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RIFTS®

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C. WALTON

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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 65

Your Guide to the Palladium Megaverse®!

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The slogan “A Megaverse of adventure – limited only by your imagination,” RPG Tactics, and titles and names such as Armageddon Unlimited, Aliens Unlimited, Arzno, Atorian Empire, ARCHIE-3, Beyond Arcanum, Beyond the Supernatural, BTS-2, Brod-kil, Biomancy, Biomancer, Bio-Wizardry, ‘Burbs, ‘Borg, ‘Bot, Dead Reign, Dimensional Outbreak, Dinosaur Swamp, Dyval, Elf-Dwarf War, Heroes Unlimited, I.S.P., Land of the Damned, Lazlo, Victor Lazlo, Lazlo Agency, Lazlo Society, Palladium of Desires, C.A.M.E.L.O.T., Chi-Town, CS, Coalition States, Cosmo-Knight, Crazy, Cyber-Knight, D-Bee, Dark Day, Dead Boy, Doc Reid, Dog Boy, Dog Pack, Dweomer, Emperor Prosek, Erin Tarn, Fadetown, Free Quebec, Gadgets Unlimited, Gargoyle Empire, Glitter Boy, Gramercy Island, Hardware Unlimited, Heroes of the Megaverse, Heroes Unlimited, HU2, Juicer, Ley Line Walker, M.D.C., Mechanoid Space, Mega-Damage, Mega-Hero, Megaversal, MercTown, Minion War, Morphus, Mutant Underground, Mysteries of Magic, Merc Ops, Naruni, Naruni Enterprises, NEMA, Ninjas & Superspies, NGR, Northern Gun, The Nursery, P.P.E., Powers Unlimited, Psi-Stalker, Psyscape, SAMAS, S.D.C., Shifter, Siege on Tolkeen, Skelebot, Skraypers, Sorcerer’s Forge, Splugorth, Splynncryth, Splynn, Techno-Wizard, Temporal Magic, Temporal Wizard, Three Galaxies, Tome Grotesque, Triax, Vampire Kingdoms, Warpath: Urban Jungle, Void Runners, Wilk’s, Wolfen, Wolfen Wars, Wormwood, Wulfen, Xiticix, and other names, titles, slogans, and the likenesses of characters are trademarks owned by Kevin Siembieda and Palladium Books Inc.

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Palladium Books® Presents:

THE RIFTER® #65



BRANDT - 97

Sourcebook and Guide to the Palladium Megaverse®

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Special Thanks to all our contributors, writers and artists this issue, especially new contributors. Our apologies to anybody who may have gotten accidentally left out or their name misspelled.

– *Kevin Siembieda, 2014*

Contents – The Rifter® #65 – January, 2014

Page 6 – From the Desk of Kevin Siembieda

Publisher Kevin Siembieda talks about 2013, our goals for the New Year and the many exciting books and projects coming in 2014. That includes **Rifts® Northern Gun™ Two** and **Megaverse® in Flames** (be prepared to be wowed by both) in the next couple of months, **Robotech® RPG Tactics™** this spring, and a number of long-awaited RPG titles for **Chaos Earth®**, **Beyond the Supernatural™**, and others.

Page 7 Art – Mark Dudley

This superhero extravaganza is by artist *Mark Dudley*. It features characters Mark has created over the years for his **Heroes Unlimited™** campaigns or characters inspired by **Heroes Unlimited™** for other uses, such as the *Candy Coated* comic book. Mark cut his teeth on Heroes Unlimited and has played HU games for more than 25 years. Palladium is proud to be a source of fun and inspiration to a few generation of gamers, like Mark. Keep your imaginations burning bright.

Page 7 – Palladium News

This issue's news talks about what's boiling behind the scenes at Palladium and the many game lines we want to support, Kickstarters, friends and our plans for conventions. The **2014 Gen Con Indy** is the big convention of the year for Palladium and we're already planning all kinds of stuff for it. On that front, it looks like Palladium Megaversal Ambassadors and Game Masters will be running 50+ role-playing gaming events for many different Palladium settings. An all-time record for Palladium-based game events. Read all about it.

