel hair carpets are a specialty in this part of the Living Planet, and buyers will come from as far away as Cenyaw to find them.

**8. Jewelry Souk.** Three long blocks filled with jewelry stores. This is the part of town to go for those in search of rings, charms, earrings, and necklaces, both the magical and mundane. It is also not uncommon to find trinkets and accessories from across all of time and space, such as chain belts, spiked wrist-

bands, silver crosses, demonic jawbones, and campaign buttons from Richard Nixon's second Presidential term.

**9. Apothecaries.** Tucked into cloistered shops, several merchants in this area specialize in healing powders and potions. Bloodletting and dentistry are also available here.

**10. Dyers Souk.** Also called the *souk sebbaghine*, this is the main square for selling fabrics made mostly of angel hair. Here one can watch men dipping bolts of cloth into vats of hot dye, while overhead a tangle of scarves and trains of wool hang from clotheslines in so great a number that they block out the sun.

**11. Souk Haddadine.** This the resiners' market, where one can purchase any and all things resin. Each month, huge shipments of resin blocks are brought by caravan into the city. With massive ovens and forges, the resiners melt the hardened chunks back down into a soft, malleable material and then make from it what they wish. This is the place to come for custom work or to commission a sword to be forged. Hard armor is readily for sale here from single breastplates up to and including full suits of plate and chain. The Haddadine is also a great place to purchase more common items like tables, chairs, lanterns, beds and other furniture. Also nestled within this area is *Heavy Metal*, a family-owned garage and one of the few places where off-world machines and vehicles can be repaired and upgraded. Techno-Wizard engine systems can also be installed here and take an average of 3D4x10 hours.

**12. Leather Souk.** When raw leather articles leave the tannery district, they end up here, where they are polished up, embroidered, and quite often, magically enchanted. Belts, gloves, masks, scabbards, jackets, pants, and armor can all be found here. As an interesting historic note, this entire souk went up in flames thirty years ago when an irate fire dragon discovered that suits of dragon hide armor were being sold here. More than a hundred people died before the beast was felled. Since that time, no dragon related articles have been openly sold in Worldgate (although rumors persist that it can be done on the sly).

**13. The Trade Exchange.** This monolithic building, the only one in the entire city to have 90-degree angled corners, is the central banking institution for Worldgate. It is here, in vast, candle-lit scriptoria that the recognized guilds and large businesses of the Free City trade for each other's goods and services. Everyday citizens, who personally barter for what they want in the marketplace, have no reason to visit the Exchange.

## Weapons and Equipment of the New Model Army

### Wormwood

### Flintlock Weapons

When the first flintlock weapons were brought to Worldgate from Earth, the Zacchaeans simply grabbed whatever they could from wherever they happened to be, resulting in a wild collection of guns from all across Europe, China, and the Ottoman Empire. Eventually though, they started collecting the .75 Land Pattern Musket in droves because as the standard-issue rifle of

the British Empire, it was the most commonly available of all models. These weapons were then studied and re-cast using native Wormwood materials such as resin and pillar wood.

Flintlock weapons were set to revolutionize Wormwoodian warfare except for one continuing setback: the powder. Traditional gunpowder is composed of three ingredients (charcoal, sulphur, and saltpeter) which are abundant on Earth, but are unheard of on the Living Planet. Unwilling to make constant dimensional raids in order to obtain what they needed, the Lords of the Exchequer posted a handsome reward for the Alchemist who could devise a native substitute. This prize was eventually claimed by a coalition of wizards. Using burned pillar wood, acidic chemicals, and select elemental spells, they found they could synthesize a kind of magical black powder that was not only an explosive compound, but which was ignited by Potential Psychic Energy (P.P.E.). The secret of the powder remains almost exclusively in the hands of Worldgate to this very day.

Wormwood flintlocks are commonly available throughout the Free City, and may either be new or refurbished (i.e. taken off a corpse and cleaned up a bit). The enchanted powder however is available only from a handful of merchants whose every action is closely watched by the agents and spies of the Lords of the Exchequer. The powers that rule Worldgate fear that, should the other nations of Wormwood learn how to produce the stuff for themselves, they will no longer have a need to hire the New Model Army. Thus, while the guns are freely traded and sold, the powder supply is tightly controlled. Still, despite their best efforts, small quantities are sometimes available on the underground market and are sold to Freelancers, assassins, rogue knights, and any others who wish to avoid the eyes of Aeon Keep.

### Loading and Firing Wormwood Flintlocks

On Earth, flintlock weapons operated quite simply: gunpowder was poured down the barrel, and a lead ball was packed in on top of it. Then a small amount of gunpowder was sprinkled into a tiny "flash pan". A hammer-like switch, called a "cock," held a sliver of flint, and when it was pulled back into position, the weapon was then "cocked and loaded." When the trigger was pulled, the cock snapped down, the flint striking the surface of the flash pan. Sparks were generated, which ignited the gunpowder in the barrel, and the gun went off.

Wormwood flintlocks, even though they are magical creations, operate in almost the exact same way. The piece of flint is instead replaced by a carefully cut shard of Wormwoodian crystal. Enchanted powder is then poured down the barrel. The New Model Army makes this easy by issuing small paper packets, called a wad, to its conscripts. Each packet contains a pre-measured amount of powder as well as the ball. The wielder tears the wad open with his teeth (this is where the phrase "bite the bullet" comes from), pours in the whole works, and packs it in with a long resin stick called a ramrod. The cock is pulled back to ready position. Take aim, and fire!

But this reloading process takes time. In fact, the rate of fire for all Wormwood flintlocks is **once per melee round** (about four times a minute). This means that a character with a loaded flintlock can fire off one shot in a melee, but will spend the entire remainder of the round reloading his gun. Many Freelancers

and Apoks carry a pair of pistols so that they can get at least two shots off before their guns become improvised bludgeons.

## W.P. Wormwood Flintlocks

This skill is available as a Weapon Proficiency to any and all Wormwood O.C.C.s. It allows characters to reload, disassemble, unjam, clean, and otherwise maintain Techno-Wizard converted flintlock-style weapons. Characters will also be able to recognize the weapon quality of such guns at 30%+5% per level.

**W.P. Wormwood Flintlocks instills the following bonuses:** +2 to strike (aimed) at first level, and an additional +1 to strike (aimed) at levels 4, 7, 10, and 13.

Bursts and sprays are not possible with these types of guns, although shooting Wild certainly is. Called shots are also possible with Wormwood flintlocks, and this skill could be combined with W.P. Sharpshooting if the G.M. allows it. The reloading time will remain the same however: one shot per melee. Also note that this single W.P. covers the use of both pistols and rifles as described below.

## Flintlock Pistol

The most common style of Wormwood pistol is based on the .50 London Pistola. The original weapon was used widely during the Age of Sail, especially by pirates who tended to carry a brace (pair) of the guns when boarding enemy ships.

Weight: 3 pounds (1.35 kg) loaded.

Range: 200 feet (61 m).

Damage: 4D6 per shot.

Payload: Single shot only.

Chance of Misfire: 10%.

## Wormwood “Shotgun”

This is not a true rifle as we might think of. Nor is it a musket. What Wormwoodians call a shotgun is really a kind of large, double-barreled, flintlock pistol. Instead of a single large ball, this weapon is filled with several smaller ones. It has two triggers which can be fired one after the other, or concurrently. Its design is based heavily on the .68 Charleville Model 1777, originally made in France.

Weight: 6 pounds (2.7 kg) loaded.

Range: 200 feet (61 m).

Damage: 3D6 per single shot, or 6D6 for a double blast.

Payload: Two shots total.

Chance of Misfire: 10%.

## Wormwood Smooth-Bore Musket

Were it not for the fact that the hammer holds a shard of Wormwood crystal instead of a piece of flint, this weapon could easily be mistaken for a .75 Brown Bess Land Pattern Musket. The barrel on this weapon is 42 inches (1.06 m) in length. A bayonet can also be added onto it for use in melee combat (requires W.P. Spear).

Weight: 10 pounds (4.5 kg) loaded.

Range: 600 feet (183 m).

Damage: 5D6 per shot.

Payload: Single shot only.

Chance of Misfire: 10%.

## Misfire Table

Because they are direct copies of actual black powder weapons, all Wormwood flintlocks have a chance of misfiring when they are used. Roll for a mishap before rolling a roll to strike. Even though the powder is magical in nature, it still reacts badly to moisture. High humidity, like being in a swamp or on Wormwood during the Mist (*Wormwood*, page 43), adds +5% to misfires. Any kind of rain, from a drizzle to a light shower, adds +15% to the chance of a misfire. A real downpour, or dunking the weapon in water will up the odds to +35%.

The following should be rolled by the Game Master. That's because the character holding the weapon has no way of knowing exactly what went wrong when his weapon fails to fire.

**01-25% Misfire.** Character has another chance to fire, with a normal chance of a mishap the next time around. The hammer must be pulled back again.

**26-40% Bad Load.** Either the powder has gone bad, or there's something blocking the powder from the primer. Either way, the gun must be cleaned out and reloaded, taking 1D4 melee rounds.

**41-45% Jammed.** The firing mechanism has become damaged and the gun must be taken apart and put back together. Takes 2D6 melee rounds. Even then, there's a 25% chance that it's still broken and will need a few hours with an Alchemist or Resiner.

**46-75% Fizzle.** Instead of exploding properly, the powder kind of fizzles, sending the shot rolling out of the barrel at slow speed. Noisy, with lots of bright sparkles, but harmless to everyone. Bullet may even hit target, but without doing any damage. Reload and try again.

**76-80% Handfire or Slow Burn.** Like a firecracker that seems to fizzle out and then suddenly pops, this gun is just pausing before firing. It will discharge at the beginning of the next melee round. If the character has been patient, waiting and continuing to aim, then there is a normal chance to strike, otherwise, it will go off wildly. Note that to the character, a Slow Burn seems the same as a simple misfire, a jam, or a bad load. Reloading too quickly could be a real mistake.

**81-90% Overloaded!** Either too much powder, or powder that packs too much of a punch. Target takes double damage, but the weapon is destroyed. The character also takes 1D6 damage.

**91-00% Explosion!** Weapon blows up in the character's face. Does 2D6 damage to the operator and destroys the weapon. The target is unhurt.

## A Note on Deliberate Overloading

Any character with W.P. Wormwood Flintlocks can intentionally dump more powder down the mouth of the gun than it can safely hold. This adds another 2D6 worth of damage to pistols and shotguns, and 3D6 to the damage of muskets. Overloads will however increase the chance of a misfire by +25%.

## Being Hit by Massed Musket Fire

The time may come when a Game Master has to figure out how much damage a unit of eighty or more Conscripts can dish out in a single melee round. The enemy is likely to be a horde of demons, though it might just as easily be a party of Player Characters on the receiving end. Regardless, a few things will be certain.

Firstly, there is going to be a lot of blood. A musket fires a round ball of resin and not a pointed, rifled bullet. When it hits flesh, it will not leave a neat, clean hole, but rather a large, messy wound (blood loss damage is doubled from all musket-inflicted wounds).

Secondly, with almost no penetrating power to speak of, if the enemy is attacking in anything deeper than one rank, then only the guys in front are going to be affected (although, once they fall down, the second ranks no longer have a meat shield to protect them and are going to be fired on in the next round).

Finally, the attack as a whole is going to be fairly random. Even at close range, Wormwood flintlocks can be very inaccurate. Which is fine. The idea is not to take out specific soldiers, but to inflict such mass carnage that the enemy loses its will to fight and breaks. When determining who does and does not get hit from a volley of fire, use the following guidelines.

- Roll a single strike for the entire volley. This is the number that the enemy will have to best in order to dodge or parry. Note that the entire volley might miss or fall short just as easily as it might score a critical hit.
- For every ten to twenty rounds fired, 1D4 will end up hitting a specific target.
- Roll at least once for each available target until most of the shots are accounted for. There are bound to be some that stray off, so don't worry about any remainders.
- If there is only a single target, 50% of the volley hits.

Example: Six Rathos Rumlbers charge headlong towards a platoon of Worldgate Conscripts. The platoon fires a total of 80 shots at them, so the Game Master begins rolling to see how many actually hit their targets by rolling 4D4 for each Rathos. The first monster is hit with 13 bullets (ouch), and the rest get 8, 5, 16 (poor guy), 8, and 6 respectively. That adds up to a total of 56 rounds. The remainder simply fly off into the thick of battle and are lost.

Damage is then rolled, and if the G.M. deems it appropriate, saving throws may need to be taken against **Shock and Trauma** (18 or higher plus P.E. bonuses, failure means the character loses ALL of their attacks for the next two melees, and has a 50% chance of dropping whatever they might have been carrying. A successful save halves the duration.). In the above example, the first Rumbler takes 234 points, drops his sword, and having failed his saving throw, lies on the ground in agony for the next thirty seconds while the fight continues around him.

## Cannon

The New Model Army also employs light field artillery directly copied from the armies of 18<sup>th</sup> Century continental Europe. They can be difficult to transport and require substantial amounts of enchanted powder in order to fire, but their destructive power has been key to holding the line in the Reorith Province. Although the general theory behind these weapons is known throughout the Kingdom of Light, Ezud, and even the Far Sovereignities, only Worldgate, with its ability to make enchanted powder, is currently able to craft them.

Cannons may be made in many different sizes, but for ease of portability, the New Model Army typically employs "6-Pounders"; a sixty-inch resin gun mounted on a carriage of pillar wood. The entire assembly weighs in at nearly a ton, and includes approximately 200 pounds (90 kg) of enchanted powder. They are most often pulled along behind a Battle Wagon parasite or a team of men with some kind of augmented strength. In battle, the cannon's crew consists of five conscripts. The "gun commander" holds the rank of sergeant and it is his job to aim. His second-in-command, called a "spongeman," must swap out the bore of the cannon with a sponge dampened with water between shots. There are also two dedicated loaders who insert a pre-measured bag of powder and then the projectile. After this, the spongeman uses a rammer, or the sponge reversed, to pack the whole works together inside the cannon. Once the charge is loaded, the fifth man pricks the bagged charge through the vent hole, and fires the cannon.

Although a wide variety of shots can be fired (including *carcass rounds*, which explode into a large pool of flame and choking gas), the New Model Army's cannons almost always fire simple "round shot" - a six pound (2.7 kg) ball of resin.

Weight: The cannon is 800 pounds (360 kg), and the carriage is half a ton.

M.D.C.: 300 for the cannon. The carriage has an M.D.C. value of 150.

Range: 4500 feet (1.3 km) at maximum, but really only effective up to 2500 feet (762 m).

Damage: 2D6 x 10 per shot.

Payload: Single shot only. A fully supplied gunnery crew will have about 100 cannonballs in tow.

Rate of Fire: Once per minute with a full crew.

Side Effects: Every time the cannon is fired, it uses up a large quantity of enchanted powder. In its wake, it creates a magical cloud of smoke exactly like the spell of the same name. The cloud will generally dissipate within a minute, but until it does, the gunnery crew will not be able to see more than 3 feet (0.9 m) in front of them, and will be at -5 to strike, parry, and dodge. On the flip side, the smoke will obscure the men from enemy attacks for a few melee rounds.

# Wormwood

## Converted Harleys

During Earth's Second World War, Harley-Davidson produced a line of motorcycles for the United States military. They became known as the **42WLA** series. Over 90,000 of them were built, a third of which ended up being sent to the Soviet Union as part of President Roosevelt's Lend-Lease program. What is not commonly known is that 9000 of those bikes were intercepted in Romania by the Zacheans, and brought back to Worldgate.

For those on Wormwood, the first Techno-Wizard converted motorcycle appeared 113 years ago (time moves four times faster on Earth than it does on the Living Planet). Most of the bikes' original S.D.C. components had been recast in resin molds, and many had a P.P.E. crystal where the gas tank should be. They were soon being fielded as cavalry units; their speed made them a fantastic asset for scouting missions, flanking maneuvers, and devastating head-on charges. The Knights of the Hospital began trading for the bikes as well, impressed by the usefulness of this "new-fangled machine." The Knights of the Temple, in their staunch adherence to tradition, refused to do any such thing.

The WLAs originally came with several military options, all of which can be applied to the Wormwood conversions. These included a heavy-duty luggage rack mounted behind the driver (for hauling a field radio, but can support anything up to fifty pounds/22.5 kg or so), a right-hand mounted leather scabbard for the Thompson submachine-gun (or any Wormwood flintlock weapon), an ammo box (good for storing talismans and supplies in), a set of leather saddlebags, a small tool kit, a skid plate, and armored leg protectors. The windshield option is never used on Wormwood because the inhabitants think it looks dumb. The Russians added a sidecar attachment, and sometimes so too do the riders of Wormwood. It can carry additional supplies, or a passenger/gunner - most often a man of magic who can recharge the P.P.E. batteries on the bike.

Production of the 42WLA ceased in 1945, so new versions of the bike haven't been available on Wormwood for about a century. That means that although Worldgate can replace certain parts like fenders, tires, and leg guards, they can no longer build a motorcycle from scratch. When one of these heirlooms is destroyed, it is gone for good.

### Harley-Davidson 42WLA (Wormwood Conversion)

**Model Type:** Originally, the bikes were all given serial numbers indicating a production year of 1942, the year after Pearl Harbor was attacked.

**Class:** Motorcycle.

**Crew:** One, or one driver and one passenger with a sidecar attachment.

**M.D.C. by Location:**

\* Tires (2) – 1 each

\*\* Main Body – 75

Optional Leg Protectors (2) – 10 each

Optional Sidecar – 50

\* Shooting out the tires on a moving bike is actually quite a difficult feat. Attacks must be a Called Shot, and even then are -3 to strike.

\*\* Depleting the Main Body of the bike destroys it utterly. Cryin' shame.

**Speed:** 65 mph (104 km).

**Range (original gasoline engine):** Bikes used by dimensional raiders are often not given a magic energy conversion, so that they can continue to run for long periods of time while away from the Living Planet. One tank of gas is good for about 200 miles of travel (320 km).

**Range (Techno-Wizard conversion):** Bikes converted to run off magic are fitted with a baseball or grapefruit-sized Wormwood energy crystal. This gives it the equivalent of one or two tanks of gasoline. The Wormwood crystals will regenerate their P.P.E. supply completely within 24 hours (half of that within 12 hours). A mage or other man of magic can also recharge the crystal power cell with a mere thought and a laying of hands. 25 P.P.E. equals out to one full tank of gasoline, or about 200 miles (320 km) worth of travel.

**Statistical Data:**

Weight: 570 pounds (135 kg) unloaded.

Cargo: Maximum is 300 pounds/135 kg (which includes the rider).

Availability: Found mainly within the Worldgate New Model Army, and to about one third of the Knights of the Hospital. A very few are in the hands of independent owners. No longer in production, although the TW conversion can be made to just about any kind of motor or hover cycle. Conversion available only in Worldgate.

**Weapons:** None built-in. The driver may use a flintlock weapon or short sword, but must drive one-handed to do so (control roll -10%).

**Combat and Piloting Notes:** There are no roads on Wormwood, and although the land is relatively flat and smooth, care and consideration should be taken using any kind of motorcycle there. In general, anyone traveling at speeds over 45 mph (72 km) must make a control roll at -5% every melee round just to remain upright. Traveling over 60 mph (96 km) increases this penalty to -10%. Every turn or swerve at speeds of 45 mph (72 km) or greater requires a control roll with a -12% penalty. Performing special stunts, like popping a wheelie or jumping through the air, are done at -15%. Roll against the character's Pilot Motorcycle skill. All penalties are cumulative. A failed roll means the character crashes, unless they also have the Ride to Live special skill which allows them to attempt a recovery.

Driving headlong into melee combat can produce gruesome, if effective attacks. Everyone mounted on a motor or hover cycle adds 1D6 points of damage for every ten miles per hour (16 km) they are traveling. So for example, a strike from a short sword moving at 40 mph (64 km) would add 4D6 to the sword's regular damage, and so forth.



# Dragons in Society

## Optional Setting Information for Rifts®

By J. Woodman

Human society provides many things that individuals could not achieve for themselves, or could, but with much greater difficulty. In Rifts Earth, the Coalition States provide their citizens with food, shelter, medicine, defense and safety. Vast sections of the Coalition States are dedicated to farming, and the genetic advances from science help make that food more nutritious and faster-growing. The state of Lone Star also provides the genetic insight to help combat human disease, while manufacturing and research throughout the Coalition States provide the weapons and armor needed to combat threats to its citizens. The fortress cities provide shelter for CS citizens to live and raise children in safety, and all of the Coalition States are defended by a vast and well-equipped army. The preceding is true, to one degree or another, outside of the Coalition; the concerns of other humans and most D-Bees are going to be quite similar, and society of some form is a way to meet needs that would be difficult or impossible for an individual to provide on his or her own.

Dragons, however, are creatures of magic with few material or social needs. They require neither food nor drink, eliminating a need to hunt or farm. They regenerate physical damage incredibly quickly, eliminating the need for medicine and healers. They have physical strength and M.D.C. hides equal to a suit of power armor even as a hatchling, eliminating the need for weap-

ons or soldiers for defense. Beyond that, many types of dragons have other abilities; natural weapons like fire breath, natural defenses like metamorphosis and invisibility, and fast means of travel like flight and teleportation. Dragons even instinctively know language and math skills, and have a fundamental understanding of magic right from hatching. Beyond a parent or mated pair to defend the helpless egg, dragons need little support from others of their kind at any stage of their lives.

For all of these reasons, dragon society is a rare and strange thing. Left to their own devices, most dragons will avoid one another, and when they do come into contact, are often hostile and suspicious of each other, even between those of good alignments. Mature dragons will sometimes kill hatchlings & young dragons that wander into their territory, and all dragons are extremely protective of their chosen lair. Young dragons still crave socialization, and most spend the multiple centuries of their childhood and adolescence getting it where they can by living among other intelligent species. It is this socialization period that determines the moral development of a dragon; most dragon hatchlings will start out quite selfish (Anarchist alignment), but dragons can be of any alignment, good, selfish or evil.

Despite all this, there are several places on Rifts Earth where dragons have come to gather in large numbers; the city of Dragcona in Atlantis, the Kingdom of Lagarto in South America, the Free State of Lazlo, and the City of Freehold in destroyed Tolkeen are some of the best known examples. Thousands of dragons are likely to be found in Dragcona at any one time, while hundreds consider Lazlo (and considered Freehold) their home. This may sound contradictory, but just as humans are capable of overcoming our baser instincts, so are dragons – when it suits them. Though their instincts are much stronger than those of humanity, they are also generally stronger-willed, and better able to restrain themselves.

This does not mean that dragons living in these (comparatively) close quarters suddenly enjoy each other's company. You still won't find dragons sharing an apartment or living in the same building (excepting the occasional mated pair), but they can manage to walk by each other in the street without tearing into one another. Their instinctive tendency to dominate territory can be problematic for a city with a population of a few hundred dragons and only 50 to 100 square miles of territory, but there are solutions. To better accommodate each other's desire for space, the lairs of the dragon population of any city are usually widely distributed, and for most, a home in Lazlo or Dragcona is not their *only* home. The wilderness of Atlantis and the wilds of Ontario are both littered with the hidden lairs of city dragons, used when they need a break from the bustle of urban living, and the same was true of Freehold before its abandonment and destruction. Most adult dragons also maintain a pocket dimension that is their most secure place to rest and store treasures (for more information on this ability, see *Palladium Fantasy®: Dragons & Gods™*).

Even the best-intentioned and most morally-upright of dragons tend to have magpie minds, and one living in a city residence, whether an estate or a bachelor apartment, is likely to have replaced all the furniture with a heap of gold, gems and other valuables to lie on. Because of this hoarding tendency, few dragons living in society will knowingly approach another dragon's lair; it is too easily interpreted as an attempt at thiev-

ery, and inevitably leads to violence. Most also invest heavily in defensive measures for their homes, including spells, technological or Techno-Wizard security systems, and guards (particularly lesser supernatural creatures) at every entrance.

Rivalry and competition between dragons don't stop simply because they agree to play nicely with each other while living in a city, however. Instead, those impulses are subsumed into a fierce competition with every other dragon in the city over social status. This intense competition is rarely noticeable when dragons are working among other species (which is their preference), but the dragon community keeps a careful watch over every individual's accomplishments, and a definite pecking order is maintained. Dragons with greater prestige in the community take precedence over those with less, with every adult automatically placed above all but the most accomplished hatchlings. Newcomers to a city are placed at the bottom of the social ranking unless particularly noteworthy (or infamous), though adult dragon newcomers are still placed above almost all hatchlings. To progress in the social hierarchy, the newcomer dragon will either have to demonstrate his or her commitment to the values of that society (and the other dragons in it) over time, or challenge the next dragon above him in the rankings. Most dragons, especially adult dragons, go with the former; time means little to adult dragons, and few want to risk combat with a potential equal or superior.

**In Lazlo**, the determination of a dragon's social ranking can involve his role in government, his position in the Lazlo Defense Force or the Volunteer Militia, his magical research at the universities, his wealth or possession of valuable magic artifacts, as well as his physical and magical might. Scrupulous and Principled dragons may even compete over who can do more charitable work for the city! The only dragon exempted from the constant rise and fall of prestige is *Plato*, who holds the top position in perpetuity due to his extreme age, magical power and personal accomplishments. The dragons who would be his near-rivals have resolved to simply wait for the old beast to retire from public service or die of old age before trying to determine who should replace him at the top of the heap. When that day comes, competition among his near-equals will be intense.

**In Dragcona and Lagarto**, dragon social rank can involve having the favor of Lord Splynncryth, holding an important position within the Church of Dragonwright, owning a winning arena champion (or successfully competing oneself), owning the most slaves or one that is particularly unique, possessing the most wealth or unique magic artifacts, as well as the dragon's magical and physical might. The dragon at the top of the social ranking in Dragcona is Styphathal, due to his relationship with Lord Splynncryth, his personal power, his (self-promoted) position in the pantheon of the Cult of Dragonwright, and his machinations with the Kingdom of Lagarto in South America. His position is not as entrenched as Plato's in Lazlo, however; if Styphathal were to lose Lord Splynncryth's favor, or if his plots involving Dragonwright or Lagarto were to go badly, it is possible that he could be overtaken. In Lagarto, the top dragon would be Styphathal once again, but since he is rarely there it falls to Melastirth, his lieutenant in the region.

**In Freehold**, dragon social rank depended on connection to the Dragon Kings. The 19 ancient Dragon Kings were at the top, while those nearest in descent from the Dragon Kings, the Dragon Princes, were next. They were followed by the other

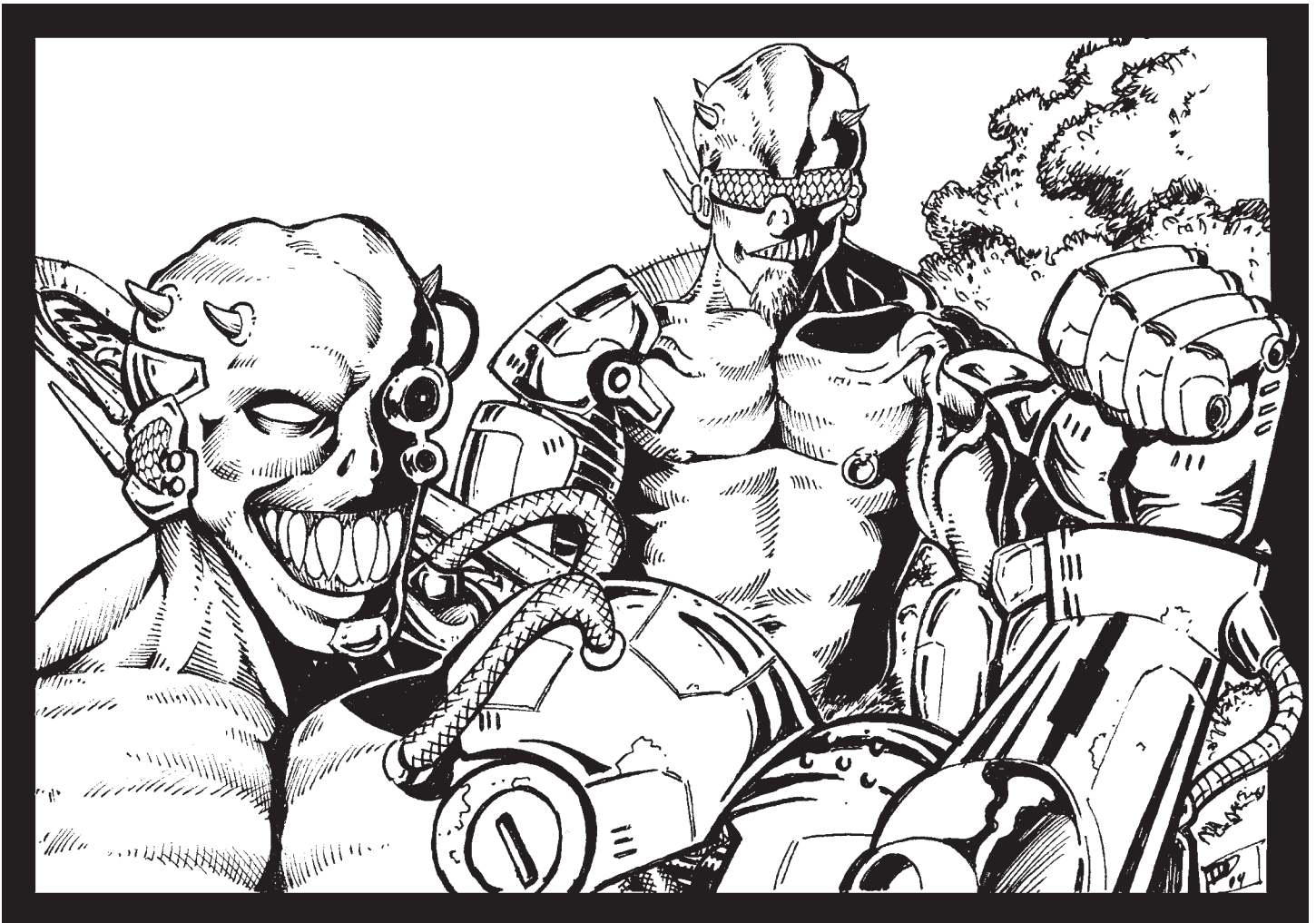
adult dragons unaffiliated with the Dragon Kings, then the Dragon Heirs – hatchlings and adolescent dragons. Within those groupings the main determining factors of rank were wealth, possession of magic artifacts, and magical and physical might. Elsewhere however, the Dragon Kings and Princes are viewed with something like shame or disgust by most dragons. For one thing, the evil nature of the Shadow Dragons they create is abhorrent to most dragons of good alignment, and their banishment from their home dimension is an embarrassment to most dragons of evil alignments. For those reasons, any of the Dragon Kings and Princes that survived the fall of Freehold and Tolkeen and made their way to a new, dragon-friendly society are lower in the social ranking than would be expected.

In all of these societies, dragons lower in the social ranking are expected to defer to those above them whenever dragons are forced to interact, whether that is simply making way for a higher ranked dragon while walking the city streets, giving higher-ranked dragons the chance to purchase something unique or valuable that becomes available, or otherwise letting higher-ranked dragons get their way.

If there is a dispute between individual dragons about some question of social precedence, it is usually "taken outside," so to speak. The dragons will meet at some pre-determined location outside the city, and physically resolve the matter. In Lazlo these combats are never to the death – the government of Lazlo would construe any form of dueling to the death as manslaughter *at best!* – but continue only until the fight is obviously in one or the other's favor. Even in Dragcona and Lagarto, fights to the death are rare, and will only continue to that point if the insult or wounded pride was severe. The natural recuperative powers of dragons prevent any lasting injuries, and the social order will be adjusted depending on the outcome; either the challenger is rebuked and his existing status confirmed, or it is adjusted to place the challenger above his defeated opponent. Adult dragons duel very rarely; most are too cautious to take the risk unless extremely angered or insulted. Hatchling and adolescent dragons duel much more frequently, both due to their impatient nature and as a way of measuring themselves against their peers and rivals.

If a challenged dragon refuses to fight, it is either taken as a snub (only if the challenged dragon *vastly* outclasses the challenger, such as an adult challenged by a hatchling), and considered extremely humiliating, or as acceptance of defeat in which case the social pecking order is adjusted without any actual violence. If anyone interferes in a duel – whether they are another dragon, human or D-Bee – the result is contested, and the issue is unresolved until the combatants can fight again. Any dragon who resorts to violence while in the city limits will face the censure of the rest of the dragon community, not to mention the Lazlo Defense Force or the Minions of the Splugorth respectively (dragon dueling is too destructive to property and other citizens for any society to permit it inside city limits).

Dragon duels are sometimes filmed by adventurous City Rats, and there is a steady market for bootleg video discs of the most recent and noteworthy dragon fights. A newly-filmed duel between adult dragons can fetch as much as 10,000 credits from someone with the resources to distribute it (like the Black Market), while a hatchling duel might get a quarter of that. Copies of these fights can be as inexpensive as 50 credits, or as much as ten times that, depending on location and availability.



# Rebel Waltz

## Optional Rules & Source Material for Rifts®

By Mark Hall

*Grz'nak ripped off his foe's cyclopean helmet, taking the head and part of the spine with it. With a shout of grotesquely child-like glee, he turned to his next opponent, beating his helmet with the one he held in his hand.*

*He was rewarded with two... no, three... blasts from the puny hand rifles these humans carried, a Vibro-Blade in the belly, and some fool pounding on him with a mace. Throwing the corpse of his first opponent at the annoyances with the rifles, he ripped out the Vibro-Blade, spattering the idiot holding the mace with Grz'nak's own gore before plunging it to the hilt in the human's puny head.*

*Grz'nak was outnumbered, armed only with his own manic viciousness and the corpses of his opponents. He was bleeding from several wounds, and ominously not bleeding where several chunks of his flesh had been excised by combat lasers.*

*He was also having the time of his life.*

Brodkil are the foot soldiers of the demon hordes of Europe. Forming a loose coalition of bands, they've claimed much of the former Czech Republic and southern Poland for themselves. In

North America, they raid across the continent, only willing to be bribed into working for a master who can fulfill their lust for blood and violence, ill-gotten gains and mindless brutality. They do, however, have minds, primitive and blood-soaked though they may be, and they have a society of their own... one suited to their monstrous appetites, and which springs naturally from their unnatural origins.

## The Sound of Sinners

Looking at Brodkil society from the outside, it seems simple to fathom, but there are small idiosyncrasies that are difficult to notice without deep (and dangerous) study. Traditional Brodkil groupings are often called tribes, but are more properly gangs; most of the members have no obvious relationship, obey the others only insofar as they wish to (or can be coerced).

Dominance combats are frequent; a day without a fight is one in which every Brodkil is too drunk to move (and even then, they'll probably fight over who is making too much noise). Fights are impromptu, without ritual; the only acknowledged bad form is breaking the other's stuff, and that's mostly because others want it, and will beat the transgressor near to death with the broken pieces.

Every gang has a leader, usually with two to four Brodkil who answer only to him; these are not necessarily the strongest or the best warriors, but they are one of the few unified forces in any gang, and so the leader commands respect by applying vio-



lence with his loyal thugs. Individual Brodkil may switch allegiance from one gang leader to another, depending on whim, bribes, and how an individual leader has benefited them, personally. They have no concept of group loyalty... Brodkil will gladly stab someone else in the back to get ahead, so they think that everyone is likely to feel the same way.

The result is that Brodkil gangs must keep moving; they must always have fresh territories to terrorize, or individual members get bored and leave.