Page 10 – Coming Attractions

New books are finally being released on a more frequent basis as well as special editions and titles back in print. **Rifts® Northern Gun™ Two**, **Rifts® Megaverse® in Flames™**, **Chaos Earth® Sourcebook: Rise of Magic™**, **Robotech®: Expeditionary Force Marines™ Sourcebook One**, **Robotech® RPG Tactics™**, and other cool 2014 releases. Make sure you do NOT miss out on the **Special Anniversary Edition Hardcover for Heroes Unlimited™** (February) and the **Palladium Fantasy RPG®** (April).

Page 16 – 2014 Rifter® Super-Subscription Limited Time Offer

We always encourage Palladium gamers to support their local game store, but if you can't easily find The Rifter® you should consider subscribing. And subscribe now when you can get a *FREE gift* and increased discount, and get this inspiring sourcebook delivered right to your door. And please tell your friends. **Offer expires February 28, 2014.** Place your order today.

Page 17 – Hollow Road – An adventure for Beyond the Supernatural™

Anthony Uyl presents a psychological adventure of deception and horror that chills the soul. And introduces the **Soul Merchant** monster.

Page 19 – Demville Locations
Page 24 – Hollow Road Locations
Page 26 – Emma Stats
Page 27 – Soul Merchant Stats
Page 28 – Soul Hound Stats
Page 29 – NPC Quick Stats
Artwork by *Benjamin Rodriguez*.

Page 31 – Necromancy and the Power of Death – Optional source material for Rifts® & others

New contributor, *Eric Siems*, serves up a delicious, macabre tour de force offering 60 new Necromancy spells, plus Necro-O.C.C.s, the Bone Merchant NPC and Necromancy-based magic items. Wow. Welcome to The Rifter®, Eric.

Page 31 – Spell descriptions start.
Page 32 – Levels Two and Three
Page 33 – Levels Four and Five
Page 34 – Level Six
Page 35 – Level Seven
Page 36 – Level Eight
Page 37 – Level Nine
Page 38 – Levels 10 and 11
Page 39 – Level 12
Page 40 – Level 13
Page 41 – Level 14 and 15
Page 41 – Spells of Legend
Page 43 – Dread Knight O.C.C.
Page 44 – Spirit Caller O.C.C.
Page 46 – Bone Merchant NPC
Page 47 – Necromantic Bone Crafting
Page 47 – Potions
Page 48 – Jewelry & Lesser Artifacts
Page 48 – Weapons and Armor
Artwork by *Tanya J. Ramsey*.

Page 50 – Rifts® Black Market: Rise to Power – Optional source material for Rifts®

Maxwell Kautsch presents an interesting study of the rising to power within the cutthroat arena of the criminal Black Market. He also introduces the City State of Singer, New York, as a trade hub of one such rising faction. All of it setting the stage for adventure and intrigue.

Page 51 – Singer, New York
Page 60 – Singer: Present Day
Page 63 – Gang Activity
Artwork by *Nick Bradshaw*.

Page 68 – Once More unto the Breach – Optional source material for Heroes Unlimited™

Alex Tulloch offers more adventure ideas, C.A.M.E.L.O.T. background and a new batch of superhuman heroes, their HQ and some gadgets for your gaming enjoyment.

Page 69 – Cordelia
Page 71 – Romeo
Page 73 – Hotspur

Page 74 – Prospero
Page 75 – Rosalind
Page 75 – Ganymede I
Page 76 – Ganymede II
Page 77 – Ganymede III & IV
Page 77 – Hermia
Page 78 – Hermia’s Bike
Page 79 – Team Shakespeare’s HQ
Page 79 – Hook, Line & Sinker Adventures
Artwork by *Allen and Brian Manning*.

Page 80 – Contemporary High-Tech Robotics and Other Gadgets – *Optional source material for Heroes Unlimited™*

David F. Smith presents all kinds of ideas and high-tech devices for use in **Heroes Unlimited™** based around a company/organization known as **ICS** (Integrated Cyber Systems).

Page 81 – Integrated Cyber Systems (ICS)
Page 82 – Artificial Implants and Limbs.
Page 83 – Commercial Systems and Drones.
Page 85 – Military Systems and Robots.
Page 86 – Legionnaire Combat Suit.
Page 88 – Building Your Own Robot from Scratch.
Artwork by *Mike Mumah*.

Page 89 – Chaos Eve – **A short story about Chaos Earth® on the eve of destruction**

Shawn Merrow makes his debut as a writer of prose in this story of the end of the old world and the Coming of the Rifts.