What creates a Brodkil leader? While skill in battle is important, virtues that humans would see as desirable in a leader... reason, charisma, and level-headedness... are almost entirely absent in Brodkil leaders. In fact, the leaders are frequently the least level-headed of any group, flying into rages at the least provocation. That brutality, and the loyalty of their lieutenants, enables them to cling to a perch on top of their seething mass of monstrous insaniacs.

In the Brodkil Empire, however, things are somewhat different. The Brodkil have re-invented a sort of feudalism; the leader of any given gang was likely once a strong-man in a larger gang, and still follows the orders of that gang's leader. At the very top is a group of Brodkil whose loyalty is not to each other, but to the Angel of Death and the technology she provides. Gangs who do not spring from one of these "controller gangs" are pummeled into compliance with the status quo. Thus, the Brodkil Empire remains a relatively safe haven for the Angel of Death, giving her a wide variety of experimental subjects to choose from, both Brodkil and those whom they have subjugated. The Brodkil themselves wander within the "empire," villages offer them "hospitality" in the form of food and individuals to terrorize (frequently strangers or wrongdoers), and they offer protection in that they destroy anyone who interferes with their subject peoples or defies their rule.

It should be noted that about 90% of Brodkil are male, but that matters little; female Brodkil are just as belligerent and violent as their male kin. Brodkil also have no internal mating behavior; no courtship rituals, no displays before others of their species to draw attention. While Brodkil have been observed having sex, and many of them rape during the course of a raid, they do not reproduce sexually; the appearance of male or female Brodkil is a function of their unique method of reproduction.

## Somebody Got Murdered

There has never been a Brodkil born of woman. Mommy Brodkil do not love daddy Brodkil very much, and so they are never blessed with little baby Brodkil. Brodkil are Sub-Demons, not natural creatures. Whatever their ultimate origin, they now reproduce through a Necromantic ritual involving the blood of a Brodkil and a relatively fresh corpse (no more than a day or three old).

To reproduce, a Brodkil must have a corpse with its brain stem and torso largely intact; a few holes in the belly won't stop the ritual, but major damage to the heart or lungs will cause problems. The limbs or eyes can be missing, but they do not regrow. The corpse must be of a humanoid mortal race, no smaller than five feet (1.5 m), and no taller than eight and a half

(2.5 m). If the body already has cybernetics or bionics, the Brodkil regard this as a bonus.

The creating Brodkil bites open its own wrist and completely covers the corpse in its own blood; this causes 20+3D6 M.D. to the creator. The Brodkil then punches the corpse in the face (a kick, elbow, or head-butt can be substituted for a punch; the only requirements are that the contact must be violent, it must be with the Brodkil's flesh (not a bionic limb), and it must be to the face). If the Brodkil is unsuccessful (which only happens rarely, when the Brodkil is unable to completely cover the corpse in blood), the head will explode like an overripe pumpkin hit by a Mack truck. In this case, the Brodkil's only consolation is that he will heal all of the damage from blood loss in time.

If the Brodkil is successful, then the face breaks, but the skull remains strong. The newly-made Brodkil will heal the punch damage normally (for a Brodkil), and its face will heal to look like a Brodkil, instead of whatever race the body once was. They also frequently grow in stature, filling out to a Brodkil's normal eight and a half to nine feet. The creator Brodkil will permanently lose 10 M.D.C. and two points of M.E. If this drops the Brodkil's M.E. below 8, then he must roll for a random insanity.

Newly created Brodkil know almost nothing of their former lives; they may remember snippets about a place, and a few faces may stir a memory, but they can never recall large amounts of detail from before they were Brodkil. Instead, they are infected with a selection of skills that their creator possessed... if their creator had learned to pilot a hovercraft, track humanoids, or bake a soufflé, it is possible that their offspring will know it. They still lack any limbs that they did not have when they were corpses, but cybernetics and bionics possessed when alive will already function. Brodkil seek out replacements for lost limbs as soon as possible. Since their creator is now short some of its vitality, it is not uncommon for Brodkil and their new spawn to seek out a Cyber-Doc together, with the spawn replacing missing parts, and the creator adding some more metal plating to its bones.

The new Brodkil is also under the control of its creator, and remains so as long as both exist. This is not a mental domination or charm; it is simply that, should the creator give its spawn an order, the spawn will follow it unless it stops to think... and Brodkil rarely stop to think about anything. Those Brodkil who do reproduce are careful to benefit their spawn with many, if not most, of their orders, since the most common reason for a spawn to disobey is that it has to ask, "What do I get out of it?" This is not hard to do, though, since Brodkil regard an order of "tear his arms off" as benefitting them (since they get to tear someone's arms off).

This unique method of reproduction does much to explain the gender disparity within Brodkil. In most Earth societies, women are far less likely to be warriors. As such, Brodkil seldom consider them worthy of being Brodkil, and leave their corpses on the field (though not necessarily intact).

## Lose this Skin

Brodkil are spirits of violence bound into humanoid form. In order to keep their body "living," they must consume meat on a fairly regular basis, or their bodies degrade, and the spirit is un-

able to continue holding onto its fleshmobile; however, since they're not truly living, they can go a long time without sustenance, and can get by on relatively little (compared to what a predator of the same size would normally require). Their penchant for bionics lessens their requirements even more. In general, each Brodkil needs about a pound of flesh every day. This flesh doesn't have to be fresh... they're capable of eating carrion, in extreme circumstances... but they're far happier with fresh flesh and nice, crunchy bones. If given a chance, a Brodkil will eat three to five pounds of flesh in a sitting, two or three times a day. This makes up for any lean times they might have had recently, and staves off their need for flesh for a while. As noted above, Brodkil do not reproduce conventionally, and so have no real need of sex. They do, however, enjoy it, especially with other demons (where they can cut loose without things ending early due to the death of a squishy partner).

Because they are a type of demonically-possessed dead, Brodkil don't have most normal biological processes. Eating flesh gives their bodies material with which to heal, and they still have blood coursing through their bodies, but it serves no real purpose... they can bleed an improbable amount and not weaken. (There are tales that the Angel of Death, on the order of an experiment, continually bled a Brodkil for three days, producing more than thirty gallons of blood in that time.) Though they are supernatural, most Brodkil are native to the dimension in which they are found, and so they do not crumble to dust when killed. They leave a corpse, like most creatures. A Brodkil who travels the dimensions, however, will have his corpse crumble to dust like other supernatural creatures, its spirit returning to its home dimension to be reincarnated by the next Brodkil to create progeny. These reborn Brodkil don't recall much of their previous incarnation; they're simply another new Brodkil in the army.

Those Brodkil capable of turning invisible have the equivalent of the third level spell *Invisibility: Simple*. Each use of the power requires an action, but the fact that it requires no words or energy means that Brodkil are able to overcome some of the difficulties of simple invisibility; if they are cut, or have some visible substance applied to them, they can blink back into view, then go invisible immediately, negating much of the trouble, since anything that was on them at the time of their invisibility disappears.

It should be noted that Brodkil blood, bone, or flesh is a very powerful Necromantic focus. Blood sacrifice of a Brodkil provides a Necromancer with three times the Brodkil's P.P.E., not just two times. If a Necromancer chooses to add a Brodkil's limbs to his body, it costs only 15 P.P.E. (as opposed to the normal 20). A helm made from the skull of a Brodkil costs 10 P.P.E., gives the wearer the ability to turn invisible, and adds 10 M.D.C. A suit of armor made from the rib cage of a Brodkil gives 100 M.D.C., and costs 40 P.P.E. In any case, the duration of bonding with Brodkil limbs is doubled. There are also some spells which specifically require Brodkil limbs to function; see below.

## The Equalizer

Brodkil have only modest magical powers; they regenerate, are supernaturally strong, and can turn invisible. The first two remain, but the last is frequently sacrificed on the altar of cyber-

netics. Brodkil love cybernetics and bionics; the more mechanical looking, the better. A Brodkil will mount any weapon he can onto a bionic limb; favorites are big, noisy particle beams, intimidating Vibro-Blades, and rows of spikes. For many Brodkil, this is a necessity; the reality of modern combat is that many corpses lack arms and legs due to the powerful energy weapons used. Other Brodkil take extensive damage, mangling a limb beyond the Brodkil's ability to regenerate; they happily chop off a useless limb to get a shiny metal one, or scoop out the remains of an eye for one that will work better. All they lose is the ability to turn invisible, and modern optics frequently render invisibility useless.

In the case of Brodkil, their unique physiology makes isolated bionics an even more attractive option than for humans. Brodkil regenerate slowly enough that they do not automatically reject implants, but instead tend to grow around them. Furthermore, since they are already supernaturally strong, an isolated bionic limb can take full advantage of its strength, as if it were integrated into a fully bionic body; once the healing is done, they have the equivalent of *Robotic Strength* with their bionic limbs, instead of *Augmented Strength*. This means they lose very little power, and can move astonishingly fast if both legs are bionic. The only thing that must not happen is their trunk or head being replaced; that will slay the demon, and no amount of cybernetic wizardry can save them. Trunk and head can be augmented, drilled into, even shattered and regenerated, but they cannot have them outright replaced. Brodkil are quite fond of *Cyber-Armor*; while theirs does not regenerate, as it does for *Cyber-Knights*, it does provide them with excellent protection with few drawbacks.

Brodkil within areas controlled by Atlantis are almost as enthusiastic about *Bio-Wizardry Symbiotes*... not quite, because Brodkil tend to think chrome is king, but they like all the options available, and will frequently go in for mass modification.

## Career Opportunities

Brodkil are violent, sociopathic killers. Their empathy is limited to understanding what causes others pain, and trying to do that. It's not a case of "In rare instances, you will encounter a Brodkil who really feels bad about all the horrible things his people do"; such Brodkil do not exist, outside of those who have been magically or psychically altered... to the Brodkil, it would be the equivalent of a profound psychosis. That said, there are three basic kinds of Brodkil: *Gearheads*, *Infiltrators*, and *Raiders*.

*Gearheads* are the rare Brodkil who are highly intelligent and learn the basics of cybernetic sciences and weapon engineering. Compared to human or D-Bee *Cyber-Docs* and *Operators*, their work is incredibly crude... they should never perform surgery on anyone who does not regenerate, for example... but they are effective at creating cobbled-together weapons, recharging *E-Clips*, and fixing cybernetic devices. Most are heavily cyborged, and avidly seek out new devices.

*Infiltrators* are Brodkil who have no cybernetics, and specialize in stealthily sneaking amongst a group so as to cause maximum carnage when they and others attack. Unable to augment their bodies with cybernetics without losing their advantage of

invisibility, they learn unarmed combat and use improvised weapons to destroy their foes.

Raiders are the typical Brodkil; cyborged sociopaths with the biggest weapons they can manage. They are not precluded from being clever, or even shrewd, but their capability to be merciful or sophisticated is limited by their inherent barbarity.

### Gearhead Brodkil R.C.C.

**Attribute Requirements:** I.Q. 12, P.P. 15.

#### R.C.C. Skills:

Hand to Hand: Expert  
Intelligence (+5%)  
Land Navigation  
Pilot Hovercraft (+15%)  
Radio: Basic (+10%)  
Recognize Weapon Quality (+25%)  
Basic Electronics (+10%)  
Basic Mechanics (+10%)  
Bioware Mechanics (+5%)  
Field Surgery (+4%)  
W.P. Knife  
W.P. Blunt or Sword  
W.P. Energy Rifle or Heavy M.D. Weapons

**Skills Note:** Though Gearheads have the skill Bioware Mechanics, they do not have its prerequisites; they are capable of tinkering and repairing with existing bioware, but not of really creating anything. They use field surgery to install any bionic or cybernetic devices; they fail to kill their patients because Brodkil regenerate.

In addition to the above skills, Gearheads may choose 1D4+1 skills from amongst Weapon Proficiencies, Communications, Technical, Wilderness, and Military. No R.C.C. bonuses apply to any of these skills.

**Bionics:** Gearheads have the same bionic desires as other Brodkil, but almost always get at least one hand replaced and outfitted with regular and Vibro-Blades; they frequently perform their surgeries with these.

**Experience:** Uses the same Experience Table as Brodkil.

### Infiltrator R.C.C.

**Requirements:** May have no bionics or cybernetics.

#### R.C.C. Skills:

Hand to Hand: Expert  
Intelligence (+5%)  
Land Navigation  
Prowl (+20%)  
Radio: Basic (+10%)  
Recognize Weapon Quality (+25%)  
Tracking: Humans (+10%)  
Detect Concealment (+10%)  
Climbing (+5%)  
Find Contraband (+4%)  
W.P. Knife  
W.P. Blunt or Sword

W.P. Energy Rifle or Heavy M.D. Weapons

In addition to the above skills, Infiltrators may choose 1D4+1 skills from amongst Weapon Proficiencies, Communications, Technical, Wilderness, and Espionage. No R.C.C. bonuses apply to any of these skills.

**Bionics:** Infiltrators cannot take Bionics without losing the ability to turn invisible. If they get Bio-Wizardry enhancement, this difficulty does not apply.

**Experience:** Use the same Experience Table as Brodkil.

## Let's Go Crazy

As mentioned above, Brodkil corpses are valuable Necromantic components. Because of their nature, a Brodkil can be used to make several magic items by skilled Necromancers. Two of the most common are listed below, as part of the spells which create them.

### Cursing Skull (Ritual)

#### Level 13 Necromancy Spell

**Range:** The skull must be handled during the ritual, but its effects extend 10 feet (3 m) per level of the caster.

**Duration:** Will function indefinitely, until the skull is destroyed or the spirit exorcised.

**Saving Throw:** Special.

**P.P.E.:** Three Hundred.

This Brodkil skull must be harvested fresh (no more than two hours after death), and is ritually scarified by the Necromancer, binding the spirit of violence which animated the Brodkil to the skull. Unable to act physically, the spirit instead incites others in the area to violence.

Those in the area of effect must make a saving throw when exposed to stress or react violently (punching a messenger, kicking someone who spills a drink on them, shooting the guy who made a pass at their date). The save begins at a mere 5, but increases by +1 for every half hour the character has spent in the area of effect in the past day. M.E. bonuses are applicable, but *not* bonuses to save vs magic. A Mind Block prevents the effect. Those who fail their save gain a +2 to initiative and +3 to damage until they are removed from the area of effect. They cannot be calmed down, instead lashing out violently, even at friends and loved ones; this, of course, requires the victim to save. Once removed from the area of effect, the victims can be calmed down, but will not do so immediately; they will calm at the same rate the character normally would from such a state of agitation.

This spell ends only when the skull is broken (it has 100 M.D.C.), or an exorcism is performed to banish the spirit. If the skull is not in the exorcist's possession, then their chance of success is at -20%.

### Dead Demon's Hand

#### Level 10 Necromancy Spell

**Range:** Melee weapon; about 4 feet (1.2 m) long.

**Duration:** Permanent until destroyed.

**Saving Throw:** Not applicable.

**P.P.E.:** One Hundred Eighty.

The Dead Demon's Hand is a Brodkil arm, from shoulder to fingertips, completely stripped of flesh and magically held rigid into an extended arm and fist. It is held at the shoulder, with the ball of the shoulder being below the wielder's hand. The Dead Demon's Hand is a relatively simple weapon, with few magical features. It is amazingly tough (80 M.D.C./800 S.D.C., but only takes damage when specifically targeted), and does a significant amount of damage (4D6 M.D., plus the wielder's S.D.C. P.S. bonus in Mega-Damage; someone with a P.S. of 30 would do 4D6+15 M.D.). It also has the special feature of becoming invisible, even to the wielder! While this makes it easy to conceal, being invisible does make it somewhat more difficult to wield (-2 to strike and -3 to parry unless the wielder can see invisible; in that case, it is +2 to strike and parry). Turning the weapon invisible or visible is done with only brief concentration (requiring one melee action).

# Weird Mutants

## New Mutant Types and Rules for Creating Genetic Chimeras

### Optional Rules and Source Material for the After the Bomb® RPG

By B. Caleb Goodson

## Human Mutants

### Brutes

#### Original Animal Characteristics:

**Description:** Brutes are massive, gigantic offshoots of humanity capable of great feats of strength and endurance. However, they trade their size and strength for agility and speed.

**Size Level:** 14 (Min 12, Max 18).

**Length:** Varies according to size level.

**Weight:** Varies according to size level.

**Build:** Long.

#### Mutant Changes & Costs:

**Total Bio-E:** 20

**Attribute Bonuses:** +10+1D10 to P.S., Brute Strength, +6 P.E.

**Penalties:** -2 P.P., -6 Spd.

#### Human Features:

**Hands:** Partial: Brutes have huge, three-fingered hands and long arms.

**Biped:** Automatically Full.

**Speech:** Partial: Voice will be loud and growly.

**Looks:** Partial: Exceptionally large and broad-shouldered creatures with long arms and legs. Everything about these mutants is exaggerated, including their facial features. Skin will be rough and lumpy, almost leathery to the touch.

#### Natural Weapons:

Automatically gets Huge Hands: Brutes have massive, oversized hands with well-developed muscles and tendons. A Brute's hands are so tough that they can be used to damage hard objects like stone and metal without damaging the character. Furthermore, if the character takes thick skin and dense bone structure, he or she will be able to parry melee weapons with his or her hands without taking any damage.

5 Bio-E for Protruding Knuckle Bones: The knuckle bones on the hands become sharp, serrated blades sticking out of the skin. These dense bones add 2D6 damage to a punch.

#### Mutant Animal Powers:

10 Bio-E for Beastly Strength

20 Bio-E for Crushing Strength

5 Bio-E for Thick Skin: +20 to S.D.C. and blunt attacks do ½ damage.

15 Bio-E for Dense Bone Structure: The character has incredibly hard, dense bones. +20 S.D.C., and the character suffers no damage from falls under sixty feet (18.3 m). For falls over sixty feet, reduce damage by half.

10 Bio-E for Extra Intelligence Quotient

10 Bio-E for Extra Mental Affinity

10 Bio-E for Extra Mental Endurance

#### Vestigial Disadvantages:

Automatically has Reptile Brain: Predator.

-10 Bio-E for Diet: Herbivore





## Lightwielders

### Original Animal Characteristics:

**Description:** Lightwielders are human mutants that have the ability to focus and project energy from specialized organs located on the arms. These organs grant great power to the mutant human, but are also painful and taxing on the body, resulting in reduced endurance.

**Size Level:** 10 (Min 8, Max 12).

**Length:** Varies according to size level.

**Weight:** Varies according to size level.

**Build:** Medium

### Mutant Changes & Costs:

**Total Bio-E:** 10

**Attribute Bonuses:** +2 I.Q., +2 M.E., +1 P.P.

**Penalties:** -1 P.E., -10 S.D.C.

### Human Features:

**Hands:** Full.

**Biped:** Full.

**Speech:** Partial: Voice will sound strange, as though it is being synthesized through an electronic microphone.

**Looks:** Partial: Looks almost completely human, save for two features. One is that all Lightwielders have glowing eyes. The other features are the lens-like organs located in the forearms. This is what the character uses to focus and expel energy.

### Natural Weapons:

Automatically has Energy Beams: The character has a pair of organs located in the forearms that hold and release beams of coherent light at a target. Damage is 1D6 per every two levels of experience. The character must have his or her forearms exposed in order to use this power.

10 Bio-E for Energy Wave: The character has greater control over his or her energy powers and blasts the light energy in a wave. This does 1D6 damage per every three levels of experience to everything in a ten foot (3 m) radius around the character.

### Mutant Animal Powers:

Automatically has Energy Immunity: The character can handle extremes of energy (NOT kinetic) without taking damage. He or she can thrust a hand into a fire, be struck by lightning, or take burst after burst from energy rifles or particle beams without being hurt. However, this only applies to the character's body. Anything that he or she may be wearing or carrying is subject to full damage, which could lead to some embarrassing situations. ("Why are you naked?" "Uh... don't ask.")

5 Bio-E for Advanced Vision

5 Bio-E for Ultraviolet Vision

15 Bio-E for Extra Physical Prowess

10 Bio-E for Extra Intelligence Quotient

10 Bio-E for Extra Mental Affinity

10 Bio-E for Extra Physical Beauty

10 Bio-E for Extra Mental Endurance

### Vestigial Disadvantages:

Automatically gets Reptile Brain: Predator. Lightwielders are extremely aggressive, and must constantly focus their minds to keep calm and rational. (If they care about doing so, that is.)

## Revenants

### Original Animal Characteristics:

**Description:** The Revenant is the most tragic example of the human mutants. These are humans that were exposed to the human-genome virus and radiation from nuclear weapons. These pitiful creatures have bodies that are in constant states of decay and restoration. Many are insane, and those who are not often become reclusive and bitter. Yet, these creatures tend to know more about the world before the Crash than any other. Thus, some seek these creatures out for their unique knowledge.

**Size Level:** 8 (Min 6, Max 12).

**Length:** Varies according to size level.

**Weight:** Varies according to size level.

**Build:** Medium.

### Mutant Changes & Costs:

**Total Bio-E:** 20

**Attribute Bonuses:** P.E. +7.

**Penalties:** -2 M.E., -2 M.A., Reduce P.B. by half.

### Human Features:

**Hands:** Full.

**Biped:** Partial: Character will walk with a stumbling, clumsy gait unless running on all fours. (Most Revenants would rather die than do this.)

**Speech:** Full.

**Looks:** None: Horribly ugly. These mutant humans are covered with tumors and strange growths. Their skin is a sickly yellow-green color or gray color. Hair is either completely gone or growing in small tufts. Odd bone growths protrude at the joints. Some will have plants growing out of their flesh (see below). Most sane or semi-sane Revenants wear heavy clothing, armor, or full helmets to conceal their features.

**Natural Weapons:** None.



#### Mutant Animal Powers:

Automatically gets Regeneration and Longevity: The character heals at a rate of one Hit Point or S.D.C. per round, and can grow back lost limbs in a matter of days. However, the regrown limb will look completely different from the original. The character will also live ten to twenty times longer than normal.

5 Bio-E for Extra Physical Endurance

5 Bio-E for Extra Mental Endurance

5 Bio-E for Extra Intelligence Quotient

10 Bio-E for Symbiotic Fruit-Bearing Plant: To use this power, the character permanently gives up ten S.D.C. The character has a small tree or vine growing out of his or her flesh! This can be located anywhere except for the head, as the burrowing roots would grow straight into the brain, killing or permanently incapacitating the character. The plant provides the character with a piece of fruit each week that gives the character all the nutrition that he or she needs to survive for a week. Also, if the character is ever trapped in an area without air, the plant will provide oxygen for the character.

5 Bio-E for Radiation Immunity: The character is immune to the effects of radiation.

10 Bio-E for Pain Immunity: The Revenant lacks the ability to feel any pain at all, and suffers no penalties from physical

damage. Can function normally until Hit Points reach a negative equivalent to the P.E. attribute, at which point the character falls unconscious and starts to regenerate. Note: Most sane Revenants have this power.

10 Bio-E for Brute Strength

10 Bio-E for Extra Intelligence Quotient

10 Bio-E for Extra Mental Affinity

10 Bio-E for Extra Mental Endurance

#### Vestigial Disadvantages:

Automatically gets Shifting Anatomy and Deadened Sense of Touch: The numerous tumors and growths constantly growing on the Revenant's flesh push and shove his or her anatomy in strange ways. The character will be unrecognizable in one month. This is another reason that Revenants tend to hide their features under armor or cloaks, letting those they choose to have contact with become familiar with their choice of clothing and personalities, rather than their appearances. They also have the most rudimentary sense of touch. -10% to any skills that require a delicate touch.

-15 Bio-E for Insanities: Roll or pick 1D4 random insanities.

-15 Bio-E for Stench: As musk glands, but the scent is of decay and death.

-10 Bio-E for Parasitic Non-Fruit-Bearing Plant: As above, except this plant does not produce any fruit.

## Fungal Genetic Chimeras

### Twisted

#### Original Animal Characteristics:

**Description:** The poor, misshapen Twisted are one of the horror stories of genetic experimentation gone horribly wrong. It is unknown where these creatures came from, or how they came about, but they are nonetheless here, and there is much speculation as to their origins, even amongst themselves. Some fear the Twisted, fearing that they carry some form of communicable genetic disease that will result in other creatures becoming Twisted.

**Size Level:** 8+1D4



**Length:** Varies.

**Weight:** Varies.

**Build:** Random, roll 1D6: 1-2 Short, 3-4 Medium, 5-6 Long.

**Mutant Changes & Costs:**

**Total Bio-E:** 40 (For Psionics ONLY.)

**Attribute Bonuses:** I.Q. +3, M.E. +4.

**Human Features:**

**Hands:** The smaller hand is a Full hand, with three fingers. The larger hand is Partial, with just a big finger and thumb. -35% to skills that require the use of two hands.

**Biped:** Full.

**Speech:** Partial: Voice will sound like someone talking through a wet bag.

**Looks:** None and Bizarre: Twisted are a misshapen lot. One arm (either the right or the left, pick one) is much larger and stronger than the other, which is quicker and more nimble. There is no discernable head, just a cluster of bumps around a permanently open mouth, where the head would be. Legs are designed like a bird's and end in stumpy pads. Character's skin comes in several different shades of brown and green, and is covered in bumps and lumps.

**Natural Weapons:** None.

**Mutant Animal Powers:**

Automatically gets Brute Strength and Leaping: Rodent.

**Vestigial Disadvantages:**

Automatically gets Diet: Herbivore.



## Sporons

**Original Animal Characteristics:**

**Description:** Sporons are a blend of mushroom and human. These creatures are instinctive loners towards others of their kind, only getting together to release spores in fertile areas. Hundreds of small mushrooms are produced through this reproductive method, but only one Sporon manages to survive long

enough to separate itself from the ground. Thus, most Sporons tend to be feral, self-taught characters.

**Size Level:** 8 (Min 6, Max 10).

**Length:** Usually around 5 feet, 5 inches (1.6 m).

**Weight:** Usually around 150 lbs (67.5 kg).

**Build:** Medium.

**Mutant Changes & Costs:**

**Total Bio-E:** 20

**Attribute Bonuses:** +2 P.S., +3 P.E., +10 S.D.C.

**Human Features:**

**Hands:** Full: Sporons have heavy, four-fingered hands.

**Biped:** Full.

**Speech:** Full.

**Looks:** Partial: For lack of a better term, these mutants look like mushroom-men. They have a humanoid body structure and long, lean limbs. They have pale, spongy skin that looks like the flesh of a mushroom. Topping their heads are wide, flat mushroom caps that look much like hats. The caps can come in a variety of colors and patterns. No two Sporons have the same cap design.

**Natural Weapons:** None.

**Mutant Animal Powers:**

Automatically gets Poison Cap: The mushroom cap all Sporons possess contains a poison. This poison is harmless unless it is ingested or it comes into contact with the bloodstream, at which point it turns deadly. A character swallowing the poison or being cut by a weapon coated with the poison must make a successful save vs deadly poison or take 4D6 damage direct Hit Points. A successful save means half damage. Sporons can harvest this poison by milking a portion of their caps without penalty. They can make one dose per size level, and it takes a day for the cap to regrow if one dose is taken. If the maximum dosage is milked, then the character's cap is removed and will regrow in one week. This does no damage to the character.

15 Bio-E for Regeneration: The character heals at a rate of one Hit Point/S.D.C per melee round. Any limbs cut off will heal in a matter of hours. Cannot survive being decapitated, though.

10 Bio-E for Brute Strength

10 Bio-E for Extra P.E.

**Vestigial Disadvantages:**

Automatically gets Diet: Carnivore.

-10 Bio-E for Webbed Hands and Feet. (Character's fingers and toes will be fused with strange, fungus-like growths.)

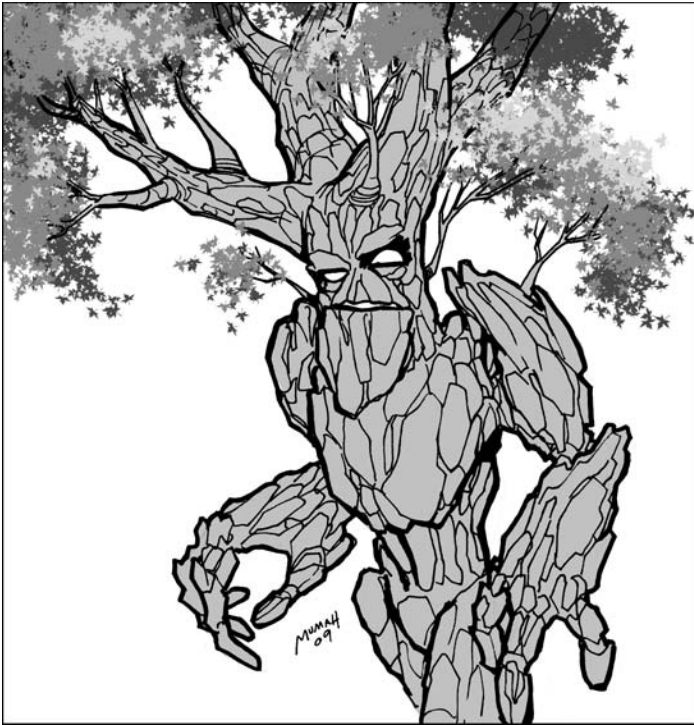
## Plant Genetic Chimeras

### Deciduons

**Original Animal Characteristics:**

**Description:** Deciduons are humanoid trees. They feel a great contempt for other plant-life, and take great offense to being compared to non-sentient plants. They have a majestic and awe-inspiring presence, making them prone to dominate most conversations or negotiations.

**Size Level:** 12 (Min 10, Max 15).



**Length:** Usually 8 feet (2.4 m).

**Weight:** Usually 350 lbs (158 kg).

**Build:** Long.

#### Mutant Changes & Costs:

**Total Bio-E:** 30

**Attribute Bonuses:** I.Q. +2, M.A. +4.

#### Human Features:

**Hands:** Full.

**Biped:** Full.

**Speech:** Partial.

**Looks:** None: Deciduons look like big trees given life. They have a basic tree-like structure divided into a humanoid form. Two large branches form their arms, and a series of root structures forms the legs. Glassy eyes stare out from their solid, trunk-like heads. The eyes can be green, red, or yellow in color. They also have leaves sprouting from their heads, and along their arms and legs.

#### Natural Weapons:

15 Bio-E for Thorny Defense: This is a kind of natural body armor. A.R. 12. A physical attack, such as a fist or foot, which rolls under the A.R. contacts the thorns, doing 1D6 damage. Character can also use a body block or tackle that does 4D6 damage plus P.S. bonus.

#### Mutant Animal Powers:

Automatically gets Photosynthetic Feeding Process: If a Deciduon is exposed to a few hours of sunlight each day and is allowed to root in fertile soil for at least an hour each day, then all of its dietary needs are met.

Automatically receives Light Natural Body Armor: A.R. 9, S.D.C. +20.

10 Bio-E for Medium Natural Body Armor: A.R. 11, S.D.C. +40.

15 Bio-E for Heavy Natural Body Armor: A.R. 14, S.D.C. +60.

20 Bio-E for Extra Heavy Natural Body Armor: A.R. 16, S.D.C. +80.

10 Bio-E for Fruit-Bearing

5 Bio-E for Brute Strength

10 Bio-E for Beastly Strength

10 Bio-E for Each pair of Branches. (Functions as partial hands. Adds one attack per melee and +1 to parry for each pair of branches. Maximum 3 extra pairs.)

#### Vestigial Disadvantages:

Automatically gets Vestigial Leaves on the head. (Same penalties as vestigial ears, except for the M.A. penalty.)

-10 Bio-E for Diet: Consumer (Replaces Photosynthetic Feeding Process.) Character must eat other life forms exclusively in order to survive.

-5 Bio-E for each pair of Vestigial Branches. (Maximum 3 pairs.)

## Mossians

#### Original Animal Characteristics:

**Description:** These hulking brutes represent the ultimate in adaptable plant/animal hybrids. Mossians can survive on a purely plant-like diet, absorbing nutrients from the soil and utilizing photosynthesis, or they can engage in an animal-like diet, consuming other life forms in order to get nutrients. Frequently, they do both, as these mutants tend to enjoy what they believe is the best of both worlds; animal and plant.

**Size Level:** 16 (Min 12, Max 20).

**Length:** 6 feet (1.8 m) to 12 feet (3.6 m) when standing fully erect, but spends most of the time hunched over, losing two feet (0.6 m) in height.

**Weight:** 300 to over 1000 lbs (135-450 kg).

**Build:** Long.

#### Mutant Changes & Costs:

**Total Bio-E:** 20

**Attribute Bonuses:** +4 P.S., Brute Strength, +8 P.E.

#### Human Features:

**Hands:** Partial.

**Biped:** Partial: Stance is like a gorilla, with the forearms longer and stronger than the legs.

**Speech:** Partial: Character will have a raspy voice, almost like a loud whisper.

**Looks:** None: Has a gorilla-like frame covered with moss-like fur and vines. Back is large and has a considerable hump. Three or four particularly large vine-like structures hang from the face, resembling trunks. These are the olfactory appendages. Two large, glassy eyes stare out from the head and are either solid blue, red, or green. Character will be bright green when healthy, yellow when sick or undernourished, and brown when dead.

#### Natural Weapons:

15 Bio-E for Thorny Defense: This is a kind of natural body armor. A.R. 12. A physical attack, such as a fist or foot, which rolls under the A.R. contacts the thorns, doing 1D6 damage. Character can also use a body block or tackle that does 4D6 damage plus P.S. bonus.





### **Mutant Animal Powers:**

Automatically gets Mossian Body Structure (Special): A Mossian's entire body is made up of dense plant fibers surrounding a skeleton composed of flexible cartilage. All blunt attacks do 1/3 damage, blade attacks do 1/2 damage. Energy, fire, cold, and acid attacks do full damage. Defoliants and chemical weapons designed to kill plant life do double damage. Can also squeeze through openings half its size because of the flexibility of the body. +20% to Escape Artist Skill.

Automatically gets Photosynthetic Feeding Process: If a Mossian is exposed to a few hours of sunlight each day and is allowed to root in fertile soil for at least an hour each day, then all of its dietary needs are met.

5 Bio-E for Advanced Smell

10 Bio-E for each pair of Tendrils: A pair of tendrils sprouts from a location on the character's body specified by the player. Tendrils function as partial hands and grant +1 attack per melee round and +1 to parry.

10 Bio-E for Prehensile Olfactory Appendages: The vine-like structures on the face of the character become the equivalent of partial hands.

10 Bio-E for Bestial P.S.

### **Vestigial Disadvantages:**

Automatically gets Color Blindness.

-10 Bio-E for Diet: Consumer (Replaces Photosynthetic Feeding Process.) Character must eat other life forms exclusively in order to survive.

-5 Bio-E for each pair of Vestigial Tendrils. (Maximum 3 pairs.)

## **Rules for Creating Genetic Chimeras**

Instead of offering a ridiculously long list of the millions of possible combinations available for creating new genetic chimeras, a new set of rules for creating any type of mutant chimera has been created. Players need to keep in mind that mutant chimeras will be looked at as strange and frightening, even by fellow mutants. Some, even in tolerant societies such as Cardania,

will look at the chimera as a freak or abomination and treat the mutant poorly or attempt to kill it. Therefore, if a player wishes to play a mutant chimera, obtain permission from the G.M. first, and obtain his or her approval for the combination presented.

Chimeras are usually created in the world of the After the Bomb in a Pre-Crash, portable gene splicer by desperate parents who cannot otherwise have children. In most nations, this practice is illegal, but in the world of **After the Bomb®**, the only nation that can even come close to successfully controlling this behavior is the Empire of Humanity, and even they are not 100% successful.

**Note:** The maximum number of donors that can be combined into a mutant chimera is three. Any more than that and a vile, misshapen monster with no human intelligence is produced. G.M.s, remember this and use it to your advantage, creating all new monsters to pit against your players.

A player can either choose the animals he wishes to combine to make the mutant chimera, or roll on the random mutant animal tables. (I personally recommend rolling randomly. You will get the most bizarre results.)

Once two or three animals have been selected or randomly rolled for creating the chimera, the player then rolls a six-sided die, assigning a different animal to each set of numbers. For two animals, a roll of 1-3 means the first animal, and a roll of 4-6 means the second animal is selected. For three animals, a roll of 1-2 means the first animal, a roll of 3-4 means the second animal, and a roll of 5-6 means the third animal. The result of this die roll will determine the chimera's starting size level, attribute bonuses, build, starting human features, and starting Bio-E.

**Example:** A player wants to create a griffin. The G.M. approves, and allows him to roll up a chimera consisting of a lion and an eagle. The player rolls a six-sided die, and rolls a 1. This means the chimera starts out with the lion's size level, build, Bio-E, starting human features, and attribute bonuses.

Once the above step is completed, the player can now spend the Bio-E points determined randomly, and now has access to both sets of powers and vestigial disadvantages available to each animal.

**Example:** The above player continues to build his griffin. The lion was rolled as the main animal, so he purchases human features based off of that particular animal. Therefore, if he wants to be a full biped, it has to be purchased. Had he rolled the eagle as his main animal, he would automatically be a biped. The player can now purchase any powers or gain Bio-E points by taking vestigial disadvantages from both the lion and the eagle. Players may NOT take powers or vestigial disadvantages that are either redundant or incompatible. (E.g., cannot take both Diet: Herbivore and Diet: Carnivore, cannot take Extra Physical Prowess twice, cannot take both a slashing beak and fangs, etc.)

**Note:** The only exception to the human features rule is when the chimera would have access to multiple limbs. In the case of the griffin, if the player purchases flight or selects vestigial wings, the wings will automatically be placed on the back, because the lion was rolled as the main body. Had the eagle been rolled as main body, then the character would have to purchase extra limbs if he wanted to have wings on the back. Another example of this exception is when a character creates a chimera with one of the donor animals being an octopus. Regardless of

the main donor animal rolled, the character will have access to multiple limbs, but they will be tentacles and will look very odd. (However, that is the whole idea of playing a chimera, is it not?)

Once the above steps are completed, work with the G.M. to determine the chimera's appearance. The main donor should be the strongest influence in the chimera's appearance. Thus, the griffin chimera in the example above will primarily look like a lion with some eagle features. However, if the character selected Human Looks: Partial or Full then the appearance of the character should be some type of blend of the features provided in the mutant animal descriptions.

Take care of all other character creation and generation as normal, and now you have a chimera!

**Note for G.M.s:** This set of rules can be used to create all manner of new and interesting monsters and creatures for your players to encounter in any of Palladium's game systems. There is literally no limit to what you can create using the chimera rules and a little imagination.

# The Scurry Scree & the Scurry Talus

## Two New Demonic Servants for Beyond the Supernatural™, 2nd Ed.

By Steven Dawes

Most practitioners of magic, various cultists and supernatural beings tend to summon other supernatural creatures to guard them and/or their belongings and hideaways. However, there are those who require (or simply prefer) supernatural creatures that are more discreet and able to hide in plain sight. The majority of modern day societies live in urban settings, therefore living in close proximity to each other with limited privacy. This requires many of these evil individuals to live amongst them and deal with the same lack of privacy and close scrutiny. Obviously, summoning a Hell Hound for a watchdog at a house in the suburbs would be a very foolish thing to do.

This is why the "Scurry Scree" and the "Scurry Talus" have become commonplace in such environments. Their shape shifting abilities allow them to exist quietly in these types of communities while still providing their masters with the unique security the supernatural can offer.

## The Scurry Scree

**scurry:** To move in or as if in a brisk pace; to move around in an agitated, confused, or fluttering manner.

**scree:** An accumulation of loose gravel or small stone debris lying on a slope or at the base of a hill, cliff or mountainside.

The Scurry Scree is a Minor Demon that anchors itself to our plane of existence in an unusual manner. First off, it must be summoned from its home dimension by a practitioner of magic or supernatural being (it cannot find its way to Earth on its

own). Upon arrival it immediately bonds and anchors itself to the summoner and immediately becomes his obedient servant. Once mentally bonded it must then anchor itself physically to a small deposit of common gravel (which is usually already provided for them by their summoner).

Those who summon a Scurry Scree will do so with a specific purpose in mind. You see, the Scurry Scree is basically a supernatural sentry that watches over the possessions and/or land, home, lair, hideaway or secret chamber of its master. To them, their entire point of existence is to be their master's watchdog, and they do so diligently. As shape-changers they transform into mundane looking knickknacks to blend into the locations they guard unnoticed and overlooked. They are always animal-like in appearance, and if examined, they look as if they were carved out of a small and plain looking rock.

Due to their diminutive size they can be placed virtually anywhere; on top of a mantel, cabinet, office desk, table, bookshelf or anywhere else it can hide in plain sight while on duty. Once posted it freezes in place (can remain frozen indefinitely) and keeps a constant watch over everything that happens in the room/area it guards. Being bonded to its master, the Scurry Scree knows who its master considers friendly and who's an intruder. Depending on its master's wishes, the Scurry Scree will either become immediately alarmed at the sight of an intruder, or may simply watch what the intruder does and only become alarmed if something of importance to its master is touched or disturbed in some way.

When they become alarmed, they immediately spring into action, scurrying off to warn their master (and incidentally, others who may serve their master). While running to its master, it



scampers in a very agitated, confusing and fluttering manner (hence their namesake). As it runs, the Scurry Scree emits a painfully high-pitched scream and vibrates to create a loud rattling sound. This is the sole function of the Scurry Scree, to alert its master when it becomes alarmed by something, and it will not stop until it either reports to its master, or is destroyed in the process.

## The Scurry Scree

### - Minor Demonic Servant

**Also known as** the “Gravel Golem” and “Scamper Sentry.”

**Alignment:** Always Aberrant. They are not malicious by any means; they are subservient creatures with animal-like intelligence, similar to that of the common dog.

**Attributes:** I.Q. High animal intelligence about equal to a canine, M.E. 2D6, M.A. 1D6, P.S. 2D6 (Supernatural), P.P. 1D6+11, P.E. 2D6+5, P.B. 6+1D4, Spd 4D6+5.

**Armor Rating (A.R.):** 13; any attack less than 14 does no damage to its rocky hide even if it hits.

**Hit Points:** P.E. number +1D12.

**S.D.C.:** 4D6+20

**Discorporation:** When the Scurry Scree is destroyed, its body explodes like a tiny grenade, sending gravel scattering in all directions. Anyone within 4 feet (1.2 m) of its blast radius takes 1D6 points of damage. (Note: Anyone who destroys the Scurry Scree with a melee weapon or a ranged weapon at point-blank range must roll to dodge the explosion. Treat the explosion like a normal attack by rolling a 20 sided die (no bonuses) and have the defenders attempt to dodge if able.)

If examined, the remains of its gravel body show no unusual characteristics, it is simply gravel that’s commonly found in that region of the world.

**Threat level:** x2, a Minor Demonic Servant. (**G.M. Note:** If the player characters are in an *Investigating the Supernatural* mode and therefore already at a x2 level, they will not notice the presence of the Scurry Scree.)

**Horror Factor:** 5 when someone recognizes what it is. These creatures pose to look like a small, animal-shaped knickknack that’s typically used as a piece or art, a paperweight, a souvenir or other similarly small inanimate trinket. The fear factor of this creature is not because it’s dangerous, but because if alarmed it summons the attention of much more dangerous individuals.

**Size:** They are typically 4-6 inches (10-15 cm) in height and length, with 8 inches (20 cm) being the maximum; they are never larger than a fist.

**Weight:** Typical range is one to three pounds (0.45-1.35 kg), with five pounds (2.25 kg) being the maximum.

**Average Life Span:** Uncertain, probably immortal.

**P.P.E.:** 1D4

**Natural Abilities:** Has excellent day and nightvision (1000 feet/305 m), can leap 5 feet (1.5 m) high and across, doesn’t breathe air and bio-regenerates 1D4 S.D.C. or Hit Points once every melee round.

**Shape-change into Knickknack:** The Scurry Scree can transform into a knickknack that looks like it was a rock that was chiseled and carved to resemble an animal. Lizards, scorpions

and gargoyles are their most common look, but they can look like any quadruped or biped animal with as little or as much detail as desired. Always changes into whatever its master desires it to look like.

**Telepathic Bond:** Magically understands the language and instructions of its master at 90%, but cannot read or speak. They will obey their master’s wishes, will recognize and ignore all individuals their master considers “friendly” and will not sound the alarm in their presence. Their bond has a range of two miles (3.2 km). While in range the Scurry Scree will always know where its master is located and will instantly know when someone has become a friend or an enemy according to its master.

**Screaming Rattle:** When alarmed, the Scurry Scree begins to vibrate and rattle like a rattlesnake while emitting an extremely loud, high-pitched scream similar to that of a screaming frog, only several times louder. As it screams it will scurry off towards its master as fast as possible to warn him of the intruder (only if its master is within the two mile radius of it). If its master is away, it will try to find somewhere to hide from the intruder, who will most likely try to destroy it while it continues screaming.

While not deafening or powerful enough to shatter glass, the screaming is painful and disorienting to anyone less than 30 feet (9.1 m) from the Scurry Scree, and victims must make a saving throw of 16 or higher (may include P.E. bonus in their attempt). Those who fail their saving throw will have to cover their ears or get out of range of the scream or they suffer -3 to all their combat actions and -15% to all skill rolls until 1D4 minutes after the screaming has stopped (or they are out of its range).

A Scurry Scree can scream rattle nonstop while scurrying to its master (or running from its attackers) and can continue its scream indefinitely if needed. This scream can be heard at least a city block away in all directions.

**Telepathic Report:** When picked up and held in its master’s hand, the Scurry Scree gives a telepathic report of what it has seen, including the sounds and faces of the intruders that have alarmed it. This is why they scurry to their master when activated, not so much as to warn him of the danger (they would know that by the screaming rattle alone) but to be able to show him a replay of everything it has seen or experienced of the intruders. Destroying the Scurry Scree before reaching its master will stop it from reporting what it has seen, allowing the intruders to stay anonymous (if they escape or hide before they are spotted by someone else who heard the screaming rattle).

**Discorporate at Will:** Believed to be something of a last ditch effort to help its master, when a Scurry Scree is trapped, captured or picked up by an intruder/attacker, it can discorporate instantly. As the discorporation notes mentioned previously, anyone within 4 feet (1.2 m) of its blast radius suffers 1D6 damage.

**Vulnerabilities:** 1. Paper and Cardboard. While vulnerable to all normal man-made weapons, melee weapons that are wrapped with paper inflict an extra 1D6 points of damage per strike. Durable items made out of cardboard (like a shipping tube, thickly rolled up newspapers or similar objects used as

a blunt object) inflict 1D12 damage per strike to a Scurry Scree and will bypass their Natural Armor Rating (only needing a natural roll of 5 or higher to strike).

2. They are affected by psychic abilities or magic that can control or expel them (like Banishment, Constrain Being, Summon Lesser Being, Exorcism, etc.).

3. They automatically fail to save against anyone using "Psychic Invisibility." However, any ill intent or act (including thievery of items the Scurry Scree is watching over) will cancel the psionic influence and immediately alarm it.

4. Their *Screaming Rattle Alarm* ability is dampened when submerged in water. In addition, they cannot swim and literally sink like a stone in water. If thrown into a pond, lake, ocean or a location where it can scurry back to land, it will exit as fast as possible and resume its screaming rattle. But if thrown into an aquarium, a kitchen sink, bathtub or other location it can't climb out of that's filled with water, it is effectively trapped and ineffective as a sentry. They do not breathe air so it won't drown; it will simply wait in the water to be rescued by its master.

5. If their master dies or releases them from service, they are forced back to their home dimension. When this happens they will disincorporate as noted above.

**P.C.C. Notes:** Psychic Diviner: A Diviner will NEVER see a sign out of the blue that he or she is being watched by a Scurry Scree. However, if they specifically look for signs they will automatically know that they are "being watched by something" (no Perception Roll required). However, if the Scurry Scree is set by its master to start screaming the moment it spots an intruder, the G.M. may let the Diviner see a sign that reads "The next room/area is being watched/guarded by something."

Nega-Psychic: A Nega-Psychic's aura will effectively "switch off" a Scurry Scree while in its presence. It's as if it simply stops working and "blacks out," resuming its sentry duty once out of range of the disruptive energy field. The Scurry Scree does not notice this disruption and will not become alarmed.

Psychic Sensitive: A Psychic Sensitive will get a creepy feeling that he's "being watched" the instant he is spotted by a Scurry Scree.

**R.C.C. Skills or Equivalent (do not increase with experience):** Detect Ambush 70%, Land Navigation 85% and Camouflage 95% (freezes in place and looks like a common knickknack and is easily overlooked).

**Average Level of Experience:** Not applicable.

**Actions per Melee:** Five. All of its actions will be used for scurrying off to warn its master of intruders, running from and dodging its attackers. If it runs from someone and finds a safe place it will merely continue to scream until a path is clear for it to run to its master (if its master is in range of its telepathic radar).

**Damage:** Not applicable! They are not meant to attack, only to call out an alarm when necessary. However, if they are caught or picked up by an intruder/attacker they can use their *Disincorporate at Will* ability to inflict damage.

**Bonuses:** +3 initiative, +4 to Perception Rolls, +6 to automatic dodge, +3 roll with impact, +10 save vs Horror Factor and is impervious to cold (cold attacks do no damage).

**Magic:** None.

**Psionics:** None.

**Enemies:** ANYONE who is not considered friendly by its master, human and non-human alike.

**Allies:** Scurry Screes can be summoned and controlled by practitioners of magic and powerful supernatural beings. Evil mages, cultists and supernatural beings keep them as sentries over their possessions and their home. In fact, they might keep several on hand at one time if they so desire. They will loyally serve their master to the best of their ability and without question.



## The Scurry Talus

**scurry:** To move in or as if in a brisk pace; to move around in an agitated, confused, or fluttering manner.

**talus:** An accumulation of loose rocks (usually larger than a fist) or stone debris lying on a slope or at the base of a hill, crag, cliff or mountainside.

The Scurry Talus is very similar to the Scurry Scree, and could be considered the rich uncle of the two. A Scurry Talus performs the same basic duties of the Scree and then some. Like the Scree, the Scurry Talus must be summoned from its home dimension by a practitioner of magic or supernatural being, bonds psychically with its master and serves him or her loyally. However, it uses rocks instead of gravel for its physical body, building a bigger, heavier and stronger body than the Scree. It's also more intelligent and capable of handling more duties for its master than the Scree.

Like the Scree, the Talus builds its body out of loose rock, but requires stones that are at least the size of a fist or larger. Like the Scree it can shape-change at will; however its disguises imitate small to medium-sized statues. These statues look identical to the garden variety statues found in home and garden stores, which can include garden gnomes, fairies, gargoyles, cherubs, frogs, turtles, geese, dogs, cats, porch lions, yard deer, lawn jockeys and other familiar sights. Typically, they are placed outdoors to keep watch over their master's yard and property, as well as keeping an eye out for intruders.

Like the Scree, they telepathically know who their master considers friendly and will ignore them. At the same time they learn to recognize their neighbors, the postman, paperboy, garbage men, and other common fixtures and daily occurrences that take place around them. They also learn to keep track of the occurrences they see daily. For example, they begin to note the usual time a neighbor leaves and returns home from work, or the general time the mailman stops by to deliver the mail. With their exceptional hearing they even learn to pick up on the neighborly gossip in case something is going on worth reporting to their master.

Another attribute similar to the Scree is in the event that the Talus becomes alarmed by someone (intruders, thieves, its master's enemies, etc.) it will send out an alarm. However, Talus do not scream out like the Scree; since they are usually displayed outdoors they must remain discreet in the public eye. Instead they send a telepathic alarm to their master and, if possible, they will go into hiding somewhere (like under or behind bushes and shrubbery, etc.) and will continue watching the intruders. If it sees an opportunity to surprise the intruders, it will transform into a hideous gargoyle-like creature and will scurry over to ambush and attack them! Unlike the Scree, the Talus is bigger, stronger and capable of combat, making it an "attack dog" to the Scree's "watchdog."

## The Scurry Talus

### - Lesser Demonic Servant

**Also known as** the "Yard Golem" and the "Rockgoyle."

**Alignment:** 80% are Miscreant, 20% are Aberrant. Unlike the Scree, they exhibit human intelligence (albeit at a child's level) and will perform cruel acts when they can.

**Attributes:** I.Q. 1D4+2, M.E. 3D6, M.A. 2D6, P.S. 3D6 (Supernatural), P.P. 3D6+2, P.E. 4D6, P.B. 6+1D4, Spd 3D6+5.

**Armor Rating (A.R.):** 11; any attack less than 12 does no damage even if it hits.

**Hit Points:** P.E. number +1D12.

**S.D.C.:** 4D6+30

**Discorporation:** When the Scurry Talus is destroyed, its body explodes like a grenade, sending rock fragments scattering in all directions. Anyone within 8 feet (2.4 m) of its blast radius takes 3D6 points of damage. (Note: Anyone who destroys the Scurry Scree with a melee weapon or a ranged weapon at point-blank range must roll to dodge the explosion. Treat the explosion like a normal attack by rolling a 20 sided die (no bonuses) and have the defenders attempt to dodge if able.)

If examined, the remains of rock fragments show no unusual characteristics, it is simply rock that's commonly found in that region of the world.

**Threat level:** x4; Demonic Servant; a Lesser Demon.

**Horror Factor:** 10 when facing one in its natural gargoyle-like form, 12 when facing more than three. These creatures pose to look like outdoor home decor and are easily overlooked, but if someone recognizes what one is while disguised (perhaps by psychic means), its Horror Factor is 6.

**Size:** They can range from half a foot (15 cm) tall up to four and a half feet (1.4 m) tall and wide. Their natural form is always 4½ feet tall standing up (can scurry on all fours if needed).

**Weight:** They can range from ten pounds (4.5 kg) all the way up to eighty pounds (36 kg). Their natural form will always be around seventy to eighty pounds (31.5-36 kg).

**Average Life Span:** Uncertain, probably immortal.

**P.P.E.:** 2D6

**Natural Abilities:** Has excellent day and nightvision (1000 feet/305 m), can leap 10 feet (3 m) high and across (twice that distance with a running start), doesn't breathe air and bio-regenerates 1D6 S.D.C. or Hit Points once every melee round.

Shapechange into Yard Decor: The Scurry Talus can transform into yard decor that looks like it was either chiseled/carved from rock or molded out of cement. Can duplicate the look of any animal or humanoid stone or cement yard decor desired. Always changes into whatever its master desires it to look like. However, it can also transform into a hideous looking gothic gargoyle-like creature at will. This is considered by most Parapsychologists to be the Scurry Talus's natural look.

Telepathic Bond: Magically understands the language and instructions of its master at 90%, but cannot read or speak. It will obey its master's wishes, will recognize and ignore all individuals its master considers "friendly" and will not send an alert in their presence. Their bond has a range of five miles (8 km), and while in range the Scurry Talus will always know where its master is located and will instantly know when someone has become a friend or an enemy according to its master.

Telepathic Alarm: When alarmed, the Scurry Talus will send a telepathic alert to its master. This alert will include any sights or sounds of note, including what the intruder(s) looks like and anything they might have said or done that's worth noting. If its master is out of range of the telepathic bond, the Talus will continually send out the alert till either it's destroyed or its master comes within range of its telepathic bond. This is a silent alarm that only its master and its master's other Scurry Talus servants can receive.

Discorporate at Will: Believed to be something of a last ditch effort to help its master, when a Scurry Talus is trapped, captured or nearly destroyed by an intruder/attacker, it can discorporate instantly. As the discorporation notes mentioned previously, anyone within 8 feet (2.4 m) of its blast radius suffers 3D6 damage.

**Vulnerabilities:** 1. Paper and Cardboard. While vulnerable to all normal man-made weapons, melee weapons that are wrapped with paper inflict an extra 1D4 points of damage per strike. Durable items made out of cardboard (like a shipping tube, thickly rolled up newspapers or similar objects used as a blunt object) will inflict 1D8 damage per strike to a Scurry

-Self-proclaimed "Supermage" Scott Percy Danson to Chief Medical Examiner Hugo Jimiez, on the steps of the Library of Congress.

Unlike some of the other magic classes, the Modern Mage doesn't see any need to intermingle magic with science, machines or computers, but simply to use the technology to make magic "easier." Consequently, the Modern Mage is well versed on the contemporary world, and will use things like the Internet, newsgroups, FTP servers, and PDAs to keep track of his information and to cross reference sources as he searches for new spells and knowledge.

The character is most definitely an investigative type and will use all kinds of information gathering techniques to not only learn new spells, but to keep track of the latest in modern technology and discoveries as well. The very nature of the Modern Mage will often lead him into communication and conflict with those that want his knowledge and also will want to keep him from finding lost information. The best way to describe the Modern Mage? Globe-trotting with an arcane bent.

**Character Bonuses:** Because of the focus on learning and knowledge, all Modern Mages receive a bonus of +2 to I.Q. and +2 to M.E. (very mentally focused). This also accounts for the bonuses to Perception that are defined below.

## Initial Spell Knowledge

Modern Mages deal with a lot of practical magic; stuff that is useful to them in a day to day setting and fitting in with their chosen occupations. This doesn't always translate well to combat, but it makes the character extremely versatile in a lot of situations. These are also the four most widely distributed spells, and that is why all Modern Mages end up learning them.

The character starts with the following four spells (from either HU2 or the HU2 G.M.'s Guide): Decipher Magic, See the Invisible, Befuddle and Weightlessness. Also, starting Modern Mages gain a total of 1D6+4 spells from levels 1-3, and 1D4+2 spells from levels 4-8. However, unlike the Mystic Study character, the character *does not* automatically gain spells per level, but must use his or her investigative nature to learn more magical spells.

**P.P.E.:** Like all magic users, the Modern Mage is a living battery of P.P.E. The character starts with 2D4x10+10 P.P.E. attribute in P.P.E. As the character grows in experience, he or she gains 2D4 P.P.E. Note that this is less than the Mystic Study character, but the Modern Mage has a number of tools that the Mystic Study character simply cannot acquire.

## Methods of Acquiring New Spells

Again, the modern world often helps the Modern Mage to acquire new areas of magic. Scouring the Internet, libraries with digital cameras with text readers that translate books into a searchable format (often thousands of pages of text), and telephone conversations with voice capture and identification as well as filters and translators, makes the Modern Mage something much different than the Mystic Study character. For the character believes entirely in the existence of magic (after all, without belief one couldn't begin to learn) but doesn't believe in the "magical."

Finding spells on the Internet is really difficult, because there is a lot of misinformation, impossible to corroborate accounts and just plain wrong/stupid commentary. Message boards, usergroups, IRC chat rooms, and other places are full of bogus information. However, thanks to the character's handy computer resources that constantly scour these sources, he can find that one legitimate piece of the puzzle that helps to piece things all together.

The chance of finding a spell through a random web search without any computer program assistance is -20%. Having the skill Internet Usage raises it by +20%; yes, to an even zero percent. This is where the Modern Mage requires his tools and expertise to track down the information that he needs. Note however, that finding new spells does become easier as one advances in experience, so there is a +2% bonus to acquiring new spells per level of experience.

The character has an impressive ability to translate spells from ancient texts, books of magic and scrolls. When combined with his computer knowledge, and a successful Principles of Magic roll (to help understand the complexities of the spell that he is working on), the character can attempt to do a Scroll/Text Conversion. The success ratio is 10%, +3% per level of experience. A successful Principles of Magic and Cryptography roll is first required and at least six months of study and research. A successful Scroll/Text Conversion means that the knowledge is gained, and the character can use the spell at will. On a failed roll, roll on the following table.

### Success or Failure

**01-09%:** The desired spell, but at half range, damage, duration, and effect. The character will need to study the spell for another six months to see if the spell can be made to work (+25% Scroll/Text Conversion on that specific spell).

**10-22%:** Nothing! No reaction or effects at all.

**23-30%:** Failure, causing the character to suffer slight immolation from the mystic energy; caster suffers 2D6 damage and is weakened (-2 on all combat rolls, -4 on all saving throws) for the next 1D4 hours (heals normally).

**31-42%:** Failure, leaving the caster dazed and confused. All skills are -20% and he is -2 on all combat rolls and has one attack per melee. The effects last 1D6 days.

**43-50%:** Failure, the character feels ripped apart from electrical energy; the character suffers 4D6 damage, but is otherwise unaffected (no lingering effects).

**51-62%:** Success, the spell works perfectly.

**63-75%:** Failure, the spell summons an otherworldly being (typically a lesser demon, entity, or minor elemental) that will be surprised and aggressive. The otherworldly being will typically be teleported back (01-75%) after 1D4 hours, but some (76-00%) are stuck in their new dimension!

**76-88%:** Failure, the character has trouble focusing and concentrating. All spells require 50% more P.P.E. to cast and have half the effects, and the character is -2 on all saving throws for 1D4 days. The character will be unlikely to successfully do another Scroll/Text Conversion (-20%) on that particular spell.

**89-95%:** Failure, opens a mystic portal to another dimension. To close the portal will require the spell caster to cast 1D6 Mystic Portal spells himself before he can close it. If left open,

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**76-88%:** Failure, the character has trouble focusing and concentrating. All spells require 50% more P.P.E. to cast and have half the effects, and the character is -2 on all saving throws for 1D4 days. The character will be unlikely to successfully do another Scroll/Text Conversion (-20%) on that particular spell.

**89-95%:** Failure, opens a mystic portal to another dimension. To close the portal will require the spell caster to cast 1D6 Mystic Portal spells himself before he can close it. If left open,

there is a 01-70% chance of something crawling out of it the first hour and 01-40% chance of another creature crawling out of it for every day that it is left open. Bad news if the mage doesn't know the Mystic Portal spell! Portal closes by itself after 2D6 days.

**96-00%:** Complete Success. The spell not only works perfectly but costs 10% less (rounded up) to cost per invocation!

## Other Magic Abilities of the Modern Mage

The Modern Mage, like the Mystic Study character, is a powerful practitioner of the arts of magic. Consequently, he has other abilities that do not require spell casting but usually require P.P.E. expenditure.

### Heightened Perception

The Modern Mage is keenly aware of his surroundings and is always observing things, trying to find that one clue that is hidden. Thus the character gets a general +2 bonus to Perception, with an additional +2 if he senses that something is not right with the current situation; that requires a roll under against M.E. to see if the character's "gut instinct" kicks in. Also, if he has the skills Detect Ambush, Detect Concealment, Military Intelligence or Land Navigation, each of those skills provides a +1 bonus to the Perception ability.

### Sense Aura

**Range:** One individual up to 100 feet (30 m) away.

**Duration:** One melee round.

**Saving Throw:** Standard.

**P.P.E.:** 5

While not as informative as a See Aura, a Sense Aura can still provide some useful information. On a successful Sense Aura the character can learn the following about the victim:

- Presence of psychic or magic abilities but not the strength/level or power.
- Presence of possession, mind control and altered mind (includes if a person is drunk or on drugs).

It does not provide any knowledge of if the individual is sick or healthy, level of experience or alignment. It is merely a screening ability. Also mind blocks, Iron Will and Impervious to Magic super abilities block this scanning ability (will mask the presence of psionic and magic abilities).

### Familiar Link

**Range:** Self and animal; 600 feet (183 m).

**Duration:** Indefinite.

**Saving Throw:** None.

**P.P.E.:** 20

At third level, a Modern Mage is experienced enough to mentally link with a small animal (mammal, bird or lizard). This link is permanent, producing a rather impressive symbiotic relationship. No matter how wild or mean the animal may have been, it will instantly consider the Modern Mage to be its friend, companion and master. To him, the animal is always docile, because the two are now one; an extension of each other. As such,

both man and animal will understand each other completely. For the Modern Mage, the Familiar is now a sensory extension enabling him to see, hear, smell, taste and feel everything the animal experiences. Thus, Familiars make great spies, listening to conversations and prowling into areas not easily accessible to their masters. Although the Familiar understands and obeys the Modern Mage, it cannot actually speak to him.

Just as the Modern Mage knows what the Familiar is feeling, so the Familiar knows what its master is experiencing (on an empathic and telepathic level). If one is in danger, the other will know it. The magical nature of the union also provides the Modern Mage and the Familiar both with an additional six Hit Points. However, if the Familiar is hurt or attacked, its master takes the same amount of damage even if miles apart. If the Familiar is killed, the Modern Mage *permanently loses 10 Hit Points!* There is also a 50% chance he will suffer shock from the ordeal. If he does, he will lapse into a coma for 1D6 hours. Another Familiar Link cannot be attempted again for at least 1D4 years.

### Other Limitations & Notes about the Familiar Link:

1. Two-way telepathic and empathic communication; maximum range 6000 feet (1829 m). Beyond this range the two cannot communicate, but each will know if the other is in danger or hurt regardless of the distance between them. The animal will also understand spoken commands by its master on an almost human level. The Modern Mage will have a keen understanding and perception of his animal companion's reactions, growls, noises and body language.

2. The Familiar also possesses all of the abilities common for that type of animal.



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3. Familiar Size: 35 pounds (15.7 kg) maximum.

4. Typical animal types used as a Familiar include cats, dogs, coyotes, foxes, weasels, ferrets, rodents, birds, large lizards and snakes.

## Sense Magic

**Range:** 120 foot (36.6 m) diameter.

**Duration:** Automatic and constant awareness.

**Saving Throw:** None.

**P.P.E.:** 3

The Modern Mage is so familiar with magical energy that he can sense or feel the presence of magic (i.e. an enchanted weapon or object, other powerful magic item, ley line nexus, Greater Demon, Demigod, god, or fellow wizard that is 8<sup>th</sup> level or greater, and similar). Like a geiger counter, the individual can tell if he is near (within 20 feet/6 m) or far (towards the limit of the range) from the source of the magic. The ability can also indicate whether a person, object or place is enchanted/under a magical spell, possesses vast P.P.E., is in the process of invoking magic, or if powerful magic is being used in the area. **Note:** Practitioners of Magic and most Supernatural Beings do not register as being magical except when actually casting a spell/using magic.

## Sense Enchantment

**Range:** About 90 feet (27.4 m) maximum.

**Duration:** Automatic and constant awareness.

**Saving Throw:** None.

**P.P.E.:** None.

The Modern Mage's knowledge and attunement to the supernatural is so complete that he can recognize magic in almost any form, on sight. This includes magic items, magic weapons, circles, other magic users, and people controlled or possessed by mystic forces. The exact purpose or power of the enchantment is usually not known, but that it is rooted in magic is easily identifiable. This is basically an uncomfortable, prickly sensation or specific "feeling" or hunch the Modern Mage gets when looking at a specific person, place, or item. Base level of perception and correct evaluation is 52% +2% per level of experience.

## Magic Combat and Bonuses

See the Magic and Spells section in HU2, page 319, for full details. Basically, the character can cast two attacks from spells level 1-8 per melee round. Each spell counts as two melee attacks. Just as the Modern Mage gains P.P.E. during his level advancement, so too does he gain other bonuses that directly augment the effectiveness of his magical skills. These bonuses are in addition to any applicable attribute and skill bonuses.

At first level, the Modern Mage is +2 to save vs all kinds of magic, +2 to save vs possession, +2 to save vs Horror Factor (if it is used in the game), and others need a 12 or greater to resist his magic (Spell Strength).

At fourth level, another +1 vs magic is gained and Spell Strength increases +1 (characters need 13 or greater to save against his magic).

Seventh level adds +2 to Spell Strength (15 or higher to save vs his magic) and +1 to save vs possession.

Tenth level adds +1 to Spell Strength (16 or higher to save vs his magic) and another +1 vs possession and Horror Factor.

Thirteenth level adds +2 to save vs magic and +1 to save vs possession.

## Skill Knowledge

Being a Modern Mage requires a fair bit more educational specifics than just dropping one skill program for the knowledge of the class. Thus, similar to Special Training (and let's face it, magic *is* a form of special training!), the character starts with a number of skill programs to reflect his upbringing and background.

### Common/General Skills

Read/Write/Speak Native Language

Basic Math

Pilot Automobile

Select 1D6+5 Secondary Skills.

### Lore Program (Special)

Principles of Magic (New!) (+20%)

Lore: Geomancy (+15%)

Lore: Theology (+10%)

Lore: Demons and Monsters (+10%)

Archeology (+10%)

### Computer Program (Special)

Computer Operation (+20%)

Computer Programming (+20%)

Internet Usage (New!) (+10%)

Basic Electronics (+5%)

Computer Repair (+5%)

### Investigative Program (Special)

Cryptography (+15%)

Surveillance Systems (+10%)

Tracking (+10%)

Forgery (+5%)

Research (+15%)

Also select one skill program from HU2, pages 46-47, from this list: Business, Communications, Domestic, Language, Medical Assistant, Pilot: Advanced, Physical/Athletic, Science and Technical. All skills gain a +5% Special Training bonus.

## Special Equipment of the Modern Mage

Note that the following equipment is not automatic, it must be purchased from the character's budget, but all Modern Mages have access to this equipment.

### **Personal Data Assistant (PDA) (Cost: \$250-\$800)**

No Modern Mage worth his salt would be without a PDA. This handy device records conversations, video and still images as well as functioning as a telephone with text messaging capabilities and audio conferencing. Since the device also has wireless networking technology (enabling it to wirelessly connect to the Internet) it has a large number of Security Intrusion detec-

tors that make it difficult to hack into (-20% for Computer Hacking and Cryptography attempts). It is light and pretty flimsy (only 4 S.D.C.) but remains an important component in the arsenal of the Modern Mage. It doesn't add any bonuses to the Acquiring New Spells percentile, but without it, the character would be hard pressed to drum up leads and follow hot links using the other technology at his disposal.

### **Desktop Personal Computer (Cost: \$4000-\$11,000)**

The character has a top of the line personal computer that interacts with all of his other devices; the PDA, the OCR Printer, Scanner, Copier and most importantly, the FTP Server. This computer has a number of ports and links to devices to be a powerful mobile communications hub. The computer comes with a 22 inch widescreen LCD monitor, wireless mouse and keyboard and state of the art sound system with DVD burner and optical drives.

### **Data Miner (Cost: \$35)**

This powerful computer utility is not what most would call "user friendly." It simply scours the Internet for all information, copies what it can and transmits that data into files on both the FTP server that the Modern Mage utilizes (see below for details) and onto the PC that the character has. It doesn't filter any information, it only does its best to copy text and images (it's limited to jpg, gif, png, tiff and bitmaps for images and avi and mpeg for video; it destroys all HTML tags and all javalinks too and stores text as txt files) and stores them on the user's computer systems.

Note that Data Miners are powerful utilities and, as such, record all kinds of information. It procures tens of thousands of pages of documents with hundreds upon hundreds of images and videos stored in separate folders. To go through them all would take the Modern Mage hundreds of hours. However, it is a good utility in that it raises the Acquiring New Spells percentage by +25%! So it is a utility that no Modern Mage would be without. It can be downloaded with a fee from many different websites and only takes about an hour of usage for the character to become familiar with.