The Theme for Issue 65

The theme of **The Rifter #65** is the secrets of attaining and using power. In some cases, like Necromancy and the Soul Merchant, that power may be feared and shunned by others, and used for nefarious purposes. Meanwhile, heroes must learn to use their powers, magic and special abilities for good. Please note that we are celebrating the **30th Anniversary of Heroes Unlimited™** all year. That means every 2014 issue of **The Rifter®** will contain something for it. New **Heroes Unlimited™** titles should be coming your way in 2014 and 2015. Fantasy, too.

The Rifter® Needs You

We need new writers and artists to fill the next few decades of **The Rifter®**. You do not need to be a professional writer to contribute to **The Rifter®**. This publication is like a “fanzine,” written by fans for fans. A forum in which gamers just like *you* can submit articles, G.M. advice, player tips, house rules, adventures, new magic, new psionics, new super abilities, monsters, villains, high-tech weapons, vehicles, power armor, short works of fiction and more. So think about writing up something short (even something as small as 4-6 pages). Newcomers and regular contributors are always welcomed.

The Rifter® needs new material, especially when it comes to adventures and source material, 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 and get four free copies to show to your friends and family.

The Cover

Every 2014 cover of **The Rifter®** will celebrate the 30th Anniversary of the *Heroes Unlimited™ RPG*. This city scene of heroes on patrol is by Palladium artist and fan favorite, **Charles Walton**.

Optional and Unofficial Rules & Source Material

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

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

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

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

www.palladiumbooks.com – **Palladium Online**

The Rifter® #66

The Rifter® #66 will present a nice variety of new source material for Heroes Unlimited and other Palladium RPG settings.

- **Cover by Amy L. Ashbaugh.**
- **Source material for Rifts®.**
- **Source material for Heroes Unlimited™.**
- **Source material for other settings.**
- **News, coming attractions and much more.**
- **And maybe YOUR submission. Send us something and see if you get published.**

Bringing you infinite possibilities limited only by your imagination™

Celebrating 30 years of Heroes Unlimited™

From the Desk of Kevin Siembieda

Happy New Year, 2014. I know this salutation will come to most of you 30+ days after the event, but as I write this, New Year's Day has just passed.

2013, a year dominated by **Robotech®**

The year behind us was a wild one. The success of the **Robotech® RPG Tactics™ Kickstarter** was as thrilling as you get. It showed we were correct about Robotech® fans wanting a product like this, and it put Palladium Books back in the forefront of gaming excitement. Fantastic.

Not so fantastic was the unexpected mountain of work and demands placed on our time to manage the Kickstarter and get this product manufactured and released.

Robotech® RPG Tactics™ is a huge undertaking and has been more challenging to everyone than anticipated. From Palladium to the team at Ninja Division and the manufacturers in China, this has been a complex and time-devouring process. That has resulted in one heartbreaking rescheduling of a release date after another. And the delays keep coming. Gahhhh, it is so frustrating, but we refuse to cut corners. As far as Palladium is concerned, **Robotech® RPG Tactics™** must be a masterpiece. It must look great, and satisfy and capture the fun feel of the Robotech® TV show. Palladium has a reputation for delivering quality products and fun games, and we intend **Robotech® RPG Tactics™** to wow and delight you.

This has also meant considerably higher costs than the original estimates, but we are not going to skimp on a game that we Robotech® fans have wanted for nearly three decades! And that's one of the fun and amazing things for us at Palladium Books®: We are publishing this new game line. We – with the help of Ninja Division and an army of creative artists, writers and play testers – are bringing **Robotech®** to life in a new area of gaming. As fan boys ourselves, this is a dream come true.

So, yes, looking back at it now, our unbridled enthusiasm and lack of experience led Palladium Books and Ninja Division to vastly underestimate the time required to make and release this product line and do it right. Looking back, it was unrealistic to think we could release **Robotech® RPG Tactics™** and the range of game pieces and items in the Kickstarter by November or December, 2013. Palladium is new to this type of game and manufacturing, so we didn't know. Our apologies, but the bottom line is **Robotech® RPG Tactics™** will be epic and all the Kickstarter components promised to our supporters WILL see release in 2014. We are trying to get everything made and released as quickly as possible, but that is just not as fast as we all want. The good news is the game rules are fun, fast and intuitive, and the quality of all game components is top notch. And most of all, it is a game made by Robotech fans for Robotech fans. We know you're going to love it.

Where's the Books?

2013 was also a year with few new book releases till the end of the year, but all new releases pleased and impressed. Ah, but none of them won more raves than **Northern Gun™ One**, which exceeded most fans' expectations. And we plan to keep that trend

going throughout 2014. Just a few days ago, artist **Chuck Walton** said to me, "Kev, I think **Northern Gun™ Two** is even better than **Northern Gun™ One**." Chuck considers that to be part of what he calls "the Kevin Siembieda magic." And that magic continues in **Northern Gun™ Two** and **Megaverse® in Flames™**, as well as other books yet to be announced.

I would like to thank Chuck for his kind words, but I don't create that 'magic' alone. It boils up from the combined talents of everyone working on each project. It comes from the writing excellence of talent like *Matthew Clements, Carl Gleba, Greg Diaczyk, Irvin Jackson, Brandon Aten, Taylor White* and others, as well as from the artistry of *Chuck Walton, Nick Bradshaw, Amy Ashbaugh, the Mannings, John Zeleznik, E.M. Gist, Kent Burles, Mike Mumah, Mike Wilson, Mark Dudley* and many, many others. (Sorry, I can't list everybody.) We create *magic* together. I hope all my wonderful artists and writers (as well as the welcomed and often insightful suggestions from fans and friends) inspire me to push my own imagination and writing to new heights.

At the 2010 Creators' Conference I challenged myself, the Palladium staff, and freelancers to push the envelope and take their craft to new heights. That, my friends, is what you've been seeing, and will continue to see. Enjoy the ride.

While the release of the **Robotech® RPG Tactics™** RPG line will undoubtedly top the news, we hope the other big newsmaker will be the number of new titles that actually see release in 2014.

My goal for Palladium's RPG lines is to release a number of long awaited book titles for **Robotech®, Chaos Earth®, Beyond the Supernatural™** (the sourcebooks **Tome Grotesque™** and **Beyond Arcanum™**, though I'm thinking **Tome Grotesque** is going to turn into **Tomes Grotesque** – as in an ongoing series of BTS monster books), as well as new titles for **Rifts®, Splicers®, Palladium Fantasy®** and **Heroes Unlimited™**. I'm not going to announce titles or release dates, or raise expectations. Let us leave it as a 'goal' and wait to see what we manage to accomplish first.

2014 Surprises. We have a number of surprises we hope to spring on you in 2014 as well. Some are new title releases you know nothing about yet. Others are fun things we've already announced like the *hardcover limited editions* for **Heroes Unlimited™ RPG** and **Palladium Fantasy RPG®** (and at only \$40 each), and a variety of other things we are kicking around.

The new year promises to be filled with new releases, fun and excitement. We hope you will be part of it all as Palladium Books makes some bold moves and hopes to release a wealth of product to satisfy everyone. Thank you for believing in us through thick and thin. Game on and keep those imaginations burning bright.

Lastly, we are celebrating the birthday of the **Heroes Unlimited™ RPG**, which turns 30 years old. **Heroes Unlimited™** was first released in June, 1984, and has never gone a year without being in print. Each issue of **The Rifter®** will have a **Heroes Unlimited™** cover theme and material for it. Power up and get ready for action.

– Kevin Siembieda, Publisher & Game Designer



Palladium News

By Kevin Siembieda, the guy who should know

Emphasis on Role-Playing Games

As noted in my editorial, the goal of the creative minds at Palladium Books is to push the envelope and wow you with one impressive and inspired sourcebook after another. New titles for many of Palladium's game lines are coming your way in the new year. See the *Coming Attractions* for descriptions of the most immediate titles.

Rifts® Chaos Earth® series expanding

We've talked about it for a while, but the **Chaos Earth®** series will be expanded in 2014 with the re-release of **Rise of Magic** and the two new sourcebooks: **Chaos Earth® Sourcebook: First Responders** and **Chaos Earth® Resurrection**. A

good number of other ideas are also floating around for future development.

The world of Splicers® to grow

Splicers® is a unique setting that pits man and organic technology against machines led by an insane artificial intelligence that believes she is a god. Several gods, actually. We suspect **Splicers®** is overlooked by some for two reasons: A retro-looking cover that does not accurately depict the macabre and fascinating world setting nor Bio-Armor and robotic enemy, and the lack of sourcebooks. That is about to change.