### **Digital Camera (Cost: \$300-\$900)**

As good as the PDA is, the Digital Camera is an important tool as well. It takes more, better quality pictures with zoom functions as well as storing them electronically so they can be transferred to digital storage without the messy function of developing film. While the Digital Camera doesn't add to the Acquiring New Spell percentage, it is a good tool and aids the Research skill with a +5% bonus. The Photography skill is not required to fully utilize the Digital Camera. The S.D.C. Of a typical Digital Camera is only in the 5-8 (4+1D4) range.

### **XS-88 Voice Recognition Speaker Phone (Cost: \$49.95)**

An exceptionally handy phone that the character will often keep in his office, this phone not only offers the customary call display, three-way calling and call forwarding, but also will tell the character who is calling and can record phone conversations. Also, there is a built-in translator for the phone that translates any of 50 built-in languages so the character can understand and

reply even if he doesn't know the language of the caller! This super phone only comes from one supplier, Daltry Enterprises based out of Yorkton, Ohio. It's been advertised forever on TV via infomercials, eBay auctions and many other methods (including cameo displays on the Simpsons and COPS) that make it fairly ubiquitous. Most people don't fully grasp the seriousness of the functionality of this device, but the Modern Mage certainly does and uses it to its fullest capacity. It has a measly S.D.C. of 3 (easily broken). Note that if the phone can help translate some aspect of a spell the character is looking for it adds +20% to the Acquire New Spell percentage, otherwise it is a measly +2% bonus but only if the character is talking to someone that gives good, credible information about the spell.

### **Peer to Peer Software (Cost: Free)**

While Peer to Peer (or P2P as it is commonly known) is best known for illegal pirating of copyrighted material, including movies, music and books, it is still a useful source for the Modern Mage to gain specific knowledge on something. Thus all Modern Mages have P2P software running when tracking down popular TV shows that have been to an area. This benefits them in two ways: they have a way to check the detail of the landscape they are traveling to, and they can see how "authentic" is the relic that they are choosing to see. As far as using P2P software to Acquire New Spells, there is a measly +1% bonus because the character will have a slightly better idea of what he is looking for with the software.

### **FTP Server (Cost: \$3000-\$8000)**

A powerful device in the servitude of the Modern Mage is the FTP server. FTP stands for File Transfer Protocol and represents the "virtual" storage of the Modern Mage. As long as the character, or anyone with proper authorization, can access the Internet, he can access files on the FTP server with the right software. FTP servers are important and useful because they can back up material on the Modern Mage's main PC and are useful as a permanent repository for stored data. Since they are accessed remotely, they can be situated virtually anywhere and it's not unprecedented for a Modern Mage to have multiple FTP servers set up with each holding different data. The FTP server, however, does not offer a bonus to Acquire New Spells because it's not an active device, it simply responds when needed.

### **Wireless Router and High-Speed Connection (Cost: \$100-\$405)**

It is important for the character to be connected online and, as such, have both a Wireless Router and High-Speed Connection. This enables the character to utilize the PDA with the FTP Server along with the Jet Search Engine. The typical range of the wireless router is 100 feet (30 m) before the signal begins to weaken, but signal boosters can jump that up to 1000 feet (305 m) at a cost of roughly \$300.

### **OCR Scanner, Printer, Fax and Copier (Cost: \$150-\$500)**

A very handy device for the Modern Mage is the OCR Scanner, Printer, Fax, and Copier. This device scans text documents and converts them into digital files for the character as well as providing the standard printing, fax and copier functions that all

machines provide. The OCR scanning is especially important in that it allows the character to get a digital copy of printed text and images.

### Desktop Publishing Software (Cost: \$200-\$1000)

Trying to understand all of the documents possessed by the Modern Mage can be difficult, so it is important to have good Desktop Publishing Software to turn it into a more legible product, especially if one is doing any seminars or appearances based on what he knows. Thus it is important for the Modern Mage to have Desktop Publishing Software.

### Jet Search and Analyze Engine (Cost: Free)

A powerful utility developed by a small cadre of Modern Mages known as the Visionary Assembly, with a specialty in Computer Intrusion Security and Factual Dissemination. The Jet Search Engine (JSE is the acronym) scours the files that it is allowed to access and analyzes them, finding linking words and phrases and generating its own reports on what it finds. This allows the Modern Mage to quickly realize what is bunk and what might actually be true. It's also extremely handy in Acquiring New Spells, raising the percentage by +30%! However, even on the typically high-end computer systems that the Modern Mage runs on, the JSE is incredibly slow and memory taxing; it chews up memory and grinds everything else down to a halt, so multitasking is pretty much impossible. But if one wants a tool that is useful in tracking down arcane information, the JSE is not merely useful, but mandatory.

## Other Stuff for the Modern Mage

**Alignment:** The character can be of any alignment, however most Modern Mages are of good or Unprincipled alignment. Evil Modern Mages often find it hard to get information through cooperative efforts.

**Level of Education and Skill Selection:** This is detailed above. The character does not roll on the Random Education Level table like the Mystic Study character.

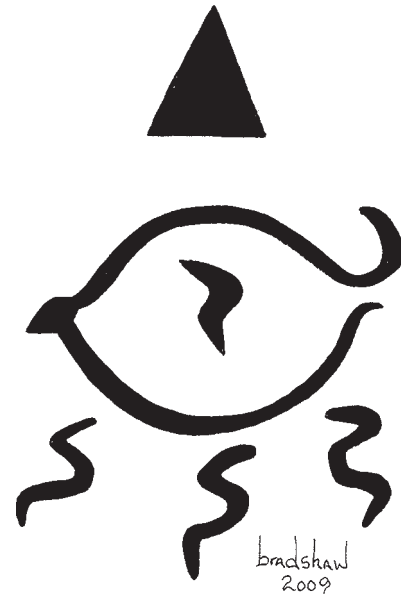
**Hand to Hand Combat:** Most Modern Mages are weak in hand to hand combat. Thus if they want a Hand to Hand skill they must select it as a Secondary Skill choice. It is recommended that the character select at least Hand to Hand: Basic to avoid getting creamed instantly.

**Attacks per Melee (Hand to Hand):** The character starts with two attacks, with extra attacks coming from a Hand to Hand skill choice and/or possibly Boxing.

**Weapons and Armor:** Unless the character is extremely wealthy, only conventional weapons and body armor are available.

**Structural Damage Capacity (S.D.C.):** The character has a starting S.D.C. of 30. Additional S.D.C. comes through Physical skills such as Body Building.

**Available Financial Resources:** The character has a budget of \$1D4x10,000+3000 towards the purchase of the special equipment above. Any extra money left over can be spent on other equipment, weapons and vehicles. Any money not spent is wasted. Note that the character is smart and well educated and will often have a fairly good job using his investigative and magical background.



## New Age Oracle

*"I don't see why you can't replace the frog's tongue with an iguana's. Iguanas are bigger."*

- WXIR Talk Show Host Pam Brown while doing a radio interview with Priestess Clarissa, a noted Wiccan and Vegan.

Finding new ways to perform old rituals is the basic mindset behind the New Age Oracle, one of the surprisingly popular new "fads" of the New Age Movement. Aspects of New Age Mysticism are taken very seriously by this character, including the Tarot, Astrology, Numerology, and other different and popular forms of mystic knowledge and ability. Yet the New Age Oracle is not a crackpot, but a genuine believer in learning new methods for achieving power.

Also an important note is that the New Age Oracle requires objects, drawings and/or symbols to be used with magic. Consequently, the character is a *Ritual Magician*, with the additional power and complexity that such magic paths require. Thus, instead of the normal spell range of the "traditional" Mystic Study character, we will explore all of the different aspects of New Age Mythology that the character is familiar with and how the character uses such knowledge.

## Different Areas of Mastery of the New Age Oracle

The character may become a specialist in three of the following areas (to be picked at first level). Also note that each option provides separate bonuses from the others.

### Tarot

Knowledge of the Tarot enables the character to recognize a Tarot deck as well as using a Tarot deck for reading a person's future. The character knows the major and minor arcana sets and is familiar with the history and lore of the Tarot. Note that it is a fairly exhaustive area of knowledge as there are many different interpretations on the Tarot and different names for the cards, the amount of cards, as well as different origins for different decks with different names for the main sets.

Divination through the Tarot results in a +10% roll to the Divination ability, defined below. The actual divination itself involves a deck of Tarot cards and turning them over one at a time to a final drawing of three cards. The interpretation of the Tarot is defined below.

Skills Gained: Card Sharp (+15%), Palming (+15%), Concealment (+10%).

## Astrology

Astrology has been around for eons and the stars even longer, so it is no surprise that divination is long associated with astrology. And elements of both the Chinese Zodiac and Western/Latin Zodiac are both attributed to personality, and with that personality knowledge a certain method of predictability can be ascertained. Unlike the skill presented in Mutants in Orbit though, there is magic attributed to this form of Astrology that makes it more precise, although with possible consequences.

For one thing, it is still unreliable; it is based on the movement of the stars and the arrangement of other celestial beings in the sky. However, prophetic dreams are definitely possible, and the character is keenly aware of the celestial movements. Thus the character will be rather date specific on the divination, keeping in mind that the further away from the birth date of the individual, the less reliable the result will be. Divination through Astrology results in a +15% bonus to the Divination ability defined below. The focus on Astrology also provides the character with a +2 bonus to M.E.

Skills Gained: Astrology (+20%) and Land Navigation (+5%). Note that the skill Astrology doesn't relate to the magical divination, but rather the history, theory, and knowledge that goes into Astrology itself.

## Numerology

For the Numerologist, the study of numbers involves many different possibilities. The date, time, and location (latitude and longitude) of birth along with elevation can be possible catalysts. Also, the timing of events and numeric logistical analysis will play a factor in all Numerology based divinations. Of course, Numerology makes one skilled in much more than just the study of numbers, it imparts an impressive memory regarding numbers in general that transcends magic and enables the character to remember an impressive array of numerical knowledge.

Divination through Numerology may seem like a bit of madness as the character babbles on, analyzing all kinds of numerical data relating to the character while in the trance before blurting out random comments and suggestions. It is quite chaotic although a successful Divination can be quite a shocking experience. Divination through Numerology adds +5% to the Divination ability defined below. The character also gains a bonus of +1 to I.Q.

## Special Abilities

**Head for Numbers:** The character has a near photographic memory when it comes to numerical data. Phone numbers, bank account numbers, addresses and other numerical information is remembered almost instantly and is retained for six months without study. The character can breeze through complex mathematical formulas and financial documents at a rate of 10 pages

per melee round and remember it at 95% instantly. As long as the character reads it once every six months it will always be remembered at the 95% proficiency. However, after six months it drops 5% to a minimum of 40% (always has a chance to remember it) but it must be related to numbers.

Skills Gained: Business and Finance (+10%) and Advanced Math (+20%).

## Crystal Balls

Pretty much the token toy for the New Age Oracle is the Crystal Ball. No other object has been more identified with divination and fortune-telling than the Crystal Ball. The character is experienced in the traditional swirling mists of the Crystal Ball and is genuine enough to tell a false fortune-teller from a real one. The character is familiar with the theory, history and knowledge of Crystal Balls, can build a real Crystal Ball and can also use other Crystal Balls with only a -5% roll to Divination when using another Crystal Ball. Also, the character can tell if a Crystal Ball is "energized" or not.

The actual divination from the Crystal Ball results in images and colors emanating from the ball that the New Age Oracle interprets based on what he feels the Crystal Ball is trying to tell him. Like all forms of Divination, it is not exact and should never be fully relied on, but does remain a fairly accurate method and adds +15% to the Divination ability below. Note that because of the reliance and history of Crystal Balls, the character gains a bonus of +2 to M.A. and +2D6 P.P.E.

Actually building a Crystal Ball is also part of this specialty. This includes the stand (traditionally wood but can be any substance depending on the character's skills), and the ball itself. It takes roughly 2D6 hours to build a proper Crystal Ball in its entirety. Quartz and Beryl are the two most common and readily available crystals that are used to sculpt the Crystal Ball itself and are "energized" with 20 P.P.E. during the final creation. The imbuing of P.P.E. into the creation process is what helps give the higher bonus to Divination since the New Age Oracle already has a portion of his or her psyche involved in the process.

Skills Gained: Performance (+10%), Art (+15%), Sculpting (+10%), Gemology (+10%). These skills revolve around the design and aesthetic appeal of Crystal Balls themselves as well as performing Divination with the Crystal Balls.

## Voodoo

Despite the obvious connection to zombies, Voodoo as presented here follows more of the established West African concept of communion with the spirits and the sanctity of the soul. Thus New Age Oracles do *not* get any sort of zombie creation rituals or control abilities. However, Voodoo is a powerful medium of connection and provides a number of abilities. Unfortunately, it is unlikely for a Caucasian or Asian character to learn the true power of Voodoo, as the secrets of the arts are jealously guarded hereditary secrets that are only taught to a select few, even within a traditional family link.

Although other Areas of Mastery support this, Divination through Voodoo is often in the form of a Seance; a large number of people that have a mutual mental link to each other through family or marriage. Divination through Voodoo gets a +10% bonus. Voodoo provides a bonus of +3D6 P.P.E. and +1 to M.E. and +1 to P.E.

## Special Abilities

**Spirit Guide:** The Voodoo-centric character has a Spirit Guide that gives him advice when it is asked for. The Spirit Guide is typically a dead relative; aunts, uncles, and grandparents are the most common. The advantage for the Voodoo Oracle is that the Spirit Guide will protect the character during Séances and Divinations with a +3 bonus to save against psychic attacks leveled against the character. Note that the Spirit Guide only appears during a Séance and the corresponding Divination. Likewise, other characters can not interact with the Spirit Guide and attacking the Spirit Guide is a moot point, since it is impervious to psionic attacks, mind control and possession. If the Spirit Guide does not show during a Séance, or if another spirit shows, it means great danger has befallen the Spirit Guide on the Astral Plane, although there is little that the New Age Oracle can do about it.

Skills Gained: Meditation.

## Rune Stones

Rune Stones are a unique area of specialty for the New Age Oracle. Traditionally, Rune Stones are of Scandinavian background, and display images of Norse gods. The character is familiar with the legends of Rune Stones and is also familiar with the runic alphabet but, of course, can not create Rune Weapons, but can get a general idea of what kind of stories are written in runic language. The character can create simple amulets or charms by energizing Rune Stones.

Divination is largely based on small stones that each has a single runic character on it, that are scattered on the ground, and how they fall are interpreted based on the direction of the stone and the character on the stone. Divination gains no special bonus through Rune Stones. The character gets a +1 bonus to M.E.

## Special Abilities

**Recognize Runic Magic:** Although the character can not create rune weapons, he or she can sense when runes are genuinely energized with magic and is familiar enough to recognize genuine rune weapons and objects. The character's sensing ability is limited to 20 feet (6 m) and recognizing rune weapons and objects is done at a skill level of 55% + 4% per level of experience.

**Create Energized Rune Stones:** The character can also create energized Rune Stones that provide some generic bonuses by carving the symbols onto the Rune Stones and energizing them with 15 P.P.E. The Rune Stones provide a +1 saving throw against magic, mind control, possession, psionics, or Horror Factor. Bonuses are not cumulative for multiple Rune Stones, and they cannot be used as a P.P.E. battery or store spells. The Rune Stones can be easily destroyed as they have an S.D.C. of 10+1D6 and A.R. of 8. The ability to create Energized Rune Stones is only available at 4<sup>th</sup> level.

Skills Gained: Literacy: Rune Symbols (+15%), Sculpting (+14%; 4<sup>th</sup> level).

## Teleology

Quite possibly the least "magical" of the sub-areas of mastery, Teleology believes that all things exist with meaning, that nothing is random and all things have a logical explanation. It's

a position that is puzzling for magic, because it equates more commonly to Science and the two are often seen in conflict with each other. Yet a New Age Oracle that focuses on Teleology will also believe that seemingly random events fit a larger goal and purpose and the character will try to fit all of the congruent events into a cohesive vision of the future.

Divination through Teleology may seem quite puzzling. The character will grill the person seeking the divination with many (may be over 100) questions that will help him ascertain a likely direction in the character's life. The result may be conflicting and contradictory but the Teleologist is a master of reading the results. Divination through Teleology gains no special bonus. The character enjoys a +1 bonus to I.Q.

Skills Gained: Psychology (+15%).

## Palmistry

The practiced art of predicting things while reading the lines in one's hand is the foundation of Palmistry. The art has been around for many centuries and can be surprisingly accurate. Likewise, the character will be very astute regarding the general health of people around him and will often have the skill and ability to assist others if needed.

Divination through Palmistry is done by reading the lines. The life line is the main line that distinguishes how long and prominent one's life will be. It's also generally used to identify what will happen in a person's life and what possible obstacles a person may have to overcome. The head line is used to properly identify the person's mental health and overall mental acumen, while the heart line is most often associated with physical health and vitality. These three are the primary factors used in Divination; other knowledge and associations are included but these are the cornerstones of this particular area of Mastery. Divination through Palmistry gains a +3% bonus because it has a legitimate, established history. There are no character bonuses.

Skills Gained: Biology (+5%).

## Augury

An interesting and often forgotten Area of Mastery, Augury has been around for many centuries. It involves analyzing the flight of birds, whether they travel in packs, what kind of sounds they emit, etc. It is most commonly believed to have originated with the ancient Romans, who often sought council based on the results of Augury. Today, however, it is a very obscure art and anyone that professes to have knowledge of it is likely called a charlatan or worse. Also, the character becomes a master at reading bird nature and physiology and comes to treat them with an incredible deal of respect.

Divination through Augury involves focusing on a particular issue (such as war, famine, etc. in a particular part of the world or the personal trials of a specific individual) and for the duration of the Divination doing nothing but watching the birds. The reaction of the birds is key to this aspect of Divination, and if there are no birds around it simply will *not* work. Not a chance. Because this is so obscure, there is no bonus to Divination through Augury. There are also no character bonuses.

Skills Gained: Biology (Birds only) +15%, Falconry (+5%).

## Ouija

Ironically, one of the most frowned upon methods of Divination is also one of the most popular. The Ouija board is one of the most iconic pieces of New Age Mythology because of its connection to popular movies and books, and remains a very visible display. The character will be able to sense a real Ouija board from a fake one, whether one is “energized” or not, and will have the skill to create his own Ouija board.

Divination through the Ouija board is the classic mantra from the movies and other pop culture. The New Age Oracle and the individual both touch the board, the New Age Oracle asks the individual questions starting with easy “yes or no” answers before going onto more introspective questions. The Divination doesn’t last long (the typical 2D6 minutes of all Divinations) but can be climactic and interesting. Despite the movie results, spirits are seldom involved that are malicious, as only those that want to contact make will do so and many often couldn’t be bothered. Divination through Ouija offers a +8% bonus to Divination. Ouija offers the character +1 to M.E. and +1 to P.S. and also +1D6 to P.P.E.

Building a Ouija board, despite what one might think, is not that easy. It involves a fair amount of craftsmanship and attention to detail, especially to build one that is aesthetically pleasing. It takes roughly 1D4 hours to build and to “energize” it takes 25 P.P.E.

**Skills Gained:** Art (+15%), Calligraphy (+10%) and Carpentry (+5%).

## Methods of Acquiring New Areas of Mastery

The character is unique in that he or she must actively search out new areas of mastery and that they require real game time to study and learn. Consequently, one does not gain new abilities per level, but by devoting two years to a specific study they then gain that ability at first level. Note that is two full years of at least four hours a day towards that study five days a week, with no great lull in that time. Thus, the level advancement can vary widely depending how devout the New Age Oracle is to mastering new disciplines.

## Other Magic Abilities of the New Age Oracle

Note that these abilities are applicable to all New Age Oracles regardless of the above different Areas of Mastery.

### Divination

**Range:** Self.

**Duration:** 2D6 minutes.

**P.P.E.:** 10

**Base Skill:** 44%+3% per level of experience.

All of the different areas of study for the New Age Oracle provide specific abilities but they have one unifying theme and that is divination. Similar to the ability in *Beyond the Supernatural™, First Edition*, the Divination has a unifying theme of requiring an item and a target to have any chance of success. Since the New Age Oracle has so many different areas of Divi-

nation expertise, it is not as simple as it may first appear for the New Age Oracle to select one particular medium. Often, he will have one preferred method and will use the others to build upon the original divination. This, however, can be extremely time consuming and exhausting and will entail the need of many different items. The benefit, of course, is a lot more accurate divination once each one is done and hopefully, not all of the P.P.E. of the character is exhausted.

It is up to the G.M. to determine what happens during the Divination (haunting visions of light and swirling mists and telepathic comments are typical). The answers should never be totally obvious, but the more successful the skill roll, the clearer the reply. (Such as, “Your mother left the world in anger. She has not forgotten the promise she made to you.”) However, a failed skill roll means that the answer is either wrong or extremely cryptic. (“Her spirit exists only in sorrow.”) It is important for G.M.s to realize that Divination does have some limitations. It can not be used to predict the future of the character himself, is never 100% accurate, and must be done via some sort of object. It also is not instantaneous, but is a very good tool for finding information, especially if the source of the Divination involves powerful magical or psionic forces.

### Séance

**Range:** Self.

**Duration:** 1D6 minutes.

**P.P.E.:** 12 (but gains the P.P.E. of the willing participants afterwards for the Divination).

This is the practiced ability of the character to perform a normally psychic ability but, in this instance, it is based entirely on magic. It requires at least four other people besides the New Age Oracle to empower the ability properly. What a Séance allows is for the New Age Oracle to use the willing P.P.E. of others around him and channel that into the Divination, giving the Divination a +20% boost and help offset the P.P.E. cost. On the flip side of that however, is that if even one person has reservations or resists the Séance then it is reduced by -5% per person so it is best used with trust.

### Astral Recognition

**Range:** Self (for Astral Location it’s 200 (60 m) feet plus 20 feet (6 m) per level of experience).

**Duration:** 2D6 hours.

**P.P.E.:** 10

This particular ability is useful to recognize both beings that are astrally invisible as well as beings and instruments that have recently been to the Astral Plane. The character is also cognitive of Astral Travel and Astral Portals that may be caused by movements to and from the Astral Plane. Note that this does not enable the character to actually enter the Astral Plane, nor communicate with anyone directly that is in an Astral state. It’s important to state that the character can not actually see anyone invisible, only sense their presence and prepare for when they are encountered.

### Sense Enchantment

**Range:** About 90 feet (27.4 m) maximum.

**Duration:** Automatic and constant awareness.

**Saving Throw:** None.

**P.P.E.:** None.

The New Age Oracle's knowledge and attunement to the supernatural is so complete that he can recognize magic in almost any form, on sight. This includes magic items, magic weapons, circles, other magic users, and people controlled or possessed by mystic forces. The exact purpose or power of the enchantment is usually not known, but that it is rooted in magic is easily identifiable. This is basically an uncomfortably prickly sensation or specific "feeling" or hunch the New Age Oracle gets when looking at a specific person, place, or item. Base level of perception and correct evaluation is 50%+2% per level of experience.

## Sense Magic

**Range:** 120 foot (36.6 m) diameter.

**Duration:** Automatic and constant awareness.

**Saving Throw:** None.

**P.P.E.:** 3

The New Age Oracle is so familiar with magical energy that he can sense or feel the presence of magic (i.e. an enchanted weapon or object, other powerful magic item, ley line nexus, Greater Demon, Demigod, god, or fellow wizard that is 8<sup>th</sup> level or greater, and similar). Like a geiger counter, the individual can tell if he is near (within 20 feet/6 m) or far (towards the limit of the range) from the source of the magic. The ability can also indicate whether a person, object or place is enchanted/under a magical spell, possesses vast P.P.E., is in the process of invoking magic, or if powerful magic is being used in the area. **Note:** Practitioners of Magic and most Supernatural Beings do not register as being magical except when actually casting a spell/using magic.

## Magic Combat and Bonuses

See the Magic and Spells section in HU2, page 319, for full details. Unlike most magic classes, however, the New Age Oracle does not cast spells per melee as all of the abilities relate to Divination and other non-spell related actions. However, the character does gain other bonuses that directly augment the effectiveness of his magical skills. These bonuses are in addition to any applicable attribute and skill bonuses.

At first level, the New Age Oracle is +2 to save vs all kinds of magic, +2 to save vs psionics, +2 to save vs possession, +2 to save vs Horror Factor (if it is used in the game), and others need a 16 or greater to resist his magic (Ritual Strength).

At fourth level, another +2 vs magic is gained.

Seventh level adds +2 to save vs possession.

Tenth level adds +2 vs possession and psionics.

Thirteenth level adds +2 to save vs magic and +1 to save vs possession.

**P.P.E.:** Like all magic users, the New Age Oracle is a living battery of P.P.E. The character starts with 1D4x10+16 P.P.E. attribute in P.P.E. As the character grows in experience, he or she gains 1D6 P.P.E. per level of experience. Note that this is less than the Mystic Study character but the New Age Oracle has a number of tools that the Mystic Study character simply cannot

acquire. Also it's possible that other Areas of Mastery for the New Age Oracle may provide additional P.P.E.

## Skill Knowledge

One of the unique aspects of the New Age Oracle is that each special branch of mystic knowledge also includes a certain amount of skill knowledge. Thus, the character possesses not only the Common/General Skills and the fundamental skills of the New Age Oracle but also additional skills based on the different Areas of Mastery. Note that in the case of duplicate skills and skill bonuses, only take the highest bonus; do *not* add the bonuses together.

### Common/General Skills

Read/Write/Speak Native Language

Basic Math

Pilot Automobile

Select 1D6+3 Secondary Skills

### New Age Oracle Skills

Public Speaking (+15%)

Principles of Magic (New!) (+20%)

Lore: Demons and Monsters (+10%)

Cryptography (+5%)

Also select one other skill program that includes all available except for the Criminal, Espionage, Medical Doctor, Military, Police/Law Enforcement, Professional Thief, and Robot programs.

## Other Stuff for the New Age Oracle

**Alignment:** The character can be of any alignment, however, most New Age Oracles are of good or unprincipled alignment. Evil New Age Oracles often find it hard to get information through cooperative efforts.

**Level of Education and Skill Selection:** This is detailed above. The character does not roll on the Random Education Level table like the Mystic Study character.

**Hand to Hand Combat:** Most New Age Oracles are weak in hand to hand combat. Thus if they want a hand to hand skill they must select it as a Secondary Skill choice. It is recommended that the character select at least Hand to Hand: Basic to avoid getting creamed instantly.

**Attacks per Melee (Hand to Hand):** The character starts with two attacks, with extra attacks coming from a Hand to Hand skill choice and/or possibly Boxing.

**Weapons and Armor:** Unless the character is extremely wealthy, only conventional weapons and body armor are available.

**Structural Damage Capacity (S.D.C.):** The character has a starting S.D.C. of 30. Additional S.D.C. comes through Physical skills such as Body Building.

**Available Financial Resources:** The character has a budget of \$2D4x1000 towards the purchase of starting equipment and resources. Any extra money left over can be spent on other equipment, weapons and vehicles. Any money not spent is wasted.

# Digital Sorcerer

*“What’s in the computer, you ask? Stuff that would blow your mind. Literally.”*

- *Famed computer hacker and Digital Sorcerer 1337\_h8r4shur to Amanda Bevington-Collins, host of the popular news show, TV Central Today on the BBNN (British Broadcast News Network).*

The Digital Sorcerer, unlike the Modern Mage, is more interested in achieving spells through technological devices than simply storing them as data files. For to the Digital Sorcerer, a laptop is his spell book, and his hands-free headset is the method that he chooses to channel the power into the world.

Studying to be a Digital Sorcerer involves the same rigorous training as all magic specialties require. It takes two years to build up the P.P.E. Battery as well as mastering some basic spells before the character even looks at a computer. Studying the intricacies of the psychic world, the character’s own strength of character and conviction as well as lots and lots of reading and research are involved in the path to becoming a Digital Sorcerer. After the fundamentals are known, the character spends the next two years learning about Digital Sorcery and the concepts and execution behind it.

Finding someone actually able to teach Digital Sorcery is not too difficult because it’s basically everywhere. However, the best teachers don’t advertise what they know. All of the big cities in the world (especially in the UK, the US, and Portugal) have well known Digital Sorcerers. These teachers rarely take on apprentices, as they are all skilled professionals without a lot of time on their hands. However, should they take a liking to someone, then they will start the process.

**Character Bonuses:** The character gets a bonus of +2 to I.Q. and +2 to P.E. as a result of the training.

## Digital Sorcery vs Modern Magic

Why study Modern Magic over Digital Sorcery? The answer is easy: it’s simpler for the Modern Mage to acquire spells than it is for the Digital Sorcerer. The Digital Sorcerer has limitations on the spells he can cast because it must be done electronically. The Modern Mage doesn’t have that limitation. However, the Digital Sorcerer, once he does have a working spell, can be incredibly powerful, simply because the spell can be energized into his computer and cast at a later time, creating a very potent “spell book” of sorts.

The Digital Sorcerer has impressive computer knowledge (and access to some of the material and technology of the Modern Mage) but the character is more interested in his focal point, and lacks a lot of investigative abilities that make the Modern Mage such an interesting class. However, the Digital Sorcerer can more easily create spells on his own, and that helps to deter the character from doing a lot of active searching for existing spells. Since the character creates his own spells as he levels up, he rarely spends time traveling to find lost tomes and libraries, and uses knowledge he finds on the Internet as “inspiration” for his own spells.

## Initial Spell Knowledge

The Digital Sorcerer has a few specialty spells that come from combining magic and technology. They include Transfuse Spell, Digital Encoding, Spell Lock, Decipher Magic, and one spell of choice from levels 1-3.

**P.P.E.:** Like all magic users, the Digital Sorcerer is a living battery of P.P.E. The character starts with  $1D6 \times 10 + 22$  P.P.E. attribute in P.P.E. As the character grows in experience, he or she gains  $1D6 + 1$  P.P.E. Note that this is less than the Mystic Study character but the Digital Sorcerer has a number of tools that the Mystic Study character simply cannot acquire.

## Methods of Acquiring New Spells

The Digital Sorcerer is the only magical proficiency that can take an already existing electronically-stored spell and use it as is. However, finding electronically-stored spells is difficult. The skill Internet Usage will aid the character in finding spells; however, the character will rely on contacts with the Master and his own focus and self research. The character is also likely to figure out new spells on his own as he engages the world through study and experimentation.

**Self Research:** Every second level of experience, the Digital Sorcerer will get a breakthrough in his mystic knowledge, and will spend the next  $1D6$  weeks working on the spell, fine tuning it through trial and error until it becomes a working spell. The spell is limited to the character’s level or below.

**Return to the Master:** The Master will occasionally benefit the Digital Sorcerer with a working spell, especially if the student and the Master enjoy a good relationship, and the Master sees growth and development in his apprentice. It will take the character  $3D4 + 8$  weeks to learn the new spell (and the spell will *never* be in digital copy; the Master believes that the student need not forget his original training) and is typically limited to levels 1-5.

## Other Magic Abilities of the Digital Sorcerer

### Spell Storage

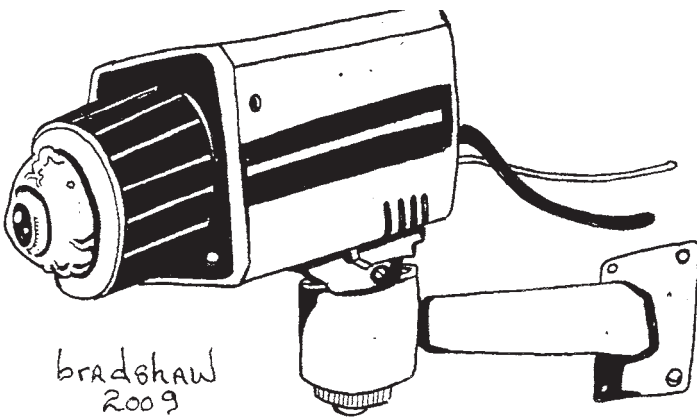
All of the character’s spell knowledge is in his head, like any wizardry class; however, he may choose to have a spell stored on his computer. A spell takes up a lot of room on a computer (300 megabytes per P.P.E. point of casting cost), but once stored, can be cast without using any P.P.E. Also, it only takes a single melee action to cast the spell. Spells may also be stored on CDs or DVDs, however; these discs are destroyed/unusable after the spell has been cast. Flash Drives, External Hard Drives and Optical Drives can be used  $1D6$  times before they are also destroyed. (P.P.E. is hard on technology, after all.) It’s only the character’s computer that doesn’t get destroyed because of its enchantment with the Digital Encoding spell.

### Computer-Based Casting

Rather than storing the spells on a computer, the character can choose to cast the spell directly through the computer. This functions as a standard invocation, except the character requires



his laptop computer and headset (as the spell must be spoken). Also, the character is limited to one spell per melee, but also has one extra action per melee (if no hand to hand skill is known, it may be a non-combat action). Note that this applies to a traditional spell casting, so the mage is within view of his target(s) while holding his laptop, and is technically “offline.”



### Casting Magic Through the Internet

One of the great dreams of many intrepid Digital Sorcerers is the thought that one can easily dispatch unwanted targets by emailing them a spell, such as Domination, Control, Agony, etc. and for the recipient to suffer the effects of the spell. However, it doesn't quite work that way. The reason is that spells are energized locally, and that localized energy can not be sent outside of the computer case. Thus, electronically stored spells are all inert and harmless until they are energized, and can only be used locally. However, to prevent someone from using the computer besides the spell caster, Wards, Seal, Mystic Alarm and similar spells are all very effective, because they are energized and cast locally from the computer itself.

### Sense Magic

**Range:** 120 foot (36.6 m) diameter.

**Duration:** Automatic and constant awareness.

**Saving Throw:** None.

**P.P.E.:** 5

The Digital Sorcerer is so familiar with magical energy that he can sense or feel the presence of magic (i.e. an enchanted weapon or object, other powerful magic item, ley line nexus, Greater Demon, Demigod, god, or fellow wizard that is 8<sup>th</sup> level or greater, and similar). Like a geiger counter, the individual can tell if he is near (within 20 feet/6 m) or far (towards the limit of the range) from the source of the magic. The ability can also indicate whether a person, object or place is enchanted/under a magical spell, possesses vast P.P.E., is in the process of invoking magic, or if powerful magic is being used in the area. **Note:** Practitioners of Magic and most Supernatural Beings do not register as being magical except when actually casting a spell/using magic.

## Magic Combat and Bonuses

See the Magic and Spells section in HU2, page 319, for full details. Basically the character can cast two attacks from spell levels 1-8 per melee round. Each spell counts as two melee attacks. Just as the Digital Sorcerer gains P.P.E. during his level

advancement, so too does he gain other bonuses that directly augment the effectiveness of his magical skills. These bonuses are in addition to any applicable attribute and skill bonuses.

At first level, the Digital Sorcerer is +2 to save vs all kinds of magic, +2 to save vs possession, +2 to save vs psionics, and others need a 12 or greater to resist his magic (Spell Strength).

At fourth level, another +1 vs magic is gained and Spell Strength increases +1 (characters need 13 or greater to save against his magic).

Seventh level adds +2 to Spell Strength (15 or higher to save vs his magic) and +1 to save vs possession.

Tenth level adds +1 to Spell Strength (16 or higher to save vs his magic) and another +1 vs possession and psionics.

Thirteenth level adds +2 to save vs magic and +1 to save vs possession.