Splicers® has developed a cult-like following of dedicated fans demanding more, including several influential Palladium creators. Creators who are developing no fewer than *six sourcebooks* for the game line. Stay tuned.

Palladium Fantasy® Unleashed

Though we hope to release one or two new Fantasy books for 2014, we are developing a plan to unleash many more times that

over the 2-4 years following it. For too long has Palladium Fantasy been left fallow. This is my personal favorite game to play, so what the heck? With any luck, that will start to change in 2014 and in a big way in 2015. We don't want to reveal too much, but wanted you to know what's boiling behind the scenes.

2013 was a year for Kickstarter projects

Not only did Palladium host a hugely successful Kickstarter, but so did many of our friends, including a comic book project by Palladium artist *Mark Dudley*, another comic by Palladium artist *Mike Wilson*, a novel by one-time Palladium writer C.J. Carella, and an online/DVD movie project for **Knights of the Dinner Table** by *Jolly Blackburn* as well as other offerings from friends and people we know. If managed well, Kickstarter can be a very good way to get the support and funding to launch new products that fans can really get behind. I find it is fun and rewarding to pledge money and support the people, companies and products you, as a fan, care about. Palladium Books and I have made pledges to support a number of friends' projects. It feels really good when that item arrives. Palladium will certainly be doing more Kickstarter funded projects in the future after we satisfy our first one for **Robotech®**.

Watch for new *Megaverse® Insider* Crowdfunding offers in 2014

Palladium's **Megaverse® Insider** crowdfunding inspired offerings have enabled Palladium to make books like **Rifts® Lemuria** and **Northern Gun One** and **Two** bigger and better than they may have been without them. They also enabled us to offer supporters additional products such as two different *limited edition hardcover editions*, *PDF copies*, *art prints*, and even *original artwork* available ONLY during the **Megaverse® Insider offer**. Not to mention getting their names in print in the books as **Megaverse Insiders/supporters**, and other good stuff. That's why we call them a **Megaverse "Insider" offer**.

Palladium's next **Megaverse® Insider offer** will be for **Megaverse® in Flames**. And later in the year, for the two, long-awaited **Beyond the Supernatural** sourcebooks: **Beyond Arcanum** and the first **Tomes Grotesque**. At least that's what's bouncing around on the drawing board right now. Keep your eyes peeled. We'll make announcements in the Weekly Update and on the Palladium Books website.

2014 Convention Plans

I feel bad. Palladium Books and I have been invited to numerous conventions and store appearances, but we have so much work I have had to turn most of them down. Sorry, folks. We will be at the **GAMA Trade Show** (March), and I think the **Dlux Entertainment Expo** (a local Ninja Turtles extravaganza in Mount Clements, Michigan, at the end of March), and I think **Penguicon** (April; another local event), **Origins** (June), **Gen Con** (August), and **Detroit Fanfare** (October). Oh, I'm also supposed to run a couple of games at **Our House Games** on a Saturday this spring (in Monroe, Michigan; April or May, maybe?). Even that feels like a lot, considering how much we want to get done. Nobody realizes just how much time conventions take up.

Gen Con Indy is the BIG one

Big Palladium Presence at 2014 Gen Con Indy – August 14-17, 2014

Palladium is pulling out all the stops for the 2014 Gen Con. We'll have a larger exhibitor booth, special display, tons of product, many Palladium creators to sign books, and more.

- **45+ RPG gaming events in a dedicated area. The MOST ever for Palladium at a Gen Con.**
- **Large booth and special display in the Exhibit Hall.**
- **Robotech® RPG Tactics™ products and demos.**
- **A wide range of Palladium RPGs, sourcebooks and other products.**
- **Special edition books, prints and original artwork.**
- **Tentative Line-Up of Palladium Creators:** Kevin Siembieda, Wayne Smith, Jeff Burke, Chuck Walton (artist), Nick Bradshaw (artist), Mike Leonard (artist), Matthew Clements (writer), Carl Gleba (writer), Brandon Aten (writer), Mark Oberle (writer), and others; subject to changes and addition.
- **Get autographs, chat and have a blast.**

2015 Palladium Open House – Spring, 2015

This is always a big, fan-favorite event for us. It will take place in April or May of 2015. More on it in the next **Rifter®**, but start planning for it.

Coming Attractions

Palladium's 2014 Release Checklist

January 2014 Releases

- **The Rifter® #65** – Available Now
- **Heroes Unlimited™ RPG** – Back in Print

February 2014 Releases

- **Rifts® World Book 34: Northern Gun™ Two** – New
- **Heroes Unlimited™ RPG 30th Anniversary Hardcover** – New
- **Rifts® Chaos Earth®: Rise of Magic™** – Back in Print

March 2014 Releases

- **Rifts®: Megaverse® in Flames™** – New
- **Palladium Fantasy RPG®** – Back in Print

April 2014 Releases

- **Palladium Fantasy RPG® 30th Anniversary Hardcover** – New
- **The Rifter® #66**
- **Robotech®: Expeditionary Force Marines Sourcebook One** – New

May 2014 Releases

- **Robotech® RPG Tactics™ Boxed Game** – New (tentative)
- **First 6 Robotech® RPG Tactics™ Expansion Kits** – New (tentative)

Also Coming in 2014

- **Dead Reign™ Sourcebook 5: Graveyard Earth**
- **Rifts® Chaos Earth® Sourcebook: First Responders**
- **Rifts® Chaos Earth® Sourcebook: Resurrection**
- **Robotech® Expeditionary Force Marines™ Sourcebook 1 & 2**
- **Beyond the Supernatural™ Sourcebook: Beyond Arcanum™**
- **Beyond the Supernatural™ Sourcebook: Tomes Grotesque™**
- **Rifts® sourcebooks**
- **Splicers® sourcebooks (tentative)**
- **Heroes Unlimited™ sourcebook (tentative)**
- **Palladium Fantasy® sourcebooks (tentative)**

Palladium RPGs are available in many hobby and game stores around the world. We encourage people to support their local stores. Going to a store enables you to see the product before purchasing it, and many stores are happy to place special orders for you, provided you pay in advance, enabling you to avoid the cost of shipping and possible damage in the mail.

Ordering from Palladium Books: You can also order directly from Palladium Books, but you will pay extra for shipping. For customers with access to a computer, we recommend ordering online to get the most accurate shipping costs and more shipping options (or by telephone; 734-721-2903, order line only). For customers without such access, use the following “mail order” process.

1. Send the cost of the books or items being ordered.

2. **In the USA:** Add \$5 for orders totaling \$1-\$50 to cover shipping and handling. Add \$9 for orders totaling \$51-\$100. Add \$15 for orders totaling \$101-\$200. **Outside the USA:** Double the shipping amount for orders going to Canada, and triple it for overseas orders. Any and all additional costs incurred as a result of customs fees and taxes are the responsibility of the foreign customer, NOT Palladium Books.

3. Make checks or money orders payable to *Palladium Books*.

4. Please make sure to send us your complete and correct address. **Note:** These costs are for the least expensive and slowest method of shipping only. Allow 2-4 weeks for delivery. Order online or call the office for a superior but more costly shipping method.

NEW! Dead Reign™ Sourcebook 4:

Fear the Reaper™ – available now

This was a December, 2013, release that some of you may have missed — and shouldn't. If you play **Dead Reign™**, you'll enjoy this book.

Like knights mounted on motorcycles, the Road Reapers travel the wasteland that Earth has become, searching for survivors, fighting zombies and waging war against the Death Cults that threaten all mankind.

Fear the Reaper™ explores the nature of heroes and heroism in the Zombie Apocalypse. It contains the secrets of the fabled Road Reapers, their structure, leadership, missions and purpose, as well as gear and combat notes. Plus a horrifying new zombie



known as the *Terror Zombie*, as well as *Floaters* (zombies in water) and which zombies can swim. Survival is one thing. Can you keep your humanity and be a hero?

- **Comprehensive background on the legendary Road Reapers™ – zombie hunters and heroes of the Zombie Apocalypse.**
- **The Road Reaper Way of Life: Living and fighting on the road.**
- **Road Reaper missions, strategies and tactics.**
- **The Road Reapers' Code – a guide to being a Road Reaper and hero.**
- **Structure and organization of Road Reaper units.**
- **Road Reaper areas of specialty and bonus skills.**
- **Road Reaper Specializations like the Ex-Con, Road Captain, Scout and Fix-It Man.**
- **More zombie-killing advice from Brad Ashley, the notorious leader of the Road Reapers and author of the Road Reapers' Survival Guide.**
- **Notable weapons and gear used by the Road Reapers.**
- **Stats for snowmobiles and boats.**
- **Combat notes and optional character tables.**
- **Terror Zombie, an amalgamation of horror fused to a Mock Zombie.**
- **Zombies in water and which ones can swim!**
- **Many adventure ideas and random tables.**
- **Written by Matthew Clements.**
- **48 pages – \$12.95 retail – Cat. No. 234. Available now!**



BACK IN PRINT!