## New Spells

### Transfuse Spell (2nd Level)

**Range:** Self.

**Duration:** 2D6 melee rounds; lasts until medium is destroyed.

**Saving Throw:** None.

**P.P.E.:** 10 plus the P.P.E. from the spell.

This spell is what the Digital Sorcerer casts when he wants to put a spell to a hard copy of digital media. It typically appears as if the Digital Sorcerer is scratching the surface with his bare hands in fast, incoherent movements, focusing the spell onto the medium. It's a fundamental spell for all Digital Sorcerers and is one of the first ones taught. Obviously, the character must already know the spell to be transfused and must have a usable medium.

### Digital Encoding (4th Level)

**Range:** Self.

**Duration:** 2D6 months, plus one month per level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** None.

**P.P.E.:** 30

This spell enchants the character's computer and allows for the transfer of the transfused medium to be copied into the computer for later casting. Note that once a spell has been encoded into the computer, the disc is destroyed, and if the computer is destroyed then the Digital Sorcerer will have to go through the entire process again. The Digital Encoding protects everything inside the case, so it's not just the hard drive, but the RAM, motherboard, fans, etc. that are magically enchanted. Thus the character can add in multiple hard drives and they will also be protected from the destroying process that normally occurs.

### Spell Lock (4th Level)

**Range:** Enchanted onto the object.

**Duration:** Two weeks per level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** Standard.

**P.P.E.:** 7

This is a useful spell to protect the computer if the character wishes for someone else to use the computer, but not to be able to access the spells. The spells are magically invisible during

searches on the machine. Should anyone attempt a Cryptography or Computer Hacking skill roll they must make a save vs magic. On a successful save they will be unaffected by the enchantment, but need to make another successful save to see the spells on the computer (but unless the character has a Principles of Magic or Lore: Magic skill they won't know what it means). On a failed initial save they are hit with an electric shock that does 1D6 damage with a sharp, burning feeling. The characters can continue to attempt as many times as they like, but each failed attempt results in getting stung again.

## Skill Knowledge

The Digital Sorcerer has some specialized training to gain his abilities. The following skill knowledge represents that training.

### Common/General Skills

Read/Write/Speak Native Language  
Basic Math  
Pilot Automobile  
Select 1D6+5 Secondary Skills

### Digital Sorcerer Program (Special)

Principles of Magic (New) (+20%)  
Cryptography (+15%)  
Language and Literacy: Two of choice (+15%).  
Lore: Two of choice (+10%).

### Computer Program (Special)

Computer Operation (+30%)  
Computer Programming (+30%)  
Computer Hacking (+30%)  
Internet Usage (New!) (+20%)  
Basic Electronics (+10%)  
Computer Repair (+10%)

Also select one skill program from HU2, pages 46-47, from this list: Business, Communications, Domestic, Language, Medical Assistant, Pilot: Advanced, Physical/Athletic, Science and Technical.

## Other Stuff for the Digital Sorcerer

**Alignment:** The character can be of any alignment, however most Digital Sorcerers are of good or Unprincipled alignment.

**Level of Education and Skill Selection:** This is detailed above. The character does not roll on the Random Education Level table like the Mystic Study character.

**Hand to Hand Combat:** Most Digital Sorcerers are weak in hand to hand combat. Thus if they want a hand to hand skill they must select it as a Secondary Skill choice. It is recommended that the character select at least Hand to Hand: Basic to avoid getting creamed instantly. Note that of the HU2 magic classes, Digital Sorcerers are likely the weakest in any form of combat.

**Attacks Per Melee (Hand to Hand):** The character starts with two attacks, with extra attacks coming from a Hand to Hand skill choice and/or possibly Boxing.

**Weapons and Armor:** Unless the character is extremely wealthy, only conventional weapons and body armor are available. The character is likely to have some sort of body armor while in the field.

**Structural Damage Capacity (S.D.C.):** The character has a starting S.D.C. of 30. Additional S.D.C. comes through Physical skills such as Body Building.

**Available Financial Resources:** The character has a budget of \$3D6x1000 towards the purchase of starting equipment and resources. Any extra money left over can be spent on other equipment, weapons and vehicles. Any money not spent is wasted. Note that the character is smart and well educated and will often have a fairly good job using his investigative and magical background. Note that he will use the budget to buy several computers and has access to all of the equipment listed in the Modern Mage section (although the character may choose to have a minimal amount of equipment and may buy other equipment as well).

## Real Time Caster

*“Three hours to perform a simple ritual? Who has the time?”*

- Reginald Smithson, *“Certified” Real Time Caster to Claudaias, Master of the Sky Fire Ritual.*

Whoever said that magic had to be long and boring studies obviously never met a Real Time Caster. In a world of instant gratification and no patience for waiting, it was only natural that someone would attempt to “mass market” spells that were quick to learn and easy to perform. Of course, as most of the readers would likely gather, the casting of spells that comes without proper instruction and training, and the years of studies to master even one spell with the belief required, is a recipe for disaster.

The Real Time Caster is the brainchild of an actual certified Wizard, a surprisingly intelligent and knowledgeable man by the name of Anton Grueswald. Anton was getting older and seeing fewer and fewer qualified students joining the Brotherhood of Magic and Mysticism. He decided that he would take some very simple spells and attempt to franchise out spellcasting, to make it popular so that those with genuine talent and ability could be convinced to take up the real arts of Mystic Study.

His spells, that he dubbed “Facile Magic,” involve nothing more than some slight hand movements (“Because the kids believe all mages do that”) as well as the required spell words. The spells are extremely simple, from the standpoint that they are easy to cast, don't require a lot of P.P.E. and don't really have much of an effect. However, some of the side effects of Real Time Casting can be pretty serious, and now Anton is starting to wonder if putting everyone's thoughts into a standardized spell casting concept was really as innocent a concept as he first envisioned.

**Character Bonuses:** None! Real Time Casting is designed to be easy and requires no commitment or training so the character gains absolutely no bonuses to any stats or abilities. There is not even a P.P.E. bonus.

## Initial Spell Knowledge

Note that these represent all of the spells that Anton developed for Real Time Casting. Real, professional magic users can also learn these spells in a matter of 1D4 minutes (10 minutes for an educated individual such as a Parapsychologist, Special Training, Hardware or Acolyte; 30 minutes for anyone else) and will find them useful, if not very powerful.

### Zap the Mosquito

**Range:** 6 feet (1.8 m).

**Duration:** Instant.

**Saving Throw:** None; always hits!

**P.P.E.:** 3

This is a weak electrical magical spell designed to inflict minimal damage (only does 1 S.D.C.) damage at minimal range but is meant to be a “fun” spell. It does one damage and can never be dodged and does count as an electrical attack magic spell.

### Light Wind

**Range:** 20 feet (6 m).

**Duration:** Instant.

**Saving Throw:** None.

**P.P.E.:** 2

This is a gentle breeze meant to cool people down. It doesn't do any damage and isn't particularly troublesome, it is simply there to cool people down on a hot day.

### Recover From Hangover

**Range:** Self.

**Duration:** Instant.

**Saving Throw:** None.

**P.P.E.:** 4

This is a popular spell! It immediately removes any feelings of nausea, headache, and/or weakness that comes from the over-consumption of alcohol. It doesn't matter how much the character had to consume, the character will be totally sober. However, if the character is hung over or drunk while casting this spell, then he or she is -2 on top of the normal save vs magical mishap of casting this spell.

### Quiet the Pet

**Range:** 12 feet (3.6 m).

**Duration:** 3 minutes in total. Does not advance with experience.

**Saving Throw:** None.

**P.P.E.:** 1

This spell simply makes a pet docile. Note that the spell has a few limitations on what the character can control. It must be an animal that the character has had exposure to for at least four weeks, and of course, can not be an attack animal, familiar, alien, or anything other than a vanilla domestic pet such as a dog, cat, hamster, small bird, etc.

### Fire Fire

**Range:** 3 inches (7 cm).

**Duration:** Half a melee round (7 seconds).

**Saving Throw:** Dodge at 16.

**P.P.E.:** 2

This spell doesn't do much more than light a cigarette instead of a match or lighter. The physical results are a flame shooting from the finger of the mage to the target. The flame is magically directed and seldom misses. It does a measly one point of damage and that is only to anything flammable.

### Omniboronusness

**Range:** Self.

**Duration:** One melee round (15 seconds).

**Saving Throw:** None.

**P.P.E.:** 1

This is a popular party spell. All it does is create a huge farting noise and corresponding smell for one melee round. It has no other effect; it's meant to be funny.

## Methods of Acquiring New Spells

None! Real Time Casters are not real wizards or masters of magic. Thus they are limited to the six spells above. They cannot perform other functions that Wizards and Sorcerers can do, such as Scroll Translation, Return to the Master and Localized Self-Teaching of spells. But with spells like Quiet the Pet and Fire Fire, what else do you really need?

## Side Effects of Real Time Casting

Because Real Time Casting involves no real understanding of magic, P.P.E. or the subtle nuances of casting magic, there are some very real side effects that can occur during Real Time Casting.

For one, each time the character casts a spell, he or she must make a save vs magical mishap. The target number is 18, with some possible modifiers. P.E. bonuses to save vs magic can be included as well as M.E. Bonuses to save vs insanity. This represents an individual's raw natural ability to control the powerful mystic forces that even these petty spells unleash. Immortals without mystic knowledge and ability get +4 to save and Natural Geniuses (talent) +2 to save. Supernatural creatures and creatures of magic like Dragons, Ki-Lin, Lizard Mages and similar beings will never have to worry about making a save vs magical mishap. Likewise, so will real wizards and spellcasters.

However, other creatures, including normal humans, won't have that luxury. On a failed save vs magical mishap, roll on the following table. All failed saves are cumulative and can result in some pretty severe penalties.

**01-05%:** Spell has no effect.

**06-10%:** Character suffers 2 points of damage from electrical burns from the inside.

**11-15%:** Character falls asleep for 1D4 hours.

**16-20%:** Character is paralyzed for 2D6 melees! All the character can do is breathe and rely on his senses.

**21-25%:** Spell has no effect.

**26-30%:** Character summons 1D4 Imps that are annoyed and tease the character mercilessly for 2D4 minutes before vanishing back to Dyval.

**31-35%:** A mirror breaks locally, and the character suffers several lacerations that do 2D6 damage. If there are no mirrors, there is no damage (however, any Mirror Mage will be aware that a spell was cast).

**36-40%:** Character's legs cramp up and he is unable to walk for 2D6x10 minutes.

**41-45%:** Character falls asleep for 1D6 hours.

**46-50%:** Character gets blasted by a fireball from above that does 3D6 damage!

**51-55%:** Spell has no effect.

**56-60%:** Portal to an alien swamp opens; the character must make a save vs toxic poison to avoid being overwhelmed; on a successful save the character takes 1D4 damage direct to Hit Points per minute; triple damage on a failed save. The portal stays open for 1D4 days and unless the room or area is sealed, the swamp gas will continue to spread.

**61-65%:** Character's face and hands are paralyzed for 3D4 minutes.

**66-70%:** Character summons 1D4 Entities (usually Banshees) into the area, and they don't leave unless no one is going to die immediately.

**71-75%:** Character loses his memory; -50% to all skills for 2D4 days and -2 M.E. permanently (remember kids, spellcasting without proper supervision is dangerous).

**76-80%:** Spell has no effect.

**81-85%:** Character summons a possessing force (either Entity, Wraith, etc.) that will immediately attempt to possess the spellcaster. The motives of the creature will never be pleasant.

**86-90%:** Character summons an acid rain that does 2D6 damage to all metal and plastic objects and 1D6 to organic matter. The rain lasts 1D4 melee rounds.

**91-95%:** Spell has no effect.

**96-00%:** Character vanishes only to reappear at a random location 1D6 feet straight up!

## Other Magic Abilities of the Real Time Caster

None! Real Time Casting does not involve any real magical knowledge or abilities. That is one of the biggest problems with it that while it teaches spell casting, the other underlying knowledge remains unknown to all but those willing to gain a greater understanding.

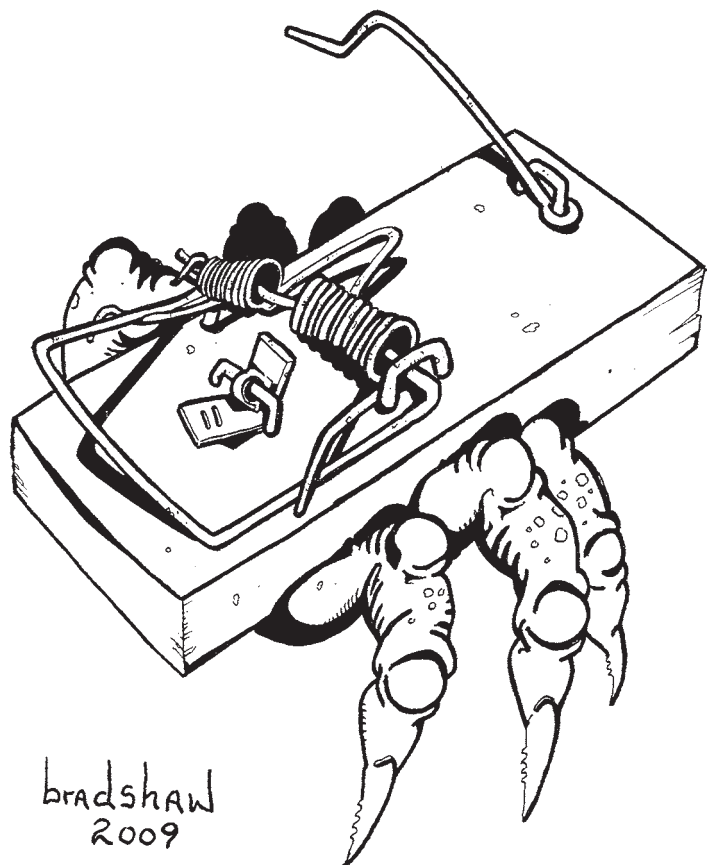
## Skill Knowledge

These spells do not require a significant investment in time or knowledge, consequently, the character does not gain any skill knowledge. But on the other hand, it is possible for other characters, including Hardware, Special Training, Mutants, etc. to learn Real Time Casting. Just don't forget about the side effects. In game terms, the character can drop one measly Secondary Skill to gain Real Time Casting as an ability.

# New Skills

**Internet Usage (Technical):** This skill enables the character to use the Internet, browse websites and perform limited HTML and BB coding. The character is familiar with Modems, TCP/IP, domain names, FTP, and other common knowledge associated with the Internet. Note that Computer Operation is *not* required for this skill, but this skill is no substitute for Computer Operation as a prerequisite for other skills. **Base Skill:** 40%+5% per level of experience.

**Principles of Magic (Paranormal or Exclusive to HU2 Magic Classes):** A full understanding of all the various types of magic, their histories, intentions, reasonings behind, purposes, methods, components, rituals and supernatural forces involved. This knowledge enables the character to recognize and understand the purpose of authentic magic symbols, circles, icons, tools, methods and magical paraphernalia, as well as other signs that indicate the use/practice of magic. The character will be able to deduce the probable purpose of the magic and which supernatural forces are likely to be involved. This deep understanding of magic will enable the character to prepare against forces at work, and stop them or use them himself. **Base Skill:** 60%+4% per level of experience. A failed roll means that the character does not realize the implication of the magic or has misinterpreted its meaning. Although the character's knowledge is extensive, the character is not infallible, and may have to consult his own vast libraries of archaic knowledge to uncover the true nature of specific magic or unnatural forces.





# The Hawaiian Supernatural

Optional Material for Many Palladium Settings

By Chris Perrin

## Introduction

*“The spirits are restless tonight. I spoke with the aumakua this evening and they tell me Pele, the volcano goddess, has become angered with a group of white men. They dishonor her traditions, they do not respect the land and they bring the food of the pig near her sacred domain. The pork reminds our goddess of her lost lover, Kamapua’ā.*

*“I do not think the visitors from the east are bad men, just ignorant, but ill will befall them all the same. When that happens, I will help them if I can. I have sent messages to the other Kahunas and I have said my chants. It is all I can do for now.*

*“I can sense something is amiss. The spirits who are known to me have said nothing, but I know something has happened. The spirits, who normally float from place to place, now move with angry determination. They go to where the white men have made their camp.*

*“For the ghosts of this land to be in such a panic, I worry something has happened to the white men! Another Kahuna may have bound a ghost to torment them. Perhaps one of the white men’s spirits, his Uhane, has chosen this of all times to escape its mortal shell and cannot find its way back. I fear Pele has already decided their fate. All I can do now is wait and hope to heal what damage I can.”*

## The Magics of Hawaii

Hawaii is best known for the spirit of *aloha*, sandy beaches, and surfing. It is a popular tourist destination for many in the United States and all over the world, but few realize that the islands are tormented by the restless spirits of countless warriors who fought over its soil, protected by gods who call her home, and maintained by an army of tireless faeries, called *menehuna*. Fewer still know of the power vortex (Rift) at Waimea Canyon Falls and the mana that is concentrated there.

The full mysteries of the islands and their various ghosts, spirits, faeries, and gods are known to only a few skilled practitioners of *huna*, Hawaiian sorcery. The term *huna* has largely become watered down in the Internet age. It has been applied to many mundane areas of study: psychology, self-improvement, and commerce, but there are still a few who remember what it once meant. These men and women can bind the little gods, the *aumakua*, to human bone, walk on fresh lava, heal injuries, steal a victim’s life force, or even return the spark of life back to the dead. Forget surfing, these men and women are the true big Kahunas.

A great deal of *huna*’s power emanates from the spirit world that exists side by side with what the uninitiated think of as real-

ity. To understand this power, one must understand the spirit world.

## The Spiritual Realm of Hawaii

Hawaiians are deeply spiritual and believe that the body is composed of three parts: the body (*kino*) and two spirits (the free *Uhane* and the body-bound *Uhane*.) The free *Uhane* can slip out of the body and travel around the islands, conversing with other spirit denizens of the islands. Of course, there are many perils to such adventuring, the most common of which is the *Uhane* getting lost and not being able to find its way back to its body. Should this happen, the poor spirit is forever dispossessed and is forced to live by itself, feeding on only butterflies for the rest of eternity.

However, the Hawaiian spirit world offers many enticements for such journeys. The most common of which is that once unbound from the body, a free *Uhane* is able to directly commune with *aumakua* (sometimes called little gods or ancestor gods) who are family ancestors who protect the living and offer advice and warnings of events yet to come. *Aumakua* are far more powerful than normal ghosts or *Uhane* because of special deeds, be they martial or in the spirit of *aloha* (kindness, unity, agreeability, humility, and patience) and *ohana* (family), they performed during their mortal lifetimes. These deeds allowed them to become minor deities with expanded knowledge and powers, including the ability to morph into animal shapes, enter dreams, and directly interact with those who seek them.

In addition to *aumakua*, the lands of Hawaii are filled with other spirits and ghosts who roam the land. Some of these spirits’ origins are not certain, though it is clear that they are not *aumakua* and they are not lost *Uhane*. Instead, they are usually peaceful, though often mischievous entities, and will usually be friendly towards those who can communicate with them.

Ghosts are another matter entirely. Ghosts are the *Uhane* of living beings who could not find a *leina*, a jumping off point from this world to the afterlife. If the *Uhane* belonged to a good aligned (Principled or Scrupulous) person, then the ghost is usually friendly, though disoriented, alone, and may be confused as to why the gods would not allow her to enter into the afterlife. If the *Uhane* belonged to an evil person (Aberrant, Miscreant, or Diabolical), the ghost will also be evil and will try to mislead any *Uhane* it encounters and prevent it from finding a portal to the next world.

Kahunas, through their study of *huna*, are aware of *aumakua*, *Uhane*, and ghosts alike. They can see spirits float amongst the trees and they can commune with any *aumakua*, even if that particular little god was not one of the Kahuna’s direct ancestors. They know when spirits are near and have rituals for binding them in gourds or other containers. Some Kahunas, called *ana’ana* Kahunas, have even learned to force spirits to steal the life energies from their enemies!

## Hawaiian Lore and Your Game

The pantheon and the mysteries of *huna* magic are great additions to a number of games. Kahunas and the spirits of Hawaii can be either powerful allies or staunch foes in a game of *Beyond the Supernatural*<sup>TM</sup>. A particularly nefarious villain in a *Heroes Unlimited*<sup>TM</sup> game might have enslaved malevolent spir-

its to do his bidding or a hero might choose to study huna as her power. In a *Rifts*™ game, it is possible a few of the Hawaiian gods might have preserved the lands they called home and may even now be marshaling their forces for an expedition to conquer the mainland.

No matter what the case, the spiritual world of Hawaii is a tool for player and G.M. alike. More than likely, the party will encounter the spirits of Hawaii either when a player decides to play as the Kahuna O.C.C., when either the G.M. or player chooses to let an *Uhane* free from the body, or when the G.M. decides to use a Kahuna or spirit as an NPC.

The rules for creating and playing a Kahuna are listed below. It should be stressed that while the rules and examples focus on the Hawaiian Islands, they are applicable anywhere in the world, especially those areas that are high in P.P.E.

## Running a Game with an Escaping *Uhane*

Should the free *Uhane* (*po'i uhane*) grow restless or should the player characters be in dire straits and need supernatural assistance, the free *Uhane* can sneak out of one or more player characters' eyes (in an area near the tear ducts) and begin to wander the countryside. The G.M. may decide any time the character falls asleep that the free *Uhane* has decided to leave. Instead, if the player wants her character's spirit to roam, the player should make a skill roll based on any occult skill the character possesses at -15%. If the character does not possess knowledge of the occult, the player may still make a roll as if her character had a skill level of 15%. Of course, the G.M. may just allow the character's spirit to leave.

Once the *Uhane* is free, it manifests itself as an ethereal form that resembles its physical body. The spirit keeps all of its mental stats (I.Q., M.A., M.E.) but replaces all of its physical stats with its M.E. Therefore, those already attuned to magic, and particularly psionics, will fare better than those not. In spirit form, all psionics skills can be used as normal and spells may be cast at double the P.P.E. cost. Those without magic or psionics will need to rely on their wits!

The good news for non-natives to the land of Hawaii who do not know the lay of the land, nor understand the powers of their own *Uhane*, is that most spirit denizens of the Hawaii still live by the rules of *aloha*. Unless a psychic baddie or demon from outside of Hawaii happens to be passing through, the greatest danger to wandering *Uhane* is getting lost and not being able to find its body. Rules for measuring the connection between a wandering *Uhane* and its body are noted below.

Floating around as an *Uhane* offers several distinct advantages to the character. First, the character can wander about, which can be useful in reconnaissance and for getting more familiar with the area. Once the character's spirit has returned to its body, that character can recall all details of every place the spirit traveled. The memories will have a glassy quality to them, like looking at a faded photograph, but will otherwise be intact.

In *Uhane* form, the character is undetectable without special equipment or training. For instance, an *Uhane* gives off no heat but is detectable by thermal scanning. However, there is only a 3% + 1% level that any non-magical or psionic character would

ever recognize which *kino* an *Uhane* belongs to or recognize the same *Uhane* twice. Magical and psionic characters have a 25% + 3% chance of sensing an *Uhane* and knowing from which body the spirit rose. Kahunas, as a class ability, can see all *Uhane* and know exactly whose spirit they are looking at and, as such, make excellent watch keepers in spirit filled areas.

Because of the difficulty of recognizing a spirit, Hawaii offers great anonymity in numbers. There are so many spirits roaming the land, it is virtually impossible to tell one from another. This makes free *Uhane* very useful tools for espionage as they possess normal hearing, sight, and smell and can eavesdrop on conversations and gather useful intelligence. Such information would be inadmissible in court, but could serve as justification for more direct action...

## Talking with *Aumakua*

The other benefit of leaving one's body is the ability to directly commune with *aumakua*. Normally, *Aumakua*, ancestors that have been deified, can visit their family members disguised as an animal. When the *aumakua* visits, it is said that the entire family will recognize their ancestor in animal form and will know that they are being shown portents of things to come. *Aumakua* can also visit their family members in dreams and offer wisdom and foreshadow the future. The G.M. should always feel free to use *aumakua* in this way; however this type of communication only happens when the *aumakua* feels it necessary to initiate it and is always done through nature or dream symbolism.

For instance, an owl lands on a tree by the family dwelling. Instantly, the family members recognize this as one of their revered ancestors and stop what they are doing. The owl screeches, shakes the branch it has landed on, and then flies off. This gesture may mean many different things and it is up to the family to determine how best to address the owl's advice and to determine if it is, in fact, a warning of ill tidings to come.

Dream conversations may also be filled with images and symbols, but in a dream the *aumakua* are far more likely to speak in verse or give riddles rather than images. When an *aumakua* chooses to communicate this way, the dreamer wakes with a complete memory of the dream and a strong inclination of what the dream means, though it is still wise to discuss such dreams with family members or the local Kahuna. As a further limitation, while the *aumakua* is doubtless aware of the issues troubling the character, the little god will only discuss what it wants to talk about. This can lead to larger problems when the character wants guidance on personal issues, but the *aumakua* is delivering warnings about global crises on the horizon.

But if the player character is willing to send its *Uhane* on a journey, the *aumakua* can be talked with directly. No symbols, no dreams, just one-on-one sharing of the *aumakua's* wisdom. The *aumakua* may still be a bit vague, but they are far more likely to speak plainly and offer advice on anything that the character may ask. That is not to say that the *aumakua* has limitless hours to spend talking and the characters should be respectful and limit the conversation to only the most pressing issues.

Also, *aumakuas* are not the eldest gods, they are deified ancestors and are neither omnipotent nor omniscient, and can only divulge information that they could reasonably know or find out

from other *aumakua*. Still, an *aumakua* is going to know about events on the island, both in the world of the living and in the spirit world. The little god will know all the skills it had when it was alive and may know how to fashion canoes, prepare foods, or craft S.D.C. swords, bows, and spears. In addition, *Aumakua* who were former Kahunas will have retained their knowledge of ancient huna rights, as well. On the other hand, the *aumakua* is not going to have the plans for an M.D.C. tank killer, a nuclear reactor, or even a water purifier.

## Dangers of the Spirit Journey

There are two dangers to traveling as a free *Uhane*: getting lost and bad spirits. The connection that *Uhane* have with their *kino* is measured by the Inner Strength Points (I.S.P.) of the character whose body it just left. The *Uhane* share the same pool of I.S.P.

As long as the character has positive I.S.P., it knows where its body is and may return by traveling back to it and re-entering through its feet. Once the *Uhane*'s I.S.P. points drop to zero, the *Uhane* has lost its way and it slowly begins to forget who and what it was as a living person. The *Uhane* will no longer be able to enter its body without help from a Kahuna.

While in spirit form, I.S.P. are lost at a rate of 1 point every 15 minutes of game time the *Uhane* is away from the body. This means that even psychically inactive characters will still maintain their connection for a short while after their *Uhane* have left their *kinos*.

I.S.P. are also lost when a spirit comes in contact with other ghosts and *Uhane*. If the character's spirit converses with or is contacted by another spiritual entity with a Good alignment, it loses 1 I.S.P. If the other spiritual entity is of a Neutral or Evil alignment, the character loses 1D6 I.S.P. This should not be considered an attack, nor is it damage; it is merely a representation of the *Uhane* losing its connection to its body through contact with other supernatural entities. Actual spirit *damage* is discussed below. Once the character's I.S.P. drops to zero in this manner, it cannot go negative.

Kahuna *Uhane* do not lose I.S.P. from contact with other spiritual entities (though they will lose 1 I.S.P. per fifteen minutes). At the G.M.'s discretion, other O.C.C.s with superior knowledge of the occult may also avoid losing I.S.P. from contact with spiritual entities or may possibly gain a saving throw vs psionics to avoid it.

Another danger of spiritual travel is movement of the host body. If the *kino* is moved more than fifty feet (15.2 m) from its original location and cannot be seen (for instance if the body was moved into a tent or over the horizon), the spirit's I.S.P. goes to 0 automatically and the *Uhane* is lost.

To make matters worse, some bad spirits may actively work to harm the wandering *Uhane*. Typical evil spirits do 1D8 I.S.P. damage (this replaces the 1D6 I.S.P. loss from above). Supernatural creatures such as demons, psionic entities, or magicians that can do spiritual or mental damage may also attack wandering spirits with their powers. These attacks lower I.S.P. in addition to any other effects. A Kahuna may also unleash a 1D8 attack against a spirit if he or she feels threatened or provoked.

If the character's I.S.P. drops below 0 due to damage (not loss due to contact with other spirits), any I.S.P. damage is dealt

directly to the *kino*'s H.P. Even though the link between *kino* and spirit has been severely damaged, the two are still linked!

The good news is that there are not many aggressively evil spirits in Hawaii, still there is one group that is a danger to both *Uhane* and *kino* alike. They are called Night Marchers (*huaka'I po*) and are the souls of warriors who fell fighting over the islands of Hawaii. They only appear at night and usually only in places where large battles were fought. When they do appear, they march in formation across the islands, carrying ghostly torches and beating war drums. When characters encounter these dead warrior ghosts, the best thing to do is lie still on the ground, face down, like a corpse. If the Night Marchers make direct eye contact with a living person, that person must make a saving throw vs psionics or be instantly turned into one of the spectral marchers. A wandering *Uhane* that comes within 100 feet (30.5 m) of a Night Marcher immediately loses all I.S.P. and must make a psionics saving throw or become a Night Marcher forever.

## Life After Death

There is another time when an *Uhane* might roam free: when it is a ghost. After the body has died, the *Uhane* escapes through the eyes and goes in search of a leina where the soul can escape from this world to the next. Leina, such as Pu'u Keka'a in Maui, are always tall cliffs that lead into the ocean. When the *Uhane* is ready to pass to the next world, it jumps from the cliffs and falls into the afterlife.

Not every *Uhane* finds a leina. Some, especially those who did not atone for their transgressions before they died, are unable to find their way and are stuck in this world to float without purpose, home, or food. Some of these *Uhane* may ask for assistance from the player characters.

Also, not everyone is ready to die. If a Kahuna can capture the deceased's spirit in a vessel or gourd, it can be returned to the body like any wayward *Uhane*. However, this requires the Kahuna to find the spirit, trap it, and return it. This may be difficult if the Kahuna was not present at the time of death. Instead, a better way of preserving the deceased is to prepare one of the body's bones and binding its spirit to the world, thereby creating an *aumakua*. Doing this requires that the Kahuna prepare the body before the spirit has had time to reach the leina.

## *Uhane* and Kahunas as NPCs

The last way *Uhane* and Kahunas can enter a game is as NPCs. Should the G.M. choose to include an *Uhane* as an NPC, she can base the spirit off of the generic *Uhane* noted below and modify it as she sees fit.

Every NPC *Uhane* is a minor telekinetic (they have the powers Telekinetic Lift and Telekinetic Punch) and limited Telepathy (player character *Uhane* do not receive the benefits). This gives them the ability to move small objects, make floorboards creak, and do typical actions associated with "ghosts." They can also communicate with the living using telepathy.

An NPC *Uhane* is not going to be of much value in combat except as a distraction or a thrower of small rocks and branches, which would only harm S.D.C. targets. The real value of an *Uhane* in the game is to get an adventure started or to serve as a spirit guide for the characters. The spirit may be in danger or



may need help finding its *kino* again. Should the spirit need help reentering its body, the party will need to secure the services of a Kahuna who may require a hefty payment or ask for a service to be performed.

In games that deal with the supernatural, an ally NPC Kahuna can be priceless as they are able to commune with spirits, see their true form, and have limited forms of dominion over them. If no one in the party chooses to play a Kahuna character, but know they will have to deal with spirits, having a relationship with the local practitioner of huna magic is a must.

The benefits of having an ally Kahuna goes beyond just being in touch with the spirits of Hawaii. The Kahuna is also part nature shaman and has limited powers to control nature. This power manifests itself as the ability to control weather, foretell the future, and walk on fresh lava.

No matter why the party chooses to befriend an NPC Kahuna, the G.M. and players should keep in mind that the Kahuna is a master of her arts and has studied long and hard to achieve her position. In other words, the Kahuna is not sitting in her home waiting for the party to arrive, instead she is placing spirit wards, healing the injured, and calming stormy seas. The Kahuna is an honored person in her village and if the player characters need her assistance, they should be prepared to treat her with respect and compensate her for her services.

Rather than being friendly, *Uhane* and Kahuna may enter a game as antagonist NPCs. While truly evil Kahunas are not common on the islands, there are evil spirits and Kahunas who would use their powers for less than honorable ends.

To start an adventure, a nefarious *Uhane* or ghost might approach the party in the same way a kind spirit would. The miscreant specter might ask the party for help locating its body, finding a leina, or righting some wrong. This plea for help will be a trap and will lead to mortal danger, all to the amusement of the evil spirit. Particularly evil *Uhane* might offer to be a spirit guide for the party and lead them directly into their enemy's hands.

Evil Kahunas can conflict with the party for any of the reasons typical villains might or for some causes that are specific to the islands. Some of the more common reasons include:

1. Greed.
2. The Kahuna is a sociopath.
3. The Kahuna feels the player characters will disrupt the natural ecology of Hawaii.
4. The player characters have insulted the gods or are about to do so.
5. The player characters are attempting to take relics or stones off the islands.
6. The player characters oppose the Kahuna's personal agenda.

One thing is for sure, if the players cross a Kahuna, they should be prepared to deal with poor weather, a lack of food, and a large number of angry spirits whose aid the Kahuna may have solicited. Furthermore, the *Uhane* and ghosts that side with an opposing Kahuna may continue to fight even if the Kahuna is killed. In some cases, if the Kahuna was particularly in tune with nature, the party might find that the entire island is now their enemy.

More importantly, the wrongful murder of a Kahuna by any player character is likely to earn the wrath of other Kahunas, the island, and spirits who may follow the players wherever they journey (including back to the mainland) in order to wreak vengeance on the killer(s). It would not be beyond some of the gods of Hawaii to send the ghosts or even *aumakua* to chase after a fleeing party if they have done grievous harm.

And remember, just because this is Hawaiian mythology does not mean that the spirit world ends on the islands. All humans have *kino* and *Uhane*. A spirit is just as likely to sneak out of its body in the middle of Kansas as the middle of Hawaii! Of course, trained Kahunas are far less plentiful in the Midwest...

## The Kahuna O.C.C.

This is an optional character class that lets players experience mastery of huna magic.

In Hawaiian, the word Kahuna means many different things, some of them magical, some not. Whether the word refers to a practitioner of sorcery or a master craftsman, the term Kahuna signifies both expertise and special status amongst the Hawaiian people. While it would have been possible to create separate Kahuna O.C.C.s for each of the forty or more types of Kahuna, this text focuses only on those Kahunas that can interact with and guide the spirit and natural worlds. While the Kahuna would never claim to be their master, the huna oral traditions passed down to her by her predecessors allow her to gain great insight from the ancestors, entreaty other spirits to act on her behalf, and sometimes control the land, sea, and sky.

### Kahuna O.C.C. Powers

**1. Commune with the Spirits:** The Kahuna can see all spirits as they roam the land of Hawaii and can communicate with them, though this communication is not a dialogue unless the spirit uses its telepathy. Instead, it is more of an intuitive understanding of who the spirit is/was while in its *kino*, what the spirit is looking for, and the general disposition of the spirit (happy, sad, scared, as well as how many I.S.P.). If the *Uhane* is in the mood to talk, the Kahuna may ask the spirit questions and learn of events happening on the island. Should the Kahuna feel threatened, it may unleash an attack which drains 1D8 I.S.P. on any spirit, ghost, or psychic creature at the cost of 2 I.S.P.

**2. Communicate with Animals:** Animals have *Uhane*, just as humans do. Because of this, the Kahuna can ask animals for advice, information, and to perform simple tasks (fetch, go look, attack). If the animal agrees to do the Kahuna's bidding, it becomes an NPC until the task is complete. Use basic stats for each animal.

**3. Travel as *Uhane*:** Kahunas do not need to make a roll or ask G.M. approval to travel as a free *Uhane*. They simply go to sleep and their spirit leaves. While traveling as a spirit, the Kahuna does not lose I.S.P. due to contact with other spirits, though she will still lose 1 I.S.P. every 15 minutes as normal. Also, while in spirit form, the Kahuna can still use their spirit attack against other spirits if (and only if) provoked or endangered.

**4. Reconnect *Uhane* and *Kino*:** If an *Uhane* is lost, the Kahuna can perform a ritual which will reconnect it to its *kino*.

She will cover the entire body, except for the feet, with *ti* leaves and begin chanting with the help of a number of assistants. Each minute of chanting restores 1 I.S.P. to the *Uhane* for each person chanting (including the Kahuna herself). This only works if the body is near the physical location it was when the spirit left.

**5. Huna Magic:** Through her connections with the spirit world and the spirits that live in the land and the sea, the Kahuna has an amazing range of powers available to her. At first level, players may select up to two huna powers for her character. Additional powers are selected at levels 3, 7, 11, and 15.

## Land Powers

**1. Control Weather:** Once per day, the Kahuna may alter the weather patterns for an area fifty miles (80 km) in diameter around where she is standing. She may clear the clouds from the sky, she may call for a light rain or hail or lightning. The Kahuna may use this power one additional time per day at levels 5, 9, and 13. Destructive weather patterns such as hurricanes and tornadoes and tsunamis may also be called at the cost of 20 I.S.P., but the Kahuna cannot use the Control Weather power for the next seven days of game time.

**2. Walk on Lava:** The Kahuna may walk on lava or any fiery surface for 10 minutes per level and take no harm. Note: this power only protects the Kahuna's feet, not her shoes, socks, or pants.

**3. Call Kamapua'a Bounty:** Kamapua'a, Pele's husband, is said by some to watch the oceans while his wife dwells in the great volcanoes. Once per day, the Kahuna may ask Kamapua'a to deliver a great quantity of fish (1D10x10 pounds of fish *per net*) to any fishermen's nets within 10 miles (16 km) of the Kahuna. As an added bonus, the nets magically do not break under the weight of the catch!

This ability also repels any oceanic predators and any evil sea creatures so that only healthy, edible fish are caught. The Kahuna may summon Kamapua'a's bounty one additional time per day at levels 3, 6, 9, 12, and 15.

## Spirit Powers

**1. Bind Spirits:** The Kahuna may use her spirit knowledge to capture a wandering *Uhane* into a containing vessel, usually a hollowed out gourd, and trap it there by capping the container. There are a number of perfectly legitimate uses for this power, including capturing an *Uhane* that has lost its way, trapping a malevolent spirit and preventing it from doing harm, or transporting the spirit to a leina so that it can go to the next world. Less honorable uses for capturing an *Uhane* include forcing it to steal a victim's life energy or for imprisoning the *Uhane* as punishment or torture.

To capture a spirit, it must be within reach of the Kahuna. The Kahuna can either bait the gourd with a bit of food, in which case the *Uhane* may just float into the gourd (50% or the Kahuna's P.B. charm/impress percentage) or the Kahuna must make a successful unarmed combat attack to snare the spirit. If the gourd cracks or is opened, the *Uhane* may choose to leave.

Kahuna may also bind the spirit of a recently deceased person to one of its body's bones. To do this, the Kahuna must be able to reach the body within 1D10 hours of death and strip all

flesh from one bone, usually the leg bone. The Kahuna then wraps the bone in *ti* leaves and performs a ritualistic chant. The deceased's spirit is then bound to the mortal realm and will forever be housed in its bone. However, the spirit is automatically transformed into an *aumakua* and can be called upon for advice and aid.

This power is a prerequisite for learning ana'ana.

**2. Ana'ana:** Some Kahunas choose to practice a darker magic and will bind even good *Uhane* and ghosts to their will. To do this, they must first entrap a wandering spirit in a vessel, typically a gourd but could be a jar or bowl with a tight lid.

If the spirit does not wish to inflict harm, the Kahuna must then subvert the spirit by chanting. This ritual can take place over a number of days, during which the Kahuna spends 50 P.P.E. (which can be broken up over the course of the ritual). At the end of the ritual, the *Uhane* must make a Magic Saving Throw at -3. If it fails, it must now go do exactly what it is told, including haunting the victim and slowly stealing its life. This drain removes 1D6 Hit Points per day and does 1D6 points of damage directly to the victim's P.E. This damage cannot be cured by normal means, only with healing magic. Spirit wards do not protect the victim from this type of curse.

If the spirit does not mind inflicting harm, the cost is 5 P.P.E. and the ritual lasts only 1D6 minutes!

The ana'ana Kahuna may call the spirit back and have them stop tormenting the victim. If this happens, the victim's P.E. is restored at the rate of 1 per day and Hit Points are recovered at the rate of 1D4 per day.

If the ana'ana Kahuna prefers a less deadly form of cursing, the spirit may just torment the victim, preventing him from sleeping and constantly annoying him. All rolls to strike, dodge, parry, and roll are -1 and all skills are at -10%. The torment may continue a number of days equal to the Kahuna's level.

Any spirits serving an ana'ana Kahuna are not seen as normal by a Kahuna. The Kahuna must first realize something is amiss and make a roll at 40% + 6% per level to detect the bound spirit.

(Note: When creating an NPC Kahuna, keep in mind that not every ana'ana Kahuna is evil nor is every Kahuna that might oppose the party an ana'ana Kahuna. Still, most of the Kahunas who practice ana'ana are regarded with some caution and a healthy dose of respect.)

**3. Tell the Future:** Once per day, the Kahuna may talk to spirits about the future. When this happens, the G.M. must reveal a scene or an image and roll 1D20. The Kahuna player notes the result and may substitute that roll *once* for any D20 roll made in combat for the rest of the game session. The Kahuna can do this one additional time per day at levels 5, 10 and 15.

**4. Healing/Reverse ana'ana:** By expending 5 P.P.E., a Kahuna may heal 1D6 points of non-magical damage or 1 point of magical damage. If the Kahuna heals any magical damage, it becomes curable by non-magical means (bed rest, doctors, the Kahuna's healing arts). This type of healing may mend broken bones and internal bleeding as well.

Also, if the Kahuna notices a spirit is tormenting another person, she can work to restore the person immediately by sensing who is commanding the spirit and forcing them to stop. To do this, the healing Kahuna spends 5 I.S.P. and forces the ana'ana

to make a Psionics Saving Throw. If the ana'ana fails, the spirit is unbound and the victim has all her power restored instantly.

If the ana'ana succeeds, she may spend 5 I.S.P. to force the healing Kahuna to make a saving throw vs psionics. If that fails, the Kahuna takes 3D6 points of Hit Point damage and immediately loses consciousness for 1D6 hours.

**5. Thought Implantation:** Kahunas can also implant thoughts. This is an ritualistic way to allow their minds to use the Super Psionic power Hypnotic Suggestion. The ritual costs the same amount of I.S.P.

**6. Spirit Ward:** By expending 10 P.P.E., the Kahuna may place a ward on a structure at its main entrance. This keeps any spirits, good or bad, from entering (including wandering *Uhane* trying to return to their *kino*). The ward must be placed on a building less than thirty feet (9.1 m) on a side and less than three stories tall.

The Kahuna's understanding of the spirits is so great that no ghostly or demonic being may enter into a warded building. However, this does not prevent them from harming the building with physical or demonic attacks.

**7. I.S.P. and P.P.E.:** The Kahuna is a little bit psionic and a little bit magical, but a master of neither. She starts out with 1D10 I.S.P. and gains 5 per level. She also starts out with 1D4x10 P.P.E. and gains 5 per level.

**8. O.C.C. Related Bonuses:** Because of her studies into the spirit world, the Kahuna gains +1 to all Saving Throws against Magic and Psionics. She is also +5 to save vs Horror Factor when confronted with ghostly or supernatural beings.

## Mystic O.C.C. Stats

**Alignment:** Any.

**Attribute Requirements:** I.Q. 8, M.E. 12. A high M.A. and a higher I.Q. are strongly recommended.

### O.C.C. Skills:

Lore: Faeries & Creatures of Magic (+20%)

Lore: Magic (+20%)

Lore: Demons & Monsters (+5%)

Literacy: Native Language (+30%)

Mythology (Hawaiian ONLY) (+20%)

First Aid (+10%)

Sing (+10%)

Dance (+20%)

Swimming (+15%)

Pick one: Boat Building, Carpentry, Track & Trap Animals (+10%).

Land Navigation (+10%)

Identify Plants & Fruit (+10%)

Wilderness Survival (+10%)

W.P. Spear

W.P. Knife

**O.C.C. Related Skills:** At first level, the Kahuna can select five skills from the list below, plus additional skills at levels 4, 8 and 12.

Communication: Any not dealing with technology (e.g. no Radio skills).

Cowboy: Any.

Domestic: Any (+5%).

Electrical: None.

Espionage: Any.

Horsemanship: Horsemanship: General only.

Mechanical: Basic Mechanics only.

Medical: Animal Husbandry, Medical Doctor, Veterinary Sciences, and Psychology only (+5%).

Military: Camouflage only.

Physical: Any.

Piloting: Pilot: Car and Pilot: Motorcycle only.

Pilot Related: None.

Rogue: Concealment, Imitate Voices & Sounds, Prowl, Palming, Seduction, and Streetwise only.

Science: Any.

Technical: Any not dealing with technology (e.g. no Computer Operation or Programming, Cybernetics, or Jury-Rig).

W.P.: Any Ancient, Handguns, Rifles, Shotguns (if *Rifles*®, Energy Pistol may also be selected).

Wilderness: Any.

**Secondary Skills:** Select four skills from the Secondary Skills List. The Kahuna gains additional skills at levels 3, 6, 9, 12 and 15. These are additional areas of knowledge that do not get any bonuses, other than any possible bonus from having a high I.Q. All secondary skills start at the base skill level.

**Standard Equipment:** The Kahuna starts out with a set of clothing, a belt with medical pouches, 2D6 uses of healing powders, bandages, and *ti* leaves, a set of light body armor (25 M.D.C. or 50 S.D.C. depending on the setting), a knife, a spear, 12 empty gourds for water or spirits, a tent, a bedroll, 50 feet (15.2 m) of rope, and a set of Hawaiian drums.

**Money:** The Kahuna will be one of the wealthier citizens in the village, though far away from the tourist traps, many Native Hawaiian settlements are not well-to-do. The Kahuna starts with 1D4x100 units of local money (typically dollars, but may be credits) as well as 2D6x100 monetary units worth of huna mystical artifacts, typically animal or human bones, that have been ceremonially prepared.

**Cybernetics:** None. The Kahuna would not wish to become unnatural by implanting such things inside herself.

## A Typical *Uhane*

**Alignment:** Any, usually Diabolical, Scrupulous, or Unprincipled.

**Attributes:** I.Q. 13, M.E. 17, M.A. 9, P.S. 17\*, P.P. 17\*, P.E. 17, P.B. 17, Spd 17. (\* Note: These are spiritual equivalents. The *Uhane* cannot affect the physical world without using Telekinesis.)

**Size:** Varies, typically the size of a human.

**Natural Armor:** None, though can only be hurt by magic, spiritual, and psionics.

**Hit Points:** 10

**S.D.C.:** None.

**I.S.P.:** 20

**Horror Factor:** Varies, usually 12.

**Attacks per Melee:** 3

**Bonuses:** +1 to initiative, +10 to save vs Horror Factor, +1 save vs psionics.

**Magic:** None.

**Psionics:** Telekinetic Lift, Telekinetic Punch, Telepathy.

**Appearance:** Varies, but usually a faint white manifestation of how the person appeared in real life.

# The Dark Realm of Netosa

A short story by Aaron Corley and Aaron Deskins

## Chapter One – Captives

“Malor!” someone whispered. “Malor, can you hear me?”

“He’s dead. Forget about him,” a second voice said.

“He has a pulse. I felt it,” the first voice repeated.

Malor flinched as something cold ran down his face. He tried opening his eyes, but the muscles in his face refused to cooperate. Something cold rested against his right cheek, numbing the pain from the Ogre’s blow, but not enough for him to forget the impact.

“See?” the first voice said again.

“Well, then get him off the ground.”

“I don’t think he can sit up yet.”

“Then let’s at least roll him over.”

Multiple hands lifted Malor’s body from the ground. The cool sensation against his face faded, gradually replaced by the burn of bruised muscles. He still fought to open his eyes, but with no success.

“Your friend looks like hell.”

“I just hope he pulls through. We are going to need his help to get out of here.” The voice sounded distant, as if spoken underwater and far away.

After what seemed only a few minutes, Malor heard a voice say, “Help me lift him.”

“How far are we going this time?” asked another voice, softer, more feminine. The Changeling was sure he recognized the speakers, but he could not think of their names. He tried to speak, but nothing happened. He tried to open his eyes, but it was no use.

Suddenly, he felt his head hang against his chest and his arms flopped against his side. He started to wonder if he was even in his body anymore. This felt like being trapped inside a rag doll. His feet bumped against something and then all sensation left him again.

He tried to transmit something to them telepathically — *this is Malor. Who are you?* — but he received no reply.

No reply.

His brain ached too much to concentrate on sending anything more. His lips felt parched, his body stiff and his mind numbed.

Malor awoke a few minutes later. His jaw still felt swollen, but his head had cleared and his eyes seemed to be working. Instead of foggy darkness, he saw blackness all around him. He sat on a dirty and uneven stone floor in a cold room with no breeze. Nearby, he could hear someone else breathing. With all the effort he could muster, he leaned forward and found a foot. He gave it a shake.

Someone else moaned softly and then another voice asked, “Who is that? What’s going on?”

“It’s Malor, sir. He is alive and awake.”

“Oh, good,” a female voice sighed. It was Lydia. The Changeling heard her move across the floor and felt her hand fumble to find him in the dark. “How are you feeling?” She sounded genuinely concerned.

As he lay there trying to recover, Malor the Mind Mage started to remember the last few days’ events. He was traveling as a bodyguard on a boat with his paladin friend Lydia, the boat was ambushed by bandits and, during the fight, he was knocked unconscious by a large Ogre. He still could not believe that a few months earlier he had been at the Library of Bletherad, studying his race, the Changelings, and now he was struggling to make money so he could search for others of his kind. At least, until he ended up here in some dark, unknown location.

“I’ve been better. How are you? Where are we?” he answered.

Lydia laughed nervously as if he told a joke. She explained in a whisper, “We are in a pit in a cave. Those bandits overran the yacht. They killed quite a few people and then gathered up the bodies. When we realized you were alive, they put you in here with us. I think we are inside the Shattered Mountains. It was dark though, I don’t really remember.”

He heard her draw herself closer to him. “Are you hurt? We have a little water.”

“I’ve been better. If I meditate a little, I’m sure I can improve the situation.”

Malor drank from a water skin Lydia handed him and asked, quietly, “Is anyone here hurt? Who is here?”

“Well,” she replied, “we are all hurt to some degree or another. The captain is here, a few of the other passengers and Addle. Most everyone else was killed, even Roark.” She laid her head on his shoulder, “I am glad you are all right.”

“That Roark was the one who started all this. He tried to kill me and throw me into the water, but I stopped him. Unfortunately, his friends arrived. I wonder why they’ve brought us here. Why not just kill us?”

“I-I don’t know. We’ve been here most of the day. Maybe they are waiting to kill us. Addle says they are Orcs, humans and an Ogre.”

“Okay. Thank you for the information. I must meditate to get my strength back.” Lydia sat up, giving the Mind Mage some space. He closed his eyes and entered a meditative trance that he hoped would clear his mind and help him refocus his psionic powers in case he needed them anytime soon.

It seemed like Malor only meditated a moment when Lydia nudged him awake. “C’m on. They are moving us again.”

Their captors lowered a makeshift ladder and the prisoners began climbing it. As he reached the top, Malor saw a point of

light to his left — just enough to illuminate the face of an Orc guard standing next to him.

Next, they marched from that room deeper into the cave, passing torches from time to time, but always going deeper. The passage seemed to go on for hours. Finally, one of the other prisoners moaned loudly and fell to the ground. The Orcs tried to get him to his feet, but he lacked the strength to walk any farther.

In the torch-lit darkness, Malor saw one Orc remove a whip from his belt and strike the injured man across the back. With a weakened cry, he convulsed on the tunnel floor.

Malor moved to help the fallen captive, but another guard stepped in his way and barked an interrogative.

“He needs help!” he answered.

“And who is you?” the first Orc demanded in heavily-accented Western.

“He’s a priest. He can heal,” Lydia said.

The Orc glared at her for a moment, then looked at Malor. “Heal. Nothing else.”

“Thank you for your kindness, good sir.”

Malor did not see the glare the Orc gave him. Instead, he healed the man, but realized more would be needed soon. Infection had set into the man’s wounds and he looked dehydrated.

“He needs water. And rest.”

“I said heal, no more.” The Orc pushed Malor back into line and lifted the man from the floor. “Keep marching.”

Disappointed, the Mind Mage took his place once more. The column kept marching for almost an hour more. Several people stumbled and fell, but not just because it was hard to see in the torchlight. Malor wondered briefly how many of the others were suffering from improperly treated wounds, but by that time the group reached a flat space on the edge of a chasm. They stopped here.

The sound of metal scraping on metal filled the enclosed space. Soon Malor could see a drawbridge drop through the darkness onto their side of the chasm. A squad of soldiers, three to four feet tall, carrying steel weapons and wearing armor, gathered in front of them. Malor recognized them as Kobolds, though he had never met any before.

Another figure in a dark robe, also a Kobold, approached the Ogre leading their captors. They talked for a moment, then the Kobold handed over a small bag. It clinked with the sound of money and the Ogre bowed as he took it.

As the Ogre and his cronies withdrew, the Kobolds surrounded the captives and began marching them onto a drawbridge. The Orcs took their torches with them as they walked into the caves. Within seconds, Malor and the others were left in the oppressive darkness of an underground kingdom.

The Kobolds steered the group through what sounded like an underground city for several minutes before leaving them inside some sort of open space like a communal cell. After hearing a heavy door close behind them and a large bolt drawn, Malor called to Lydia in a whispered voice. To his relief, it did not reverberate throughout the cavern.

“What?” she called back.

“How many of us are there?”

“You, me, Addle, the captain, four or five of the passengers from the yacht,” she reported. It felt like there were more than just eight or nine people in the cell however. The smell of unwashed flesh hung in the air and he heard people moving about slowly. “Why?”

He did not answer. Instead, he found a wall and sat down against it to meditate.

A while later, the sound of the door opening again pierced the cold silence. A Kobold in armor entered. He carried a torch that cut through the darkness like a knife. Two more soldiers followed behind him. They set a pair of buckets each on the floor and stepped back toward the door. In the faint light, Malor could see bread sticking out of one of the buckets.

After a pause, several of the captives charged forward. They pounced on the bread like animals, fighting over the few meager loaves. In the process, the second bucket was kicked over, spilling water on the floor. The Kobold with the torch laughed, then his companions left once again with the now-empty bucket.

Getting one’s share of the food proved difficult. Not only was there not enough to go around, but not everyone wanted to share. In addition, it was dark, making it impossible for Malor to see who had food and who did not.

“Listen to me,” he said aloud, “we need to work together or none of us will make it out of here alive. If we fight amongst ourselves for food and water, we’ll all suffer together and get nowhere.”

His entreaty was met largely by silence, however, though there were a few grunts, groans and heckling comments. His hunger, together with the darkness, compounded the disappointment inside. Still, Malor started thinking of some way to change their situation. If only he had some light...

Suddenly, he remembered something. “Lydia, can you come to my voice?”

“Where are you? Keep talking and I will follow your voice.”

“I’m right here. Can you hear me? Can you hear me now? Can you hear me now?”

“We can all hear ya! Shaddup!” Someone yelled.

A second later, someone touched his shoulder. “Is that you, Malor?” Lydia asked.

“Can you create some light with your powers? This darkness does nothing to help our situation.”

“Well, it’s a blessing from Rurga and she really doesn’t want us to use it as a substitute for a torch. Maybe you could make something combust instead.”

Malor lit a small fire on the ground, hoping there was enough kindling around to keep it going for a while. In the dim light, he saw Lydia and the shadows of several others prisoners as well.

Almost immediately, someone came running over, frantically speaking in a language the Mind Mage did not understand. He even tried to put out the fire, but without success. Lydia confessed she did not understand him and after a moment, Addle appeared at the edge of the firelight to translate.

“He says, if you do not put out the fire, they will kill us all.”

As he extinguished the fire, Malor asked, “Is there anyone in charge here?”

Addle translated and then asked, “Do you mean among the prisoners or the Kobolds?”

“Both.”

Addle and the other talked for a moment. The Dwarf became grave. “There is no leader among the prisoners,” he said finally. “And I am afraid that we are now captives of the Flaming Eye Clan.”

“Oh, no,” Lydia said softly.

“What does that mean?” Malor asked, unsure of why the other two were so upset by this news.

“It means we will surely die,” the Dwarf answered in a tone no less grumpy than his usual one.

“The Kobolds of the Flaming Eye Clan,” Lydia explained, “control the entire south end of the Shattered Mountains. They are a bloodthirsty lot. Neither my order or the Dominion Army patrols this area because the Kobolds do not associate with the Wolfen and will kill them on sight — just as they will anyone else that sets foot in the mountains, including Dominion soldiers and knights.”

“Worse than that,” Addle intoned, “recent rumors suggest that they have come under the leadership of a priest of darkness who intends to revive the Old Ones. So, instead of killing intruders on sight, they have been capturing them in preparation for a grand sacrifice to their evil god. If the god is awakened, it is only a matter of time before the Old Ones return to power and the world is plunged into a second Age of Chaos.”

Malor had studied enough history to know about the ancient Old Ones. They had enslaved the world millennia ago. It had only been through a long and bloody conflict that the Alliance of Light had been able to subdue them and force them into a tenuous hibernation.

“Hmmm... Looks like we’ll have to do something about this. When will they bring food next? I’ll need my strength when the time comes.”

Addle relayed the question to the figure in the dark and translated the answer: “Twice per day, though he admits he has lost track of time and does not know for sure.”

“Perhaps we should get some rest until our next feeding.”

“And then what do you propose?” the Dwarf asked.

“We need our strength. I propose we rest until our next feeding and make sure we get some of the food.”

“Need our strength for *what*?” Lydia pressed.

“I don’t plan on becoming a sacrifice for the Old Ones. Who will record this story and share it with the world if I’m dead?” Malor smiled, though he knew in his heart the ancient enemies of all goodness are no laughing matter. He continued, “I think our best bet is to try an escape at some point. It may be futile, but we’ve got to try something.”

“We’re dealing with religious fanatics,” Addle said. “We should have a plan.”

Lydia gave the Dwarf a sideways look, then leaned closer to Malor. “You aren’t going to die. Not yet, anyway. What do you have in mind?”

“I wish I could speak Dwarven. Perhaps I could influence our guard’s mind. I’m also thinking that perhaps I could teleport the guard’s key here. I don’t quite know yet what to do. Any ideas yourself?”

“Hasn’t your god given you the gift of tongues?”

“No. Unfortunately not. What do we know about the guard?”

Addle shrugged, “Just Kobolds. I noticed they wore armor and carried swords, but no shields or helmets.”

“I’m just wondering if they are on constant guard or only come to deliver meals. Maybe you could ask your friend there if he knows anything.”

“How many guards are there usually at any given time?”

“Three usually bring the food,” Addle answered. “He does not know how many are outside.”

“Hmm...,” Malor pondered this and then stated, “I think we should rest now and get more of a feel for our new home.”

“Are you feeling all right?” Lydia asked. “You have spent a lot of time asleep since the attack on *The Rivermaster*.”

“Using my abilities drains me. If I am to use them again I must be rested. How are your powers from your god?”

“I have been set apart as a Paladin of her Order. We have certain abilities — create daylight, a sense for the truth and a sense for evil — that she gives us. We then develop them through her service,” Lydia explained. “Your abilities sound more psychic than spiritual, is that true?”

“Yes. You could say that. My mind has certain abilities that you have witnessed.”

Lydia did not answer. After a moment, Malor decided to meditate, figuring she would rouse him if she needed him.

Some time later, the guards returned with more food and water. Lydia tapped Malor on the shoulder as the Kobolds entered the cavern. They followed the same routine as earlier, setting the bucket down and waiting for their prisoners to pounce on it. *It almost seems like a game to them*, Malor thought.

“If you are going to act, now is the time,” Lydia said.

## Chapter Two – Escape

In the torchlight, Malor saw a large humanoid push away another and take an entire loaf of bread. The Kobolds did not seem to care, but the Changeling perceived his opportunity was at hand.

He got to his feet and approached a man who had taken more than his share of the bread. “I need food,” he said, using his powers to exude a sense of friendship.

“Sure.” The man, completely under the Changeling’s psionic control, broke the loaf in half and gave part to Malor as if in a trance. “Here you go. Do you want some water, too?” He pushed aside a woman trying to get to the water and handed the bucket to the Mind Mage.

Malor broke off a piece of the bread and chewed it while nonchalantly looking over the Kobold guards. Two held torches, the third did not. He carried no keys, but was dressed and armored like his companions.

Noticing Malor, he barked something in a language the Changeling did not understand.

The Mind Mage ignored him and the guard turned away. They waited for the prisoners to finish with the water.

“Addle, how do you say ‘demon’ in Dwarven?”

Addle told him the word. “Why?”

“Just curious. These words might come in handy. What about ‘Look!’ or ‘Help!’”

The Dwarf told him and added, "If you gotta plan, you might as well share it, so the lady and I don't mess it up."

"How do you say 'hold your horses'?" asked Malor with a grin.

Addle was about to answer and then stopped himself. He glared at the Changeling for a moment.

Malor continued, "I think we should try to create a distraction of sorts. I can create illusions, but must sometimes use verbal commands to distract the person seeing. If we create the illusion of something powerful, I bet we can scare our guards away, or at least enough to distract them so we can take them out."

"Tell me more about your powers from your god, Lydia. You can create a light. How powerful is this light? Can you focus it on one person? What about your other powers?"

"It is powerful enough to keep vampires away, but not enough to affect normal people," she answered, "and it only works if I concentrate."

Malor turned to the Dwarf, "Addle, who are these Old Ones that these Kobolds want to bring back?"

"The Old Ones are the ancient evil that enslaved the world. Everyone knows that."

"Maybe we can convince these Kobolds that the Old Ones have returned. Using my illusionary skills, I can make myself look like anything else."

"Here's an idea. I'll make myself look like some demonic Old One. You, Lydia, cast your light spell on me to make it look as if I have some unholy power emanating from me. You, Addle, scream 'an Old One!'"

"That should hopefully be enough to distract them so we can make our jail break. What do you think?"

"I think you are crazy," Addle said flatly.

Lydia asked, "How would you get an Old One to fit in here?"

"Ok, maybe an Old One isn't best, but I can make myself appear to be a demon or some other creature. Something to scare or distract them. You two can add to the drama."

"Sure," Lydia said.

"Can you see the door?" Malor asked the Dwarf.

"Yes."

"It's just a door, about five feet tall. It opens to the outside," Addle told him.

"Is there a keyhole or handle on the inside?"

"I can't see a keyhole from here. As I recall, though, it is barred from the outside."

"Then when the guards come in is our only chance. Do you think you can handle a Kobold or two, Addle?"

The Dwarf was silent for several seconds and then asked in a serious tone, "Are you trying to be funny?"

Malor smiled. "Okay. Can you take three Kobolds?"

"You are about to piss me off," Addle grumbled.

"I can help," Lydia offered.

"Ok, let's try it," Malor said. "When the guards come in next, I'll change into some demon-like creature, you, Addle, yell something to distract them, then we'll rush them. Any effects you can give, Lydia, are appreciated."

"Sounds like a plan," Lydia said.

Malor sat quietly, meditating. He was soon awoken by the guards returning with food for their prisoners. As soon as he heard the door open, Addle alerted his companions.

"I'll need a moment," Lydia informed them while the Changeling altered his shape.

Taking his cue from Malor, the Dwarf suddenly yelled, "Help! There is a demon!"

The Kobolds turned, drawing their weapons at the sudden appearance of a ten-foot-tall hulking monster charging them. They rushed forward, only to be met by Addle, who tackled one of them.

The other two swung at Malor. One missed, dropping his weapon, while the other struck the Changeling across the middle with his short sword. Malor launched a fireball at the guard, igniting his clothes and casting shadows over the cavern. Stunned, the Kobold dropped his weapon and staggered about.

Malor closed the distance to the door when, suddenly, the chamber was filled with light as bright as noon day, centered on Lydia. Its appearance caused most everyone else to run for the shadows, though she followed her companion.

Addle knocked down the second Kobold with a stiff arm across the neck and ran after her.

Thanks to the light, he was able to see the door. As suspected, it opened outward and was slightly larger than the opening it covered (which explains why it let no light in). Malor made out two more guards outside, both covering their eyes as he ran toward them.

He concentrated long enough to ignite a pillar of fire under the Kobolds. They both started and backed away, trying to put out the flames that separated them from the door.

"Let's go," Addle said impatiently.

"We need to hurry. The light will only last for a minute," Lydia added.

"I'm with you: let's move. What does your Dwarven sense tell you about this underground world?" the Changeling asked Addle.

"Dwarven sense"? Honestly, human, sometimes you make no sense yourself!"

As the three companions pushed through the door, they noticed more Kobolds coming. Addle and Lydia both slowed up when they saw the pillar of fire blocking the way, too. Malor pushed forward, grumbling, "And I thought Dwarves were stone lovers."

The Dwarf ignored his comment. He and Lydia stepped around the pillar as Kobold guards approached. They both carried weapons which they brandished at their captors.

Addle engaged one of them, cutting the lighter soldier with his sword. Lydia had taken one of the Kobold's short swords and was now fighting alongside him. Meanwhile, Malor looked around. As far as he could tell, they were in a two-way corridor about fifteen feet wide and at least twice that long. A dozen more guards were approaching, mostly from the right.

Lydia knocked one of the Kobolds into the pillar of fire. "Which way now?"

"There are few Kobolds that way," Addle yelled, still fighting one of the guards. "I think I see some dwellings that way,



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too.” The Kobold he was fighting cut him across the arm, drawing blood. Using his free hand, however, the Dwarf knocked him out and let the body slump to the floor.

“Let’s go then!”

The three of them ran down the corridor into the darkness. Although he relied on his hearing to keep track of the other two, after a few hundred feet Malor was completely lost in the subterranean darkness.

“Lydia? Addle? Are you there?”

Someone grabbed Malor’s hand and he heard Addle’s voice. “This way, human.”

“I think we are going to need a torch,” Lydia said. She stood close by, too, and the Changeling wondered if Addle was holding onto her as well.

“If we have wood or something to burn I can start a fire.”

“I don’t see anything readily available,” Addle reported.

“What *do* you see?”

“I think we are going the wrong way. All of these buildings look deserted.”

“How do we know this is the wrong direction? Towards what? Perhaps we can use this area as a camp to move in on the Kobolds.”

“I thought we were looking for a way out. The architecture here seems older to me than what I saw on the way in. But then, you are in charge here, so whatever you want to do, we will do.”

“How did *I* get in charge?” Malor wondered aloud.

“Anyways, can we let the Kobolds summon the Old Ones? I want to get out also, but if they summon them, there really isn’t any point getting out, right?”

“If they summon them, it means the end of the world!” said Lydia, indignant.

“Then I think we should try to stop them. I really like this world.”

“We could alert the Dominion Army back in Llorn.”

“We haven’t got time for that. I say we find out who is in charge and take them out ourselves,” the Dwarf said.

“I think Addle is right: we just don’t know when they’ll have the ceremony complete. We need to at least scout out the situation and see how their progress is coming along. If we need food and water, Addle, what do you suggest?”

“We can steal it from the Kobolds, but first, we need to find a safe place to hide.”

“Any ideas? You are the only one among us who can see in the dark,” Lydia reminded him.

“How about one of these dwellings?” He moved toward one of the buildings. Malor heard him struggle with a door before breaking it in. After a moment, he came back. “These dwellings aren’t as abandoned as I thought.”

“What’s in there?”

“It looks like somebody’s home. They haven’t been gone that long.”

“What type of stuff is there. Can you tell if it’s Kobold?”

“Definitely Kobold,” Addle replied.

“Besides, Dwarves don’t live on this end of the Shattered Mountains,” Lydia said.

“I bet all of the buildings around here are homes. We might be able to find some food here, too.” Addle said as he stepped into the building, leaving Lydia and Malor in the darkened street.

“I really don’t like this,” the woman said after a moment. “The darkness, I mean.”

“Let’s try and find some food,” Malor said. “Quick.”

A few minutes later, Addle returned. He handed some bread to his companions and then put something cold and ceramic in Malor’s hands. “It’s an oil lamp. It won’t create a lot of light, but it will help. All it needs is a spark.”

“Do you think the Kobolds will see the light?”

“How else do you to plan to see?”

“I’m not against seeing. I’m just against two hundred angry Kobolds chasing us.”

“You may have just jinxed us, human,” Addle said. He grabbed Malor by the arm and pulled them into the dwelling. “Be quiet,” he ordered.

After what felt like an eternity, Malor heard talking outside, although it was muffled through the stone walls. The three of them hid under a table not too far from the door, however. Whoever it was, they carried no torches or other light source.

In spite of his sixth sense warning him of danger, Malor changed shape to look like a Kobold. Then he crawled across the floor towards the door to listen as quietly as he was able. As he went, however, he bumped into something causing some other object to fall and strike the floor. It shattered loudly.

“What have you — ?” Addle began, in an angered whisper.

The tense feeling that had settled over the trio of escapees suddenly intensified.

Another minute passed before a pair of Kobolds pushed open the door. After a moment, one stooped to examine the Changeling who now pretended to sleep on the floor in the middle of the room. The Kobold gave him a good shake on the shoulder and said something in his language. When Malor did not reply, they began to roll him over.

Suddenly, there was a bright flash of light and Malor heard something slam against the wall. When he opened his eyes, Addle had knocked one guard senseless against the stone interior of the building. Lydia engaged the other.

“Move, Malor!” she yelled, kicking the Kobold in the face.

The Kobold responded by nicking her with his spear across the left thigh.

“Let’s go!” Addle yelled. “Or we will be pinned in here for good.”

The Changeling jumped to his feet and ran back out into the street behind his companions. At least a dozen angry Kobolds stood to his left, blocking the road back to the area Malor just escaped from.

Lydia led the group down the road to the right. Somehow, she was able to keep her light centered on herself. All Malor had to do was keep up and he could see where they were going. Addle, although not as fast, brought up the rear after clobbering a couple of the Kobolds.

The road took them through a series of two and three story dwellings similar to those Malor had seen in other large cities,

only these had been carved out of the earth itself. They crossed a tenth of a mile, however, before the dwellings ended at a platform at least a hundred feet in diameter overlooking a deep chasm.

Lydia stopped to rest against the railing as Malor caught up. He could not see the bottom of the chasm from the railing.

“Where do we go now?” the Paladin asked as the light went out again, leaving them in complete darkness.

They both turned when they heard footsteps approaching. “It’s me, Addle,” the Dwarf said. “But we can’t stay here. The Kobolds are on my tail.”

A moment passed while everyone caught their breath and considered the options.