Heroes Unlimited™ RPG, 2nd Ed.

If you love playing smart games with heroic super beings in possession of strange and wondrous powers or technology, then **Heroes Unlimited™** is the role-playing game for you. This RPG has unleashed the superheroes inside gamers for three decades and counting.

Heroes Unlimited™ RPG is probably most famous for rules and abilities that enable you to play ALL types of heroes while capturing the feel of comic books, and for being a thinking-gamer's setting. All of this adds up to super-fun and epic comic book-style adventure.

- **11 archetypes or categories of heroes, and another dozen subcategories including Crazy Heroes, those empowered by magical artifacts, Immortals, geniuses, and heroes without any super abilities whatsoever.**
- **100+ super abilities, plus scores of sub-powers.**
- **100+ magic spells plus Enchanted (Magical) Weapons and Objects.**
- **40+ psionic abilities.**
- **Super-Vehicles, high-tech hardware, in-depth characters and more.**
- **Create any type of hero and superhuman – aliens and mutants to super-soldiers, martial artists, mages and Mega-Heroes.**
- **Cover by comic book legendary artist, Jim Steranko.**
- **Interior artwork by Ramon Perez, Scott Johnson, Mark Dudley, Paulo Parente, Kevin Long, Mike Gustovich and others.**
- **Written by Kevin Siembieda.**
- **A complete role-playing game with many sourcebooks.**
- **Heroes Unlimited™ – celebrating 30 years of heroic adventure.**
- **352 pages – \$26.95 retail – Cat. No. 500 – Available now.**

A few notable Heroes Unlimited™ Sourcebooks:

Instantly expand your playing experience with these and other HU2 sourcebooks.

- **Villains Unlimited™** – 80+ villains, rules for creating secret organizations, gadgets, adventure ideas and more.

- **Heroes Unlimited™ G.M.'s Guide** – with 10 complete adventures, additional and optional rules, many random tables, 70 more magic spells, new vehicles and equipment, the law, G.M. tips and more.
- **Powers Unlimited™ One** – New powers galore! 120+ Minor Super Abilities, 45+ Major Abilities, 20 more psionic powers and more.
- **Powers Unlimited™ Two** – 11 new power categories and many sub-set types of heroes, symbiotes, weaknesses, and more.
- **Powers Unlimited™ Three** – 130 more new powers. 'Nuff said.
- **Heroes of the Megaverse®** – A sourcebook that enables you to bring your heroes and supermen (and any of the HU2 sourcebook characters, powers and material) into the **Rifts®** and/or **Phase World®/Three Galaxies™** settings, plus new powers, heroes, superhuman creation tables, and more.
- And other **Heroes Unlimited™** sourcebooks.



NEW! Heroes Unlimited™ 30th Anniversary Hardcover Edition

– only \$40 while supplies last

The **Heroes Unlimited™ RPG** turns 30 years old this year. To celebrate, Palladium is releasing a special, commemorative, **Heroes Unlimited™ 30th Anniversary Hardcover** in February, for only \$40. The original HU2 hardcover sold for \$50 and has since become a collector's item that sells for \$200-\$350 on the secondary market.

To preserve the value of the “original” **Heroes Unlimited™ Gold Hardcover Edition**, we have made the **HU2 30th Anniversary Edition** as *visibly different* (and cool) looking on the outside as possible. The material used for the cover is different (not leatherette), the blue is a different, more vibrant shade of blue, and although the cover is imprinted in *gold foil*, it features artwork depicting a superhero and the words “Special 30th Anniversary Edition.” Even the spine is different looking, and the end sheets are red and without art. The *red, white* and *blue* combination represents the United States of America, the birthplace of superhero comic books, and the colors of costumed heroes.