“I have an idea: you two hide in the dark. Addle, you yell ‘they went there!’ while I point back down the direction we came. Hopefully, my Kobold disguise will fool them and the darkness will prevent them from noticing our ventriloquism.”

“Kobolds can see in the dark, remember?” the Dwarf reminded them impatiently.

“Is there anywhere to hide — rock formations?” Malor asked the Dwarf, trying to hide the panic in his voice.

“None that are easy to get to.”

“How far are the Kobolds away?”

“Right behind me.”

“What if we climbed over the balcony here?” Lydia suggested.

“Do we have any rope?” Malor asked.

“No.”

“We need to do something!” the woman reminded them.

“I see a ledge about fifteen feet down,” Addle said, “but you’ll never make it if you can’t see.”

“You two worry about the Kobolds. I will worry about the light.”

Once again, Malor shape-changed to look like a Kobold. When the transformation was done, he said, “Addle, pretend to be my prisoner. Put your hands behind your back. Yell out stuff like ‘Just because you caught me doesn’t mean I’ll tell you where the gold is!’ and then, when they don’t expect it and are hopefully caught off guard, you can rip their arms out of their sockets and I’ll blast them with some fire.”

“You’re crazy,” the Dwarf muttered as he moved in front of the Mind Mage. He got in place just as the Kobolds arrived on the balcony.

He yelled something in his native language while doing his best to make it look like he was struggling with Malor. Light suddenly filled the balcony, causing their pursuers to shriek and both Addle and Lydia charged forward only to find themselves outnumbered at least three to one.

The Dwarf grabbed his first target while Lydia fell back to Malor’s side.

“Now’s a good time for some more fire,” she nodded.

Malor summoned a wall of fire underneath the first row of Kobolds.

“Let’s go,” Lydia urged, climbing over the railing to get to the ledge below.

Addle threw the Kobold he had grabbed a second before into some of the others, then ran to Malor’s side. “Good work.”

Seizing the confusion, Malor hopped over the railing and climbed down to the ledge. Lydia’s power cast just enough light to reveal a cavity big enough for the three of them to stand on without being seen from above. In addition, a narrow crevasse led back under the balcony and into the dark.

They waited quietly against the cliff face as the light faded. After several minutes, Malor was about to say something when he felt Lydia’s hand on his lips, shushing him. Above them, he could hear a few Kobolds discussing something before turning and leaving.

It looked like they had finally found a safe place to hide.

“I guess we have a little climb back up,” Malor whispered after catching his breath.

“Up? We should go back this way,” Addle said, pointing to the crevasse.

“Uh, okay. Sounds good to me. What’s down that way?”

“I don’t know, but it seems to lead generally back toward the center of their town.”

“If we are going to stop them from awakening the Old Ones,” Lydia said a bit sarcastically, “we will need to find their leader. I bet he lives in town somewhere.”

“It would seem that some shaman or shamans would be involved in the process, I’m guessing,” Malor said. “Do we even know what is involved in the process? If we take them out we could stop the process.”

“I have no idea,” Lydia admitted.

Addle concurred, “But it is probably the work of evil priests and wizards. It must be stopped.”

“So how do we know there’s a tunnel from this crevice you want us to take to the town?” the Mind Mage asked. “Does your Dwarven sense tell you anything?”

In the darkness, Malor could not see the dirty look Addle gave him. “It tells me this tunnel leads back toward town. It also tells me this crevasse is not used much and that we can probably count on not running into any Kobolds any time soon if we follow it. If we stay here, who knows?”

“Do you think the Kobolds will find us here?” Lydia asked.

“I don’t intend to stick around to find out.”

“I guess we should get going. I think the city was only a few minutes from the ledge, so we can’t be too far from it. But who knows how long this cavern will go.”

Lydia took Malor by the hand and they started walking. The passage was narrow in places with an uneven floor and plenty of opportunities to trip or scrape oneself against the rock. After a moment, with a slight tremble in her voice, she said to him, “I really hate this dark. Is there anything you can do about it?”

“If we have something flammable I can start a fire. Addle, what do you see?”

“I think we are underneath the cavern we escaped from earlier,” the Dwarf reported. “I have nothing to burn, except maybe my clothes.”

“It is just cold and dark,” Lydia said. “I don’t like it.”

“We should find an opening soon,” Addle assured her.

“Should we rest before we attempt to enter the city?” Malor said and then bumped into Lydia. Apparently, she had stopped because Addle had stopped. The Dwarf sounded as grumpy as usual when he said that would be fine.

“I don’t think he meant right here, though,” Lydia said. “Maybe we could find some place to actually sit down. Right, Malor?”

“Sounds good to me. I’ll probably need to rest before we get into any more combat.”

“Humans.” The Dwarf led them a little farther to a small area. Malor heard water flowing nearby.

“What’s that?” Lydia inquired.

“It’s our ticket back into the Kobolds’ city.”

“Can we drink it?” Malor asked. “What does your Dwarven sense tell you?”

“You know, human, you are *really* starting to piss me off. What makes you think I know whether we can drink it?”

“I’m sorry to upset you,” Malor apologized. “I’ve always heard that Dwarves have a great sense of the underworld. I just assumed you had a great understanding of this place. Please accept my apologies.”

“Whatever. You can drink the water if you like. Then we will continue.”

After a moment, Malor whispered to Lydia, “Are all Dwarves this moody?”

“All Dwarves are grumpy,” she assured him.

“I can drink the water. My mind will protect me, but if it’s poisoned I’m not sure about you. Perhaps we can see if there are creatures using this water source.”

“The opening is too small for us to continue downstream,” Addle reported when he returned. “So we probably ought to move upstream and see what we can find. Do you mind getting wet?”

“How wet?” Lydia asked, unsure. The darkness was obviously getting to her.

“No more than your boots, I should think.”

“Would it help if we had more light? Perhaps you can create another globe to see by, Lydia.”

“I can’t. I can only do it so many times a day. I won’t be able to summon more light for a while now.”

“Addle, have you seen any life at all in this tunnel?”

“Plenty. Why?”

“Where there’s life, there’s something to burn. A torch of some sort would be great right now.”

“Not necessarily. I have seen lots of mushrooms, but they are too damp to light. Maybe we should continue in the dark for a while and then find something.”

Lydia groaned at the suggestion.

“Are the mushrooms good to eat?”

Lydia groaned at that suggestion too.

“Mushrooms beat not eating at all.”

“True.”

“Show me which ones are edible,” Malor said to Addle. “Maybe we should take a rest for a little while and then get moving again.”

Addle took a few minutes to gather up a selection of the local fare. After a moment, Malor’s thirst got the better of him and he moved toward the stream. He took a sip of the water. It was heavy with minerals, but tasted fine otherwise. “Are there signs, Addle, that animals have been around this water, drinking it? Is there any life in the water?”

“Not here. I have seen no animals since we rid ourselves of the Kobolds.”

Lydia asked Malor about the water and, after he described its flavor, she drank from her hand. “At least it is wet,” she decided.

“Perhaps we should take a break for a few minutes then continue on,” the Changeling suggested.

“Good idea.”

“How far do you think we are from the city?”

“We’re underneath it,” Addle told him.

“So how do we get into the city from here?”

“I am still working on that one.”

“We have to figure out something,” Lydia said. “We can’t let the Kobolds bring back the Old Ones.”

“How thick do you think the ceiling between us and the city is?” Malor asked the Dwarf.

“Maybe twenty or thirty feet. I am not really sure.” The Dwarf’s voice sounded a bit farther in the dark than it was a moment ago.

“Do you think any other paths lead to the city?”

“This one must. There is an iron grating just up the path a little ways.”

“Should we rest for a few hours, then check it out?”

“You humans *always* need to rest,” Addle grumbled.

“I think we should,” Lydia agreed with Malor, ignoring the Dwarf’s tone.

“Fine. How long do you want to rest for?”

“How about until my mind is well rested? That is probably a few hours.”

## Chapter Three – Sneaking Back into the City

Lydia roused Malor sometime later. “We are ready. Are you?”

“So let’s go. Anybody hurt?”

“No, we are both fine. Addle has been scouting ahead. He says he found a way out of this cavern, but we aren’t going to like it.”

Malor took a moment to heal himself. “Okay, let’s go.”

“I hope we get out of this darkness soon,” Lydia said. “I hate this place.”

Addle led them through a serious of narrow, rough passages carved by water a hundred years ago. The water still flowed here and, sometimes, got as deep as the Changeling’s waist. The first time Lydia complained, however, the Dwarf ignored her. The second time he reminded her that this was the only way out and she said nothing more about it again.

After what felt like a couple hours, Malor bumped into his female companion. “Careful,” she warned and then asked the Dwarf, “Where are we? I can’t see.”

The roar of water made it difficult to hear anything else and the air was full of spray, but it was still too dark to see any of what was causing the noise.

“This is the Kobolds’ aqueduct. They learned how to make these from us millennia ago. If we follow it,” Addle explained, “it should open in a cistern somewhere. Can you handle getting soaked for a while?”

“I guess so,” Lydia answered.

“What about you, human?”

“I’ll be fine. Lead on, O Dwarven guide.”

“There is a ledge about six feet up,” Addle told them. “I can lift you both to it. On the right is an opening where the water comes out. Just follow the ledge until you get to it and then go inside.”

“How big is the opening?” Lydia asked.

“Big enough for you to stand up in. The water flow is not enough to knock you over either, but watch your step because it might get slippery. Ready?”

“Yes.”

“Good.” Malor listened as the Dwarf lifted Lydia up and she climbed onto the ledge, then he felt Addle’s hand on his shoulder. A moment later, he was standing on the six inch wide ledge as well. He shuffled along after the Paladin, going at least thirty feet before he got to the opening Addle had mentioned. Careful not to hit his head, he stepped into the water’s flow.

“Which way now?” Lydia asked, just in front of him.

Addle stood just behind him, “Keep going forward until I tell you to stop.”

After several more minutes, the tube began to angle upward and Lydia reported seeing a faint light up ahead. Malor saw it as well, but said nothing.

They kept walking and, within a few minutes, reached an iron grating. Light and water poured into the tunnel from an iron grating above in the ceiling. “My guess is that there is a fountain above us. We just need to pry the grating loose somehow and we will be back in the city,” Addle said.

“Sounds easy enough,” Lydia agreed with a hint of sarcasm.

Malor turned to Addle. “How’s that Dwarven strength of yours? Think you can pry it open?”

“Stand back.” Addle pushed his way to the grating. He positioned his hands and pulled, using his feet to brace him against the opening. Nothing happened. “I think it would be better to push.”

“But what if the grate falls?” Lydia asked.

“I’ll catch the grate in case it starts to fall,” Malor assured her. “Does it appear anyone is near the grate outside?”

“I don’t see anyone,” Addle reported. He put his feet against the grate and pushed on it with his legs. Even in the dim light, Malor could see the sweat on his brow.

Suddenly, the grate popped free, falling into the Mind Mage’s telekinetic grasp. Malor used his mind to hold the grate in place, then set it aside. He misjudged his skill, however, and,

as soon as he released the three-hundred pound iron mess, it tipped over, filling the tunnel with a loud clang.

“Good job, human.”

“Enough of that,” Lydia ordered. “Let’s go.”

She stepped through the opening and into the pool of a large fountain. In the center was a massive bowl housing a blue-colored flame that filled the cavern with eerie shadows.

“Where are we?”

“I don’t know, but it looks like a public fountain of some kind.”

“Let’s not stay long,” Lydia suggested, walking toward a spiral staircase on the left.

“Let’s be careful not to make too much noise,” the Change-ling warned. “Where do you suggest we go, Addle?”

“How would I know? I don’t live here. If we are going to stop them from freeing the Old Ones though, we should find out where the Old Ones are sleeping,” he answered. According to legend, those ancient and dreaded enemies slept beneath the ground, waiting to be awoken by their servants — evil beings of any species — and many of the mountain chains in the Palladium world were merely markers for their resting places.

“I think we should take a prisoner to get some information. One of these Kobolds could probably tell us where the ceremony or whatever will take place.”

“Where do you propose getting a prisoner with *that* kind of knowledge?”

“If these Kobolds are obsessed with bringing back the Old Ones, don’t you think they’d know where they’re taking their sacrifices and where they perform their evil rituals? Are Kobolds so secretive that they don’t even tell each other who their own leaders and shamans are and where the leaders and shamans perform their evil deeds?”

“Maybe someone just thinks Kobolds are stupid,” Lydia jibed the Dwarf. “Malor has a good point. Any adult should do.”

In the firelight, Malor could see Addle glare at him. For whatever reason, he could tell the Dwarf did not like him much. Lydia had said Dwarves tended to be cranky, but this seemed like more than just a maladjusted disposition to the Mind Mage.

“We should have a plan. Running around town will just get us jailed again,” Lydia said, a bit put off that Malor would think of something she had not.

“Probably,” the Dwarf growled.

“Let’s go then,” the woman said, sensing the hostility between her companions. She started up the stairs, moving as quietly as possible.

She passed through the archway at the top with the other two in tow. Candles placed in sconces along the wall broke up the darkness in this new room. It had a high ceiling with a few benches along one wall and a silent altar opposite. Two archways led out of the room. A chain blocked the one on the left.

In the distance, they heard a combination of singing and chanting.

Malor saw someone coming from the unchained archway. They looked to be Kobold height and wore a cloak covering all of their features.

“Quick, someone is coming,” he reported to the others in a whisper. “Here’s our chance to take them alive. Take cover and get ready to grab the person who comes through.” He then pulled back beside the archway to get ready.

“Got it.”

The hooded figure walked through the archway with head down. She carried a chalice in her right hand. The other was hidden in her sleeve. She appeared not to notice the three intruders hiding in her path.

Before any other action was taken against her, Malor tried to confuse her psionically, but his power seemed to have no effect. The Kobold walked right past him and towards his skulking companions. As she walked past, Lydia jumped out of the shadows and tackled the stranger, bringing her to the ground in a tangle of fabric and limbs. The figure tried to scream, but the woman covered her mouth too quickly.

“Quick, let’s get the Kobold down the way we came.”

“Grab her feet,” Lydia snapped. The Dwarf grabbed both ankles under one arm and they dragged the struggling Kobold back toward the fountain. Meanwhile, Malor focused his mental powers on her, hoping to gain her trust — if only temporarily and artificially.

“Addle, ask it about the Old Ones. When are they coming? How are they coming?”

Addle translated the question, but their female prisoner did not answer. The Dwarf threatened to strike her, but she still said nothing.

“Ask it what its name is,” the Changeling ordered.

“Ask *her* what her name is,” Lydia corrected. “She’s a person even if she isn’t human.” The woman looked hard at Malor. “Or Dwarven.” She looked at Addle and then lowered his fist for him. She was noticeably offended at their brusqueness.

The Dwarf repeated the question, more politely this time.

“Karistan,” she answered.

“You’ll have to excuse us,” Malor said to Lydia, “but this Kobold is trying to summon the Old Ones and destroy our world. Ask Karistan why she wants to destroy our world.”

Addle did and then reported, “She says it is the Kobolds’ right to rule the world and their Old One has promised to make that possible.”

“When can we expect the Kobolds to take over?”

“After the next full moon,” Addle translated.

“I have completely lost track of time,” Lydia confessed. “What day is it anyway?”

“I believe you humans will be celebrating the summer equinox soon,” Addle said, “but I don’t know your calendar that well.”

“How do you plan on awakening the Old Ones?”

“She says there will be a ceremony.”

“Are you a priestess? Will you be bringing the Old Ones back?”

“She says she is not. The chief priest calls himself the Lowliest Servant of Netosa —”

“Netosa? He was one of the *worst* Old Ones!” Lydia gasped. “They can’t bring him back. He will turn this entire region into a battlefield. Millions will die.”

“I think that is their plan,” Addle assured her.

“Ask her, ‘what if we want to join the Kobolds so we don’t become destroyed when Netosa returns?’” Malor ordered.

The Dwarf repeated the question but, when the Kobold replied, raised his fist again to strike her. Luckily for their prisoner, Lydia was able to stop him first.

“What did she say?” the woman demanded, restraining Addle’s arm.

“Netosa will have no room in his kingdom for non-Kobolds,” he repeated. “Or words to that effect.”

“Tell her she must be naive, because the Confederacy of Dwarven Clans is already moving to bring Netosa back before the Kobolds.”

Addle looked at Malor. “What?”

“Just a little improvisation. We’ve got to convince her to tell us what’s up.”

“It seems pretty obvious. They are going to use the full moon to augment a ceremony involving some sort of sacrifice. The resulting magic will awaken the Old One,” he explained.

“But who are they going to sacrifice?”

“Probably all of those prisoners they took when they nabbed us.”

“Hmmm.... How many priests or priestesses are there above?”

“She says dozens, if not hundreds.”

“Great,” Lydia moaned.

Thinking quickly, Malor said, “Ask her about the ‘other’ Kobold clan in the adjoining cave. Perhaps we can convince her that a rival clan is trying to beat them at bringing back the Old Ones.”

“She says there *is* no other clan in the mountains.”

“Ask her who the Kobolds we saw with the white hand are.”

“She says they are the hands of the Old Ones.”

“Netosa’s priests,” Lydia concluded.

“Will you stop saying his name!” Addle growled. “It is bad luck!”

Malor was about to ask another question when they heard footsteps coming from the landing above. His danger sense kicked in as he realized someone was coming to toward the fountain.

“Quick! Someone is coming,” Malor said, moving back toward the drain. “Quick! Down the drain! Shove the Kobold down, too!”

“What?”

“Why?” Lydia demanded. “What is going on?”

“Some Kobolds are coming! Let’s hide. Quickly!”

The four of them clamored to the drain. Lydia went first, then Addle raised their prisoner up to her. The Kobold took this as her cue to get away, but the Dwarf and Paladin held her tight.

“D’ye need help getting up there?” Addle asked Malor.

“Sure.”

The Dwarf lifted Malor up far enough for him to grab the lip of the drain. He climbed in and directed Lydia to take the prisoner deep into the drain. A moment later, Addle appeared at the edge and made his way to where the others waited.

“Let’s keep going a little ways,” the Changeling suggested.

“We can’t,” Lydia said. Malor looked past her, seeing shadows at the bottom of the shaft that could only be caused by approaching torches.

“I think we are pinned,” Addle grumbled.

“Hmm... This could get interesting,” Malor murmured. Quickly, he sized up the situation. Lydia and their hostage were twenty feet from the rear entrance to the drain. Addle was five feet behind Malor and ten feet from the other entrance.

Malor pushed past Lydia and readied a fireball. Before he could launch it, however, Addle informed them that several Kobolds had arrived at the top of the stairs leading to the fountain. “They are armed, too.”

“I’ll hold the rear. You take the front!”

“With what? We have no weapons!” the Dwarf reminded him.

Malor ignored him. “Okay. Follow me. We’ll just have to go the way we came.”

He moved past Lydia toward the finished end of the drain. The corner was basically a ninety to one hundred degree angle that turned to his left. He was between it and Lydia, about five feet away from the corner.

Quickly, he rounded the corner and launched a fireball. It exploded against a Kobold, illuminating the cavern as it did. The creature stumbled, fell and then rolled aside as his companions charge forward.

The next soldier stabbed Malor in the gut, burying his sword deeply before the Changeling had a chance to stop him.

Malor fired off another pair of fireballs. His attacker dodged the first, letting it explode against the cavern wall, while the second caught the Kobold straight on, killing him. His body fell to the side of the passage, allowing just enough room for one more enemy at a time to advance.

Immediately, a second Kobold charged forward, slashing at the Changeling. His blade narrowly missed, but he did not look likely to give up.

“Lydia!” Malor stumbled back toward the Paladin. In the dark, he bumped into either her or their prisoner, causing Lydia to let go of her Kobold prisoner.

“Stop her!” the human said.

“I got her,” Addle assured them.

Suddenly, Malor felt something heavy strike his head, breaking the skin. He fell to the ground, pretending to be dead, only to have several Kobolds grab him. They maneuvered him clumsily to his feet, scraping his arms against the cavern walls before binding his hands behind his back.

Although he could hear Addle and Lydia fighting, the Mind Mage could not see them. After a few minutes scuffle, however, the fighting stopped and they were led to the edge of the drain.

The flames around the fountain cast enough light for the Changeling to see six Kobolds standing around Lydia and Addle, their former prisoner and at least three lowering him from the drain. There might have been more still in the drain, but he could not tell. The Kobolds moved quickly and precisely, creating only minimal noise.

Silently, the Mind Mage cursed his luck, wishing now he had summoned a wall of fire to cover their escape. Unfortunately, he lacked the strength at the moment.

The Kobolds dragged Malor up the stairs and away from the fountain. Within a few minutes, they came to a stop in a small anteroom where the three of them were deposited on the ground.

Malor could not see anything in the darkness, but he heard Lydia ask Addle in a whisper if he was all right and the Dwarf replied in a similar hushed tone. Before she could direct the same question to the Changeling, however, a Kobold barked ferociously at them and the Paladin groaned in pain.

After a pause, someone else entered the darkened room. He said something to the guards in Dwarven and then left.

Malor tried to meditate again, but the guards dragged them from the room and quite a distance before chaining them to shackles on a wall in another part of the city. It seemed to the Changeling that they were back in the same prison — it sounded the same as before, at least — though this time there was no light to see by.

“Did you understand any of what was said?” he heard Lydia ask Addle.

“We’ve been deemed troublemakers and need to be punished.”

“What does that mean?”

“There are going to sacrifice us to the Old Ones at the next full moon.”

“When is that? Did you find out?”

“Yep.” Addle sounded parched. “Tonight.”

## Chapter Four – The Offering

Hours later, Malor heard a sound that brought him out of his meditative trance. The guards had returned. They unchained him from the wall, leaving his wrists bound together and, once again, dragged him through their underground city. This time, to a fate possibly worse than death.

After what seemed like hours, they arrived at an opening to the surface. It was dark, but Malor could see the stars over a small valley. Hundreds of beings stood around him: Kobold civilians, soldiers and priests; slaves and prisoners, Lydia and Addle — it looked like everyone one was invited to this occasion.

His armed escort pushed him toward a long line of other non-Kobolds — presumably, those who would also be sacrificed under the full moon tonight.

Malor scanned past the line of chained up prisoners. It looked like everyone was being herded to a raised altar at the north end of the valley where a small group of Kobolds stood. In the moonlight, it looked like they were sharpening long-bladed daggers.

Three Kobold guards waited within fifteen feet of his position, but there must have been dozens if not hundreds more milling about.

“Lydia? Addle? How many must die for the Old Ones to return?” the Changeling whispered.

“Thousands, I would guess,” Lydia said. However many it would take, the Kobolds seemed well-prepared.

“Let’s bide our time to get closer to the altar.” Malor watched the moon near the apex of the sky, signaling the appointed hour. Suddenly, the guards started moving the line closer to the altar. Some of the prisoners resisted, only to be beaten down. Malor could not see it well, but he could hear Kobolds chanting and, after a moment, the blood-chilling cries of the first few victims.

“Horrible,” he muttered to himself.

Malor estimated the moon would be in position within fifteen minutes. He tried the manacles about his wrists, but the metal would not budge. He was probably twenty people from the front of the line with Lydia, Addle and hundreds more behind.

“Addle — can you break these chains?”

“Already tried,” the Dwarf grumbled.

Malor strained to see the podium. He counted at least a dozen priests engaged in conducting sacrifices. He closed his eyes and concentrated. A little panic would be useful at the moment, so he willed a wall of fire into existence under the priests. Soon he heard the sounds of people losing control of themselves, prompting him to open his eyes. As he did, the wall of fire disappeared by some unseen force.

Some of the priests and potential victims were injured, but their leader — although angered — had quickly wrested back control.

Malor asked Addle how to say ‘Old Ones’ in Dwarven and the warrior told him.

“Addle, yell with me.”

The Changeling began yelling, “Old Ones! Old Ones!” and pointed at the altar area. Soon Addle picked up the chant, too, and the Kobolds joined in. In fact, after a moment, it looked like their captors were relishing the mantra, caught up in the excitement it created.

Lydia tried to get their attention. “I think this is having an opposite effect from what you intended.”

She was about to say more when a soldier pulled her out of line and toward the altar. She struggled against his grasp, but the non-human was stronger.

Using his powers, Malor tried to fill the Kobold with fear. The empathic transfer was successful. The guard let go of her and cowered on the steps. Lydia gave him a swift kick and more guards charged her.

Malor focused on the Kobolds coming at Lydia and tried to instill fear in their minds. He hoped sparking a panic would foil the priests’ attempt to restore the Old Ones.

After a second, however, Addle grabbed his arm. “Don’t just stand there! We gotta get out of the way!”

The Dwarf pulled him out of the main thoroughfare and closer to the wall under the altar. Somehow, while the Mind Mage was concentrating elsewhere, Addle had gotten a dagger which he now used to pick the lock on his shackles. It took a few seconds to get them off of both prisoners, but by then full-blown chaos had swept the area.

“Let’s go!” Freed, Malor now jumped to his feet, pushing his way to the podium, when a Kobold guard attacked him with a sword. His danger sense had been buzzing for a few minutes already and now he knew why.

“Get me to the altar and we’ll end this! Get those Kobolds!”

“Here we go.” Addle threw one of the soldiers out of the way, charging for the podium.

The Dwarf charged through a line of Kobolds, knocking them aside. He and Malor got about fifteen feet from the stairs when a pair of guards with pole arms attacked. One stabbed the Dwarf in the gut. He broke the weapon’s shaft off and hit the soldier with it, but it was obvious Addle was hurt badly.

By now the chaos Malor tried to create seemed to be starting up. Hundreds of enraged slaves swarmed the podium, resulting in the perfect chance for him and the others to escape.

As if on cue, his two companions started to flee the valley and Malor followed them. They ran for about an hour, making their way through the crowds of Kobolds and slaves, over a short wall and down the mountainside. About the time he thought he would collapse from lack of air, the Changeling’s danger sense came back on.

“Hold! Something is amiss!” the Mind Mage announced to his companions.

“Yes: *you!*” Without warning, Addle suddenly tackled Malor, sending them both tumbling down the mountainside. The Dwarf locked the Mind Mage’s arms behind his back in a painful hold, then jammed a dagger blade up against his Adam’s apple.

Lydia ran to their sides. “What’s going on here?” she demanded, obviously shocked.

“What’s this?!” the Mind Mage gasped against the blade.

“This one is a Changeling!” the Dwarf said, spitting the final word from his mouth like poison.

“A Changeling?” Lydia almost laughed. “What makes you say that?”

“Remember the way he changed into a demon in the cavern? He did the same thing on the yacht before we were captured. He changed into a Kobold when the guards found us, too,” Addle sneered. “He’s a Changeling.”

“No, he’s not,” the woman shook her head, refusing to believe.

“You don’t believe me? Then ask him.”

She looked the Mind Mage in the eye, glancing briefly at the blade at his throat.

“Malor, are — ?”

He tried to laugh. “Changeling? This is absurd! Get your hands off me Addle! I’m no more a Changeling than you are,” Malor insisted as he tried vainly to influence the Dwarf’s mind with his psionics.

“No, Paladin of Rurga,” Addle said to Lydia, maintaining his hold on his prisoner but withdrawing his blade slightly. “Invoke the truth. Ask him in the name of your goddess.”

“How do you — ?” She stopped, realizing it was the only way to uncover the truth. Malor tried not to gulp against the sharp blade. Lydia had explained this power to him before. As emissaries of the Warrior Goddess, Paladins of Rurga had the ability to force others to answer questions truthfully, whether they wanted to or not. She had not used it in his presence, but had spoken enough about it in casual conversation for him to know that she would believe whatever answer he would give. But he also knew the only answer he could give under the spell’s influence would be the wrong one.

Lydia took a step closer. “Malor, in the name of the Warrior Goddess, Rurga, are you a Changeling?”

Although he tried to fight the spell, he was unable to resist. “I... am... a... Changeling,” he confessed reluctantly.

The Paladin gasped and took a step back. Tears filled her eyes and she shook her head against the truth. “No, Malor. No,” she whispered and, without waiting for him to offer any explanation, Lydia turned and ran into the trees. Malor watched her go, powerless to stop her. Soon she had disappeared down the mountainside and into the forest.

Suddenly, Addle tightened his hold on Malor’s arms, pressing the blade into his skin on his neck. “Now then, Impostor, let’s be done with you.”

“You would kill me after I helped *save* us?”

“You are a Changeling. You *cannot* be trusted.”

Malor had heard stories from his grandmother about the irrational hatred people harbored for Changelings. He was convinced his parents’ deaths had been the result of mindless prejudice, though he had no proof. Still, he never thought it would catch up with him. People ignorant of his true nature had always been kind to him. Now this...

“Then I shall die at Dwarven hands and shall know what true Dwarven friendship means.”

“I’m not the one who lied about who I am, Assassin.”

“I am *no* assassin.” Malor protested as he launched a fireball at the Dwarf, catching him in the face. Addle backed away, dragging his knife across the Changeling’s collarbone and shoulder. The knife ripped his clothes and bloodied his tunic.

Meanwhile, the Dwarf’s beard ignited, sending smoke and flame into this face. He patted at it, trying to dowse it while charging after Malor.

Addle bowled him over, barely hitting the Mind Mage but still knocking him to the ground. “Now you die, Changeling.” Raising the knife, he moved in to finish Malor off.

Malor summoned his inner strength to protect him just in time for the Dwarf’s first knife stab. He felt the blade enter his chest with enough force to knock the wind out of him. If not for his power of mind-over-matter, he would have surely been dead.

The Dwarf let go of the knife and pounded Malor across the jaw with his fist. At that point, the Changeling began to wonder if he would survive or not. Desperately, he willed the burnt ends of Addle’s beard to ignite. With a puff, they exploded again in his face, buying enough time for the Changeling to kick his attacker free.

Climbing to his feet, Malor yanked the knife from his chest; the exertion almost knocked him over. Next, he stumbled over to the Dwarf and drove the knife deep into his back. Blood stained Addle’s clothes as his body went rigid and then tumbled to the ground.

Malor took a step away, weakened by the loss of blood and still confused by the sudden betrayal. He stood alone in the forest with only the stars staring down on him. Blood stained his hands, though he could not tell if it was his or the Dwarf’s. It did not matter, he felt weak enough to join the dead warrior at any moment.

The Changeling leaned against a nearby tree, trying to figure out how to stop the bleeding from his chest. His breath felt wheezy, as if a lung had been punctured. Sadly, he knew he lacked the internal strength to heal himself immediately and doubted he would live long enough to meditate long enough to recover it.

Still, he willed his body to heal, forcing all of his mental energy to concentrate on the process. As he lay there recovering from his wounds, he wondered if the return of Netosa might not have been a bad thing.

# The Way Station

## Optional Source Material for Rifts® Chaos Earth™

By Mark Vernon

## A Safe Haven in Madness

When the survivors of the cataclysm talk of the Blue Zones, it is generally believed they are an ever changing place of demons, monsters and other horrors that have no name to describe them. It’s also thought that any human found there is either working for, or trying to make a dark pact with the creatures that the Blue Zones spawn. Or possibly even suicidal. This view is not without merit, and is true more often than not, but it is not the complete picture. Some brave (or foolhardy) souls enter the Blue Zones not to make pacts with monsters, but to learn of the strange energies there, to harness them, and with luck, to find out how to use them to fight the very creatures they bring into the world.

These pioneers of magical study face many problems. Civilians who had their lives shattered by the coming of the shimmering blue lines distrust anything from the Blue Zones and, at best, fear these neophyte wizards, or at worst, hate them for consorting with the enemy. Demon Callers and Death Mages see Blue Zone Wizards and Chaos Wizards as competition or foolish interlopers into their affairs. The horrors of the Blue Zones generally consider them to be slaves, entertainment, or food.

NEMA considers the wizards misguided, but occasionally useful. Certainly, no one else is in a better position to report on the movements, numbers and weaknesses of the monsters from the Blue Zones. However, NEMA has its hands full maintaining control over its own territory, keeping power and heat on for thousands of refugees, plus feeding and guarding them. The Zone Wizards can expect no regular supplies or protection from the forces of NEMA so long as they choose to dwell in the Blue Zones. Of course, living in the Blue Zones means surviving the constant threat from the demons, weird storms, hypothermia, and starvation.

Even with all these problems, the Blue Zone Wizards remain in the Blue Zones, studying the magic there and using it to fight the monsters that threaten them and the world. To survive in such a hostile land, they have banded together and found a safe



haven in the chaos around them. Built with their own hands out of the wreckage of the city, they have called it the Way Station.

## Humble Beginnings of a Hideaway

When the cataclysm ripped the land apart, people were caught completely off guard. The malls, supermarkets, and restaurants were all destroyed or ran out of stock. Supplies that would pour into the city daily stopped dead. Food and drink became more precious than gold as the survivors scrambled to survive. Winter clothing, safe shelter, weapons and medical supplies all became needed more than ever before. When the demons began to overrun areas filled with the Blue Lines the people retreated to the secure areas of NEMA and prayed that things would improve. NEMA itself began hoarding supplies and scavenging the ruins in danger zones for the necessities of life. Rationing of food became mandatory and, for now, the situation is fairly stable. At least compared to most places on Earth.

Away from NEMA's area of control, the Zone Wizards had to learn to survive in the Blue Zones. Many of the first to arrive quickly perished, but those that survived for even a short time could pass on what they learned to the ones that followed. It quickly became clear that the Zone Wizards needed what NEMA had: A secure place they could store supplies, rest, and defend themselves from attack. Until such a place was found, the wizards were forced to spend most of their time looking for food and water, and sleeping wherever was safe at the moment. Just as many neophyte wizards have died from a horde of Hang-Jaw Demon Rats finding them as they slept as have died in battle with a huge, fire-breathing demon.

One small group of Zone Wizards saw this problem and began to search for what was needed. The obvious safe locations (army bunkers, police stations, etc.) were either destroyed or infested with demons. Even if they weren't infested with demons, NEMA had taken care to strip the weapons and supplies from most of them already anyway, so they were unsuitable for use. The shopping malls had everything needed to survive, but were not easily defended and far too vulnerable for a small band of Zone Wizards to fortify effectively. Worse, some demons knew that humans would come there searching for food, and stalked nearby, hoping for a snack of their own.

It was only by chance that a trio of wizards found the place they would call home. Hidden between two collapsed office buildings and looking like a pile of rubble itself in some ways, a bus repair depot was still fairly intact. It had no food, supplies or heat but it needed only minimal repairs to seal it away from the bitter cold and any curious demons. While not a true bunker, the depot was solidly built and had a great deal of space inside. It was also smack dab in the middle of the Blue Zones, making it the perfect location for those who came to study magic and the blue lines. Gathering some more Blue Zone Wizards for help, the depot's windows were boarded up and covered and a crude tunnel entrance was excavated.

After the Zone Wizards had moved in they took stock of the situation. There was no food or water, but there were two buses and all the equipment needed to keep them in good order. The large bay doors were covered with rubble and could not be opened, but the buses were still useful. Long before the cataclysm, Chicago had switched their bus system to electric motors

recharged off the main power grid, so there was no worry of suffocating if the engines were turned on. With the bus heaters and a few strategically placed Campfire Spheres (see *Rise of Magic™*), the depot could be heated quite easily. The buses were quickly converted into dormitories for the wizards, keeping them off the cold concrete floor and giving a small amount of security while they slept.

The depot was fully equipped with tools, which were a great boon. Most of the large wrenches served both as weapons and let the Zone Wizards gain access to food and supplies that had been locked away or hidden. The lockers for the depot were forced open and the supply rooms searched. One room contained stock uniforms and overalls for the drivers and mechanics. The gray uniforms were ill suited to the arctic conditions outside, but they were undamaged and available, so were often used to repair clothes or were sewn into cloaks. The gray color turned out to be excellent camouflage in the city ruins, blending in well with the blasted landscape of dust, concrete, soot, and snow.

For security, the Zone Wizards dug tunnels and escape routes in the rubble and made sure to conceal the entrances. Checkpoints were set up and guarded. As the number of people willing to enter the Blue Zones to study magic increased, so did the number of wizards at the depot. With the depot's repairs mostly done, supplies from other areas were brought in wherever they could be found. Food, water, blankets and the like. The real gem of the scavenging expeditions happened after the Zone Wizards came across the remains of a skirmish between NEMA and a demonic gang. Forgotten in the rubble, a heavily damaged NEMA combat bike was recovered. It's front wheel and laser were gone, crushed under a demon's foot, but the engine was intact. Using parts from the repair depot the wizards were able to jury-rig power cables to the nuclear engine. Now the bus engines and other electrical essentials could be recharged though the ability to charge E-Clips was still beyond them.

As the weeks went by, the depot soon helped cut down on the incredible casualty rate normal among Blue Zone Wizards by giving them a safe haven to rest, and a place to share knowledge about the monsters they encountered daily. Some Chaos Wizards even began learning magic from the more experienced Zone Wizards. Perhaps just as important was the bus depot gave the Zone Wizards a place where their abilities were accepted and could be practiced openly. Far too often, a Chaos Wizard would often be seen as a monster or a demon in disguise by their fellow survivors. In the harsh world of post-apocalypse, many an innocent youth who manifested magic by accident is set upon and lynched, or even more tragically, commits suicide rather than live as a "monster." Just to know there were others who could do the same amazing things as themselves, and who accepted it, saved more than one survivor.

No one is certain who began calling the depot the Way Station, but the name has stuck. This is something they built, and for many of the Zone Wizards, it is now their home.

## Life at the Way Station

The first priority for the Way Station wizards is secrecy. The depot is by no means a Mega-Damage building, nor a defensive structure. Almost any demon could easily destroy it if they knew

about it, so the first rule is to keep it hidden. No rubble or filth dropped from a Blue Line storm is ever cleaned up or removed from around the building. It adds to the camouflage. All entrances to the Way Station are watched around the clock, and are as carefully hidden as possible. One advantage the Zone Wizards have is using magic to cover an entrance with debris, then removing it when it is to be opened again.

In sharp contrast to NEMA's barracks is the level of noise and light at the Way Station. At a standard NEMA barracks, one hears soldiers clomping about at all hours, the whirl of drills and wrenches keeping equipment in good repair, sergeants barking orders and the all too often wail of an alarm warning of another danger that must be dealt with. NEMA has been fairly successful in keeping power and heat on in their area of control, so most buildings are bright. Floodlights scan the open areas near any NEMA building, looking for any signs of monsters who either managed to sneak by the patrols or popped into existence in the safe zone.

The Way Station is quiet and dark by comparison. Conversations are held at whisper level, if at all. Generally, the only sources of light are the Campfire Spheres that are placed around the station for heat. The flickering, magical Campfire Spheres and the dancing shadows make the old bus depot feel rather medieval, suiting the cloaked and hooded wizards well. The quiet and dark is another security measure for the Zone Wizards. None of them are really sure how good the hearing of the average demon is, so they stay as quiet as possible. Any windows the bus depot had are now covered and barred so no hint of light gives away the Way Station's existence. Still, even though the Zone Wizards are as quiet as church mice, the bus depot is rarely without noise. The laughter, screams and other hideous noises of the demons that surround the Way Station are often heard through its thick walls in addition to the rumble and crack of the frequent storms.

Another difference between the Zone Wizards and NEMA is the permanency of their base of operations. NEMA is in Chicago's heart where it has a power plant, factories churning out weapons, combat drones, armor and other needed supplies round the clock. They have medical facilities, the means to recharge E-Clips and manufacture ammunition, barracks, and a command center, not to mention well stocked food and other mundane supplies vital to the working of a military force. They know the area very well, have established regular patrols and have hordes of survivors who depend on them to protect them. Simply put, NEMA cannot leave. There's too much to lose and too much to move. If they lose what they have now, the war against the demon hordes is truly lost. Any demon horde who tries to force them to leave will find themselves under a blistering hail of fire from a very determined group of soldiers fighting to survive and hold on to what they have.

The Zone Wizards at the Way Station have no delusions about their ability to withstand a determined assault. If a demon lord, or even a moderately powerful demon gang find the Way Station and decide to attack, the Zone Wizards might be able to drive them off but the secrecy of the depot would be compromised. It would no longer be safe, and would most likely be attacked until it fell. Consequently, the Zone Wizards use the Way Station as a safe haven but are also looking for other places to

find shelter for when – not if, but when – the Way Station must be abandoned. So far, no large central location has been found suitable, but the Zone Wizards have set up a number of small safe houses and storage areas, typically by using the magic incantation *Move Debris* (see *Rise of Magic*). Hidden inside these small enclosures one could find a small amount of food (usually canned goods), medical supplies (painkillers and bandages), and a weapon or two (a crude club, or maybe a knife). Most wizards in the Way Station know of at least two such safe houses, and should the Way Station be abandoned, they can flee to a hopefully safer location. One problem with this system is should the repair depot be abandoned, it would be very difficult for the Zone Wizards to quickly reassemble again. The wizards don't consider this a major problem though, since they know any of them who is captured may be forced to reveal the location of the others. A wide network of safe houses prevents the entire group from being captured or killed. Again, secrecy is the means of survival in the Blue Zones.

These safe houses also serve a very practical purpose when new Zone Wizards arrive in the Blue Zones. Another wizard is always welcome at the Way Station, but they know very well that appearances can be deceiving. That new Zone Wizard may be one just like them, or could be a demon in disguise, a Demon Caller, a Death Mage, or a Chaos Witch. When someone new arrives in the Blue Zones who looks like they might be a good wizard to bring into the fold, three of the Way Station's wizards will try to make peaceful contact with him. Typically, one actually comes out to greet the person, the other Zone Wizards stay hidden and watch for trouble. If it's a trap, the Zone Wizards simply flee from the enemy. If the meeting goes well, the newcomer is brought to one of the safe houses that has been set up away from the Way Station. There the Zone Wizards quietly question the new wizard, try to determine his feelings on magic, demons, NEMA and other important issues and find out his reason for being in the Blue Zones. After a short time with the potential member, the three Zone Wizards make a quick secret vote to see if they believe the newcomer is worthy of being shown to the Way Station. If all three agree, the newcomer is quietly brought to the Way Station and hopefully he will become a productive member of the small band. In truth, the Zone Wizards would prefer a more thorough way of investigating a novice wizard, but they simply have no other way of doing so at this time.

Just as important as secrecy in the Blue Zones is food and water. Even with magic to restore spoiled food and multiply the amount, it still means there must be some food to use magic on. The nuclear winter has provided an abundance of snow which normally could be melted down into water, but the snow is contaminated by volcanic ash, concrete dust, and bombarded daily by the freakish storms that erupt regularly in the Blue Zones. Without any means to produce the necessities of life on their own, daily forage parties go out to search for food, scavenging in the malls, homes and restaurants for anything they can find. The wizards do everything they can to make the food last, including watering down all food in soups and stews and then freezing it for later. The Zone Wizards know this is only a temporary solution however. Eventually, the food that was in the city will run out. There's been discussion of finding a way to

grow mushrooms or other crops inside the depot, but they lack the facilities or knowledge to do so effectively. Finding a stable source of food is high on their list of priorities.

Beyond secrecy of the Way Station and the means to survive in the Blue Zones, the Zone Wizards also look for survivors (a low priority due to the lack of them in such demon infested locations), study the Blue Lines and demons, learn and teach magic to each other, and scavenge for useful items. In their time in the Blue Zones, the Zone Wizards have found three Automag pistols and five clips of ammunition. Since these are the only weapons available to them, most prefer to rely on their magic. The weapons are communal property and at least one is always kept at the Way Station to protect it.

Though they are well outside of NEMA's safe zone, the Way Station tries to keep in contact with them. Usually the trek is made to the NEMA controlled zone for the purpose of trade, typically medical supplies and food in exchange for information. The Zone Wizards are now able to compare notes about demons and magic, as well as be the first to know when a huge thing has slithered from a Blue Line and is heading NEMA's way. It's not always possible for the Zone Wizards to get a warning out on time, but they help when they can. This journey is always fraught with danger that doesn't end when the messengers reach the NEMA controlled area. The civilians know of the strange things so-called Zone Wizards can do, and often fear they have made horrific pacts with some demonic lord. Fear can turn to blind hate quickly among the survivors and Zone Wizards sometimes face a lynch mob while simply trying to deliver a warning to the people who would kill them.

A few of the Zone Wizards are growing concerned about the number of odd beings coming through the Blue Lines. They don't appear to be monsters or demons, but they're definitely not human. Some seem like aliens lost on a strange world, struggling to survive as best they can. Others look more like creatures of myth but not demonic, such as Elves, Orcs, and Dwarves. It's been debated as to whether to offer help to some of them, but the Way Station's resources are already stretched thin. While some wizards argue helping these dimensional beings could be a remarkable boon for them in terms of learning more about what lies beyond the Blue Zones, the majority caution they can't take such risks now. Demons are well known for their deceptions. For now, these dimensional beings will have to fend for themselves. The Way Station continues to observe them from a distance and occasionally helps them in small ways. A few Zone Wizards hope to eventually establish small trade with select groups of the dimensional beings but such an event is a long way off.

Isolated out at the Way Station, the Zone Wizards are usually quite busy with the day to day struggle to survive. Sometimes however, the sheer number of nearby demons or ferocity of a Blue Line storm forces the Zone Wizards to remain inside the Way Station for days at a time. During these times, the Zone Wizards have had to find ways to pass the time. Using magic, some of the younger Chaos Wizards have taken to painting, splashing bright, bold colors on the buses and walls to make the Way Station a bit more pleasant. Others use these times to practice their magic or discuss the theories about how magic works and how it could be best used to fight back the demon hordes.

Some Zone Wizards have taken to storytelling as pastime, but this is generally considered too loud an activity.

By far the most popular way of passing time at the Way Station is reading and writing. Actual paper books are somewhat rare in the time of the cataclysm. Many books were converted to digital format and it's just not feasible to waste power reading books when you could be heating your home, if you have power at all. Books written on actual paper do exist, but many were lost in the initial cataclysm, more were spoiled by the elements after that, and still more destroyed by the survivors needing fuel for their fires to keep from freezing. As a result, the Blue Zone Wizards are actually collecting a small but growing library of books on a variety of subjects. Some have even taken to writing themselves, penning their observations on demons and magic of the Blue Zones for future reference or simply keeping a diary during these harsh times. In time, this will help preserve literacy among them as more knowledge is lost with the fall of civilization.

## The Challenges of a Blue Zone Wizard

In the world of Chaos Earth, playing a Zone Wizard requires a different mind set from the player running a member of NEMA. The soldiers of NEMA are expected to put their lives on the line for others and are fully capable of going above and beyond the call of duty. It is this dedication and perseverance in the face of the horrors of the Blue Zones that have allowed NEMA to hold on to what they have and make occasional strikes at the demonic forces around them. These are heroes born, bred, and trained.

In contrast, the Blue Zone Wizards who make their home in the Blue Zones are, for the most part, civilians. Even former police and firemen of Chicago typically join forces with NEMA. It's closest to what they knew before the cataclysm, it's how they feel they can best help their fellow man. Blue Zone Wizards have no military training, no system of rank, no great call to fight the good fight. Consequently, there won't be squads of Zone Wizards scouring the Blue Zones for demons to fight, working in perfect co-ordination and blasting away with deadly precision. Discussions about what plan of action to follow aren't simply decided by one Zone Wizard and then his orders are followed. Instead, Zone Wizards are more cautious and try to avoid or outwit their foes rather than outfight them. Drawing on too much power of the Blue Lines is as likely to work as to destroy the user, so a clever use for a small bit of magic often trumps a huge blast of eldritch energy. Being so close to the Blue Lines, the Zone Wizards know new vile things spew forth from them every day – or every hour – so what worked on a threat yesterday may not today. They know the idea of a standard operating procedure just doesn't work under these circumstances. They have to make it up as they go and be ready to change the plan at a moment's notice. Or cut their losses and run.

A Blue Zone Wizard's battle is also an isolated one. NEMA maintains regular patrols and scours their own area to ensure that no monsters have managed to sneak past the patrols. Strike teams sent into hot zones are armed to the teeth, ready to cull the demons to make sure they don't attack en masse. But no

matter where any of the soldiers of NEMA go, they know help is just a radio call away. Even if their radio is jammed or broken, lost radio contact raises an alarm back at base and a rescue squad is dispatched. Silver Eagles can arrive in minutes, heavier troops shortly after.

The Zone Wizards don't have advanced communications, have no effective strategy for dispatching help to any of their group who find themselves in trouble, or even any way of learning a group member is in trouble. They are slowly learning to be prepared for such things, and do try to keep in touch with their own forage expeditions. But it is pretty much assumed that any wizards out in the Blue Zones must rely on themselves in an emergency. As a result, the Zone Wizards have learned to depend on the people around them, and on themselves, and will be extra cautious in every situation.

Another problem facing the Blue Zone Wizard is the reaction from other survivors. NEMA soldiers are widely seen as saviors of mankind, fighting against the forces that threaten to overwhelm the last remaining pockets of humanity in the world. They provide food, shelter, heat and medical care for them. They are quite literally the hope for the future.

On the other hand, even if a Zone Wizard does some good with his magic, say if he saves a town from destruction, fights demons, or saves a life, there is very little chance he'll be thanked. At best he may get a fearful glance as those he saved rush to hide from him. Even if it's clear he saved their lives, the survivors are more likely to be convinced that it was some trick or deception. In the minds of many survivors, if someone shows they can use the magic of the Blue Zones, that makes him a threat or demon in disguise.

All this has drawn the Blue Zone Wizards together into a very tight-knit group that knows if they are to survive they must rely on each other and pool their knowledge and resources. They have not abandoned their fellow man. They have not become corrupted by the magic they wield (they hope). The Zone Wizards are working to learn how to use the magic the world is now bathed in, to help the other survivors around them, and take the fight to the demons. If there is one advantage the Zone Wizards have in their plight it is their magic, and the constant day to day battle has given them a very sharp learning curve. Though the sink or swim approach is a very dangerous way to teach magic, it is working for the Way Station. At least, among the survivors.

# The Hammer of the Forge

## Chapter Forty-Six

### “And Two”

By James M. G. Cannon

A grav car met them at the spaceport as they disembarked, and whisked them through a maze of freeways and highways, out of the city and into the barren wasteland outside the metroplex. The six of them, squeezed into the small compartment of the car, made for a tight fit. Joriel, the biomechanical Celestine, took up the most room. He was a big guy to begin with, but the maroon feathered wings erupting from his back made him half again as large. Curled up next to him, literally under his wings, the Atlantean Undead Slayer Kassiopaea Acherean looked almost tiny, despite being well over six feet tall herself, and clad in the bulky, rune-inscribed battle armor of her order. Beside Kassy reclined Arwen Griffin, a young martial artist with green skin and blue hair, who otherwise looked human enough. Across from Arwen sat Sammadar Orak, herself encased in the insectile power armor she had stolen from the K!ozn Continuum, a beyond state-of-the-art killing machine painted a riot of day-glo colors. Only one person, the man on her left, knew that within that suit of armor was a green haired, pixie-ish near-human. Caleb Vulcan, Knight of the Cosmic Forge, had dispensed with his badge of office, the armor of a Cosmo-Knight. He often preferred to wear street clothes, and it allowed for some slight room within the confines of the grav car. On Caleb's left sat a shadowy being in a trench coat and fedora, his only fixed features a pair of glowing orange lights, about where eyes would be in a solid being. This was Doctor Abbott, one of the most accomplished wizards in the Three Galaxies.

“I had no idea you were a member of the Fraternity of Stars,” Abbott said in Orak's direction. He had a British accent, despite growing up in the Three Galaxies, where as far as Caleb knew, there existed no British Isles anywhere.

Orak's voice was a modulated buzz, and helped keep her identity secret. “Membership has its benefits. Little jobs like this one come my way every once in a while. Keeps my life interesting.” By profession she was a mercenary and Galactic Tracer; a bounty hunter. But the Fraternity of Stars was anything but mercenary. Rather, it was a guild of explorers, adventurers, and freelancers who gadded about the Three Galaxies getting into trouble... and occasionally solving problems.

“Yes, I would imagine so,” Abbott said. “I've been a member myself for nearly fifty solar years. Of course, I haven't done a 'job' for the brotherhood in some time. I seem to be quite able

to find trouble on my own.” He chuckled slightly. “Or with Caleb and Kassy’s help.”

Beside Abbott, Caleb grunted. He only listened to Abbott and Orak talking with half an ear. Orak’s connection to the fraternity and her little mission to investigate some mysterious arch did not concern him half as much as Elias Harkonnen. Harkonnen, killer and pirate, terrorist and former Invincible Guardsman, had recently escaped from prison. Caleb was the one who put him there in the first place, and now that Harkonnen was loose, Caleb wanted nothing more than to find him and put him back. But the Three Galaxies were a large place, and with no leads, the trail had dried up. While the group waited for Harkonnen to show himself, they had agreed to accompany Orak to this arch. But Caleb wasn’t happy about it.

While Caleb silently stewed and the other members of the party made small talk, the grav car made its inexorable way to the arch site. According to the flash sent to Orak by the Fraternity, this archway had grown out of the earth one morning in the middle of the planet Dusk’s desert. There wasn’t much else in the flash, other than that it was covered in runes and seemed to defy analysis by conventional means.

Which is why the conventional authorities turned to the Fraternity of Stars, who turned to Orak.

Which brought them to the present.

The grav car pulled off the road and into the impromptu camp that had arisen around the arch. Through the windows of the car, Caleb saw a dozen brightly colored tents, portable generators, a fleet of grav cars, two tanks, and some kind of lattice strung with lights and dishes and monitors. And beyond them, looming over all of them, the arch itself.

The arch was immense, easily ten meters high, apparently formed from the same sandstone as the outcrops of rock the grav car had passed on the way to the site. There were indeed runes carved into the stone, strange whirls and lines that made no sense to Caleb.

The car dropped them in the middle of the camp, and it took another half hour of introductions and handshakes and bruised egos for them to navigate through Dusk’s bureaucracy and get to the arch itself. The sun, high in the sky by this time, created a large shadow across the camp.

Abbott, nearly invisible in the bright sunlight, twirled his cane in his hands and made little clucking sounds. Caleb tugged at Abbott’s elbow. “Can you read it?”

Abbott looked at Caleb. “Not a jot.”

Caleb tried to quell the stab of worry that accompanied the wizard’s declaration.

The six of them were finally cleared to approach the arch, and made their way through the camp and past the lattice. None of them were dressed for desert conditions. Joriel shaded who he could under his wings, while Arwen and Kassy both gulped water from canteens provided by Dusk’s authorities.

The party stood a dozen meters away from the arch when the runes flickered alight and the space between the arch’s arms began to glow.

“Interesting,” Abbott said. Everyone looked at him.

Orak’s voice crackled. “I’m not getting any readings through my suit. Weird. It’s like this thing isn’t even here. I can see it through the visor, but the HUD isn’t picking a damn thing up.”

“Why is it doing that?” Caleb asked Abbott.

“I’m sure we’re about to find out,” Abbott said. “This arch is clearly a gate. The only question is, are we here to see something come through, or are we being invited to cross over ourselves?”

“I’m not sure I want to know the answer to that question,” Kassy said.

The glow from the arch intensified, and without discussion, the six of them all reacted instinctively. Caleb sheathed himself in his metallic red centurion armor. Arwen activated her force shield, enveloping herself in a warm violet glow. A blue white sword dripping with fire appeared in Kassy’s hands, and Joriel summoned up his blazer, a similar weapon composed of psionic force. Orak’s armored right arm morphed into the barrel of a massive gun. Only Abbott stood serene and unperturbed as the glowing wave reached out and gathered them up and pulled them into the arch.

In just an eyeblink, the six of them spilled out of the other side of the arch, into another world. The sun and shadows were gone, replaced by a black sky with low, scudding dark clouds, outlined with bursts of red lightning. They stood in the midst of a plaza made up of square cut stones, surrounded on all sides by oddly shaped buildings, something like ziggurats. Behind them stood a massive arch, the twin of the one on Dusk, down to the runes carved across its expanse, but this one was fashioned from the same square-cut stones as the plaza and the ziggurats.

“Qrun,” Joriel swore.

Abbott looked back at the arch and his eyes flickered in his version of a frown.

“This look familiar to anyone else?” Kassy asked.

Caleb shook his head, then paused. He heard something moving in the darkness. Arwen stepped past Caleb, still glowing. She nodded. “We don’t have a dozen Undead Slayers with us this time.”

“What are you talking about?” Orak asked.

“This place looks oddly similar to a world that Joriel, Abbott, Arwen and I visited recently,” Kassy said. “It was crawling with...”

Kassy trailed off as a horde of slaving vampires swarmed into the plaza, pale-skinned and clad in ragged clothes, eyes gleaming redly in the semi-darkness.

Caleb took an involuntary step back as the tide rushed towards them. Near him, Arwen bounced on the balls of her feet. “Rematch,” she said happily. Caleb was less enthusiastic. He remembered Kassy and Abbott discussing their visit to this world. Joriel was nearly killed last time, and the team only survived because it was made up largely of Atlantean Undead Slayers, each one armed to the teeth with vampire-destroying magic tattoos. From what Kassy had said, vampires could only be harmed by a handful of substances, among them water, wood, silver, and



sunlight. Caleb didn't have a single weapon made of any of those elements, and he was not nearly so invulnerable himself. Vampires didn't fight with energy weapons, but with fists and claws and teeth. That horde would tear him apart, just as easily as it had torn Joriel apart. Caleb spared a glance at the Celestine. Joriel's mouth was set in a grim line, and his blazer didn't waver, but Caleb could tell that Joriel was shaken.

Abbott gestured and a bouncing ball of glowing yellow light leapt from his palm and up into the air, where it bobbed happily, creating a circle of light around the six of them. The vampires halted at the edge of Abbott's light, barking and growling and gesturing at the six of them with their claws. They might have been saying words, but not in any language that Caleb knew.

"The Globe of Daylight will keep them at bay while we consider a strategy," Abbott said.

"How about we just bug out back through the gate?" Orak said.

Abbott's eyes twinkled in his version of a smile. "That's going to be difficult, as the gate was only one way. I can certainly get us back to Dusk, but it will take time to set up the ritual and gather the necessary psychic energy. I must admit however that I am curious as to why we have returned to this hostile place."

Caleb and Kassy exchanged a look. She could keep them all alive long enough for Abbott to solve his mystery, but it wouldn't be pretty. Caleb nodded. Kassy started activating tattoos.

\* \* \*

Elsewhere, another Cosmo-Knight had passed through a similar arch-gate on another planet spinning somewhere in the black, far from Dusk.

Ariel of Titan, clad in her silver Hoplite armor, stepped through on a volcanic planet, and stepped out onto the roof of a cyclopean building that looked to be built from some kind of green soapstone. The sky was low and scarlet, like a weeping wound. As she looked around, Ariel noticed that the soapstone was pitted and scarred, as if marked with acid. Behind Ariel loomed a soapstone arch, twin to the one she had stepped through on the volcanic planet. The Forge had brought her to the first gate, but she didn't feel any particular pull now that she had stepped through.

Ariel reached out with her cosmic awareness and tried to sense where she might have landed. But her cosmic awareness buzzed angrily in the back of her skull. Whatever stars there might be beyond the red sky, they were foreign ones. Ariel remained lost.

Still, she knew she had traveled to another dimension, and one of her gifts as a Titan allowed her to bridge the gulf between realities. With some trial and error, she could conceivably find her way back to the Three Galaxies. But not yet. The Cosmic Forge wanted her to pass through that arch for some reason, and she would discover it.

Ariel walked across the expanse of the roof to the edge, and looked out upon a cyclopean ruin. Around her, stretching in all directions, were towering buildings of the same construction. Many of them lay shattered to rubble, and gigantic boulders lay strewn about the city like giant's toys. Strange glyphs and fig-

ures were etched into the stone, and gargoyle-like projections erupted from the gables and joints of the buildings. Many of them were smashed and scarred as well.

The city seemed to stretch as far as Ariel could see, a crumbling, decaying monument to some long-dead civilization.

Then, as Ariel watched, the gargoyles began to move. They contorted and stretched and expanded and lifted themselves from the walls and began to climb. She recognized them for what they really were, now, by their leathery skin and insect eyes, their curving horns and grasping claws. Hordelings. Deevils. Devils. Demons.

Hundreds of them, climbing and leaping and suddenly flying up the side of the building on which Ariel stood, moving with preternatural speed. They moved without sound or cry, just the rustle of wings, the crunch of claws digging into rock, the gasps of living creatures exerting themselves.

Beneath her silver helmet, Ariel grimaced. She called up her signature weapon, a great two-handed sword that was as long as she was tall, and prepared to meet her foes. They came crashing up over the side of the building, a wave of flesh, and they fell upon her. She swung her sword with Forge-enhanced Titan strength, and unleashed blasts of silver light that burned through demonic flesh, and they died in droves. But in the end, there were too many of them, and they overwhelmed her. She was lost.

\* \* \*

Another archway, appearing on the CCW core world Dravidia, managed to capture a squad of CAFFCO marines and one scientist.

They stumbled out of the arch onto a sandy floor beneath a marble arch carved with runes. The marines managed to keep their feet and held their weapons at the ready, but the scientist fell face forward into the sand. His name was Vodal Kee, and he was a Sinestrian, a serpentine being who lacked limbs of his own. He made up for the lack with a set of bionic waldoes that he wore at about shoulder height. Right now they were sprawled out helplessly, metal fingers grasping weakly at nothing. His datapad lay just out of reach in the sand.

Vodal looked up, past his datapad. "Nine Hells," he said.

The roar he heard wasn't the aftereffects of the jaunt through the gate. Around him rose the columns and tiers of a gigantic coliseum, packed to the rafters with shouting and gesticulating fans. Banners waved in the breeze, emblazoned with a blue helmet with horns that looked vaguely familiar, but Vodal was too stressed to think of where he had seen it before. At the far end of the arena stood two of the largest humanoids Vodal had ever seen, brightly skinned and clad in an odd mixture of heavy furs and crude armor plates. They fought, swinging huge blunt instruments of destruction against one another that resounded with terrific crashes as each thunderous blow connected. The giants had yet to notice the intruders, but the audience saw the gate flare and dump its contents onto the killing floor.

Vodal noticed cameras, hovering overhead, begin to rotate and focus on the newcomers.

"On your tail, sir," one of the marines said, grabbing at one of Vodal's waldoes and nearly wrenching it free of the chassis.

"I don't need help," Vodal snapped. He was beginning to panic. What would happen when those giants noticed them? Quickly, Vodal got his tail under him and rose smoothly to his full height. The marine shouldered his weapon and stepped in front of Vodal, aiming at the giants.

"Anyone know what just happened?" asked another marine. Under her helmet, her voice had a nervous quaver.

"Qrunning magic," muttered another marine. "I bet this is some kind of attack from the United Worlds of Warlock."

"That doesn't make a lick of sense, corporal," said the first marine, the one who had tried to pull Vodal up. "Now button it, unless you got something intelligent to say." Vodal realized from the stripes on the marine's shoulder plates that he was the sergeant in charge of the squad, and something like relief flooded into his hearts. Someone else was taking charge, someone who could act decisively in a crisis situation.

"Okay," the sergeant said, "standard circular pattern. Keep the civilian safe, weapons at the ready. We are making our way to those doors over there." The sergeant pointed with two fingers towards a pair of massive doors on the far left.

"Should we leave the arch, sarge?" asked the nervous marine.

The sergeant looked over his shoulder at Vodal, as if asking for clarification. "I have no idea what activated the gate, or what might set it off again," Vodal said. The sergeant nodded, as if he had expected as much.

That was when one of the giants crashed to the ground, causing a quake that unsteadied the marines and nearly toppled Vodal. With his foe defeated, the other giant noticed for the first time the small squad of marines and the scientist. The giant hefted his massive, bloody mace, and began to walk towards them.

Vodal squeaked in fear.

The marines opened up. Flashes of yellow light hammered into the giant. He barely slowed. The marines began to move as one towards the doors, all but dragging Vodal along with them. The crowd roared even louder. Vodal's head rang. He felt queasy.

Somehow, the doors appeared before them. One of the marines scurried to the side, where an access panel lay, and produced an electronic lock pick. There came a whooshing sound, and Vodal whipped his head around to see the massive mace sweep aside the two marines closest to him with a sickening crunch. The marines were thrown across the sand like rag dolls and fell to the arena floor, dead. Vodal heard someone screaming, and realized it was himself as the giant leaned down and stared hard at him with one huge bloodshot eye.

One of the marines pushed Vodal down roughly and fired point blank into the giant's eye. The huge humanoid howled and lurched backward, and the grenades came out. Explosions rocked the giant, and he fell backwards another step, tottering on his feet. The sergeant hauled Vodal upright once more, just as the doors cycled open. The remaining marines, Vodal in tow, stepped through the opening, laying down suppressive fire at the enraged and wounded giant.

The hacker marine keyed the door shut, and for a moment, they were safe.

Vodal looked at the sergeant. "I didn't even get their names," he said.

"Rennick and Kayser," the sergeant said. "Good people."

The doors shuddered with a massive impact. The giant was hammering at it, trying to get in.

The sergeant hefted his rifle, ejected the E-Clip and jammed a fresh one into the port. "We need to keep moving," he said.

Vodal looked at the sergeant as if he were mad, then at the four remaining marines. Their expressions were hidden by their helmets and blast shields, but their posture spoke of grim acceptance. Two of their number were already dead, they were lost in hostile territory, and they couldn't even be sure they were still in the Three Galaxies. Just what was that gate, and where had it taken them?

It was then that Vodal realized that his datapad, with all the information he had absorbed from the gate, was still out on the arena floor. He hoped he wouldn't need it, but had a sinking feeling that he would.

\* \* \*

Elsewhere, the time traveling Romana Vorishchenko ne Usckios stepped into a gate herself, this one formed out of the ruins of an old city of the Burschian Dominion. Although alone, and apparently armed with only a laser pistol, Romana was fully confident in her ability to handle whatever might lie on the other side of the gate. The Time Council, the enigmatic body for which she worked, had entrusted her with the Singularity Watch, a powerful time-traveling device. Romana was still familiarizing herself with the full capabilities of the device, but remained reasonably certain she could handle any amount of trouble that came her way.

When the blue glow faded and her eyes adjusted, she found herself standing on a vast plain beneath a bright blue, cloudless sky. Before her, massing in columns and rows, stood two huge armies facing one another. It appeared that a battle was about to begin.

Romana put a hand on the butt of her pistol, then slowly began to approach the gathering host. She saw scouts in the tall grass pointing at her and beginning to advance. They called out to her in some guttural tongue that she couldn't understand. As they drew closer, Romana realized that they weren't human. They were Ogres; oversized, brutish humanoids in heavy armor, armed with spears and axes. They lumbered toward Romana. Behind them, the armies began to come together with a shuddering crash. The opposing army was even larger than the Ogres, and more crudely armed. It took a moment for Romana to realize that they were Trolls.

What was this place? Romana wondered. Some backwater world in the United Worlds of Warlock? The UWW was populated by Elves and Trolls and Ogres and such creatures, but they generally had access to the same technology as the rest of the Three Galaxies. Ogretopia, in particular, was known as a tech-

nological hub within the UWW, and for producing some of the worst terrorists in the UWW. But there weren't any Ogres in the Three Galaxies who still used primitive weapons, as far as Romana was aware.

They had reached her now, and the ogres encircled her, growling and barking in their primitive tongue. One of them jabbed at her with a spear, and Romana stepped back despite herself. She brushed a palm across the face of the Singularity Watch, activating the translator program. But it didn't work. The Ogres still jabbered at her, and they were losing their tempers.

But the Singularity Watch was keyed into every era of the Three Galaxies. There was no reason why it wouldn't be able to translate their language... unless she wasn't in the Three Galaxies any longer.

One of the Ogres roared, raising an axe. Romana blanched. Quickly, she cast a spell, freezing time for a few precious moments. Romana ran through the grass, away from the Ogres and the battle. She didn't get far before the scouts rejoined the timestream, but she didn't look back as the axe dropped.

Romana kept running. The clash of armies drowned out any sounds of pursuit.

Then, suddenly, Romana slammed into something solid. She bounced, bit her lip, and fell backward into the tall grass. Quickly, she got her feet under her, and risked a glance back. Most of the Ogres had given up, returned to their battle, but one of them still stalked her. The one with the axe.

Before her, she saw no sign of a barrier, just the grassy plain stretching out as far as she could see. But when she reached out, she felt something smooth and solid, slick like glass. She rapped her knuckles against it, and heard no echo.

The Ogre drew closer.

Romana preferred not to settle things violently, but she figured she could handle one Ogre. She drew her pistol and drew a bead on the advancing Ogre. Then a thought occurred to her, and she spun, taking a step back, and fired. Red light flashed from the muzzle and burned through the invisible barrier. The wall shattered, and fell to the plain in sheets of mirrored glass.

Beyond, Romana saw rolling dunes, a caravan of lizard-like creatures crossing the roof of them. Beyond, a gigantic coliseum stretched high into the sky. The roar of the crowd could be heard, even from where Romana stood. On the other side of the arena, she saw a large city of adobe and stone rolling across the dunes.

She looked back at the grassy plain. The lone Ogre stood dumbfounded, his axe hanging limply in his hands.

"What is this place?" Romana said.



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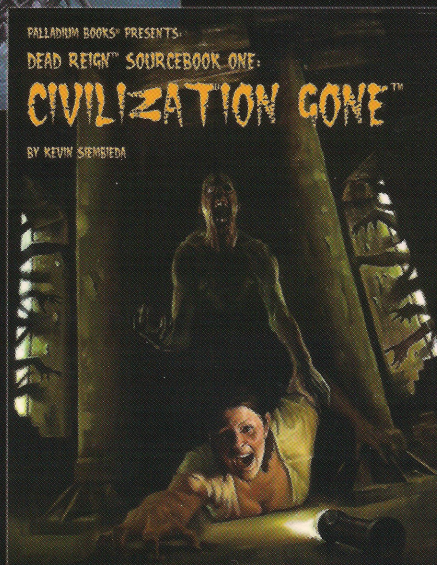
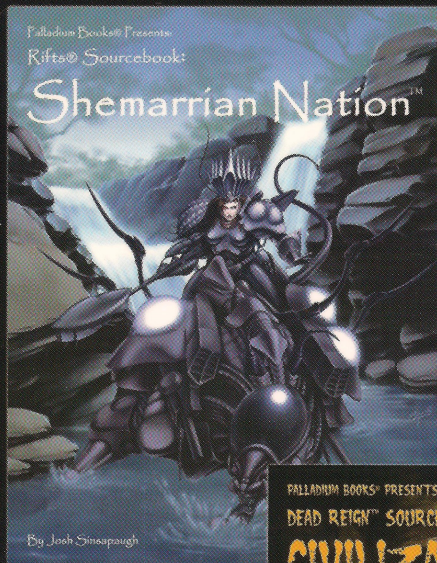
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