All the elements described above should make the **Heroes Unlimited™ 30th Anniversary Hardcover** *impossible* to mistake for the original HU2 signed and numbered HC edition. We have kept the price an unprecedented, low **\$40** for a hardcover Gold Edition of this size. We want to give **Heroes Unlimited™** fans a crack at purchasing one before the price skyrockets on the secondary collectors' market. Enjoy and game on!

- **Limited to 400 signed and numbered copies.**
- **Signed and numbered on the credits page by Kevin Siembieda and the Palladium staff.** We'll try to get an artist or two to sign as well.
- **Blue fabric cover with gold foil imprinting.** A completely new and different cover than the original HU2 Gold Edition.
- **Interior pages are exactly the same as the original HU2 HC and the current softcover edition.**
- **Create any type of hero and superhuman – aliens and mutants to super-soldiers, martial artists, mages and Mega-Heroes.**
- **100+ super abilities, plus scores of sub-powers.**
- **100+ magic spells plus Enchanted (Magical) Weapons and Objects.**
- **40+ psionic abilities.**
- **Super-Vehicles, high-tech hardware, in-depth characters and more.**
- **Written by Kevin Siembieda. Cover art by Michael Wilson.**
- **352 pages – ONLY \$40 retail from Palladium Books only – Cat. No. 5000HC – available for pre-order – ships February. At the printer!** (Pre-Orders: Though you may place a pre-order weeks before the product is actually released, your credit card is NOT charged until a week or so before the item is ready to ship.) Sorry, this product is not available in stores. **Note:** The price is only \$40 to celebrate the proud event of HU2's 30th Anniversary and make sure the hardcover is accessible to our core fan base. Enjoy.
- **A complete role-playing game with many sourcebooks.**
- **Heroes Unlimited™ – celebrating 30 years of heroic adventure.**

NEW! Palladium Fantasy RPG® 30th Anniversary Hardcover Edition

– only \$40 while supplies last

It doesn't seem fair to offer a **Heroes Unlimited™ Hardcover Edition** and not one for **Palladium Fantasy®**, so Rifter® subscribers are the first to get the news that Palladium is releasing a **Palladium Fantasy® Special 30th Anniversary Hardcover** in April. The **Palladium Fantasy RPG®** was released in June of 1983, so technically the Fantasy Game is still *30 years* old until June.

The original Crimson Edition hardcover sold for \$50 and has since become a collector's item that sells for \$250-\$400 on the secondary market. The special, commemorative, **30th Anniversary Hardcover** in April will sell for only **\$40**.

To preserve the value of the "original" **Palladium Fantasy RPG® Crimson Edition Hardcover**, we have made the **30th Anniversary Edition** as *visibly different* looking on the outside as possible. The material used for the cover is a brown leatherette imprinted with "*Elemental Green*" foil, different art on the cover, and the words "Special 30th Anniversary Edition." Even the spine is different looking and the end sheets are without artwork.

All the elements described above should make the **Palladium Fantasy RPG® 30th Anniversary Hardcover** *impossible* to mistake for the original signed and numbered HC edition. The price is **\$40** (while supplies last), low for a limited edition of its size. We want to give Fantasy fans a crack at purchasing one before the price skyrockets on the secondary collectors' market.

- **Limited to 450 signed and numbered copies.**
- **Signed and numbered on the credits page by Kevin Siembieda and the Palladium staff.**
- **Brown leatherette cover with Elemental Green foil imprinting.** A completely different cover than the original Crimson Edition.
- **Interior pages are exactly the same as the current softcover.**
- **30+ different Fantasy O.C.C.s – Mind Mage, Diabolist, Druid, Wizard, Palladin, Ranger, Thief, Assassin, and more.**
- **300+ magic spells.**
- **60+ magic wards and 50 magic circles.**
- **Psionic abilities and psychic characters.**
- **Demons, magic items, weapons, world background and more.**
- **Written by Kevin Siembieda. Cover art yet to be determined.**
- **352 pages – ONLY \$40 retail from Palladium Books only – Cat. No. 4500GHC – available for pre-order – ships April.** Sorry, this product is not available in stores. **Note:** The price is only \$40 to celebrate the proud event of Palladium Fantasy's 30 years of continuous publication and make sure the hardcover is accessible to our core fan base. Enjoy.
- **A complete role-playing game with many sourcebooks.**
- **Palladium Fantasy® – celebrating 30 years of wonder.**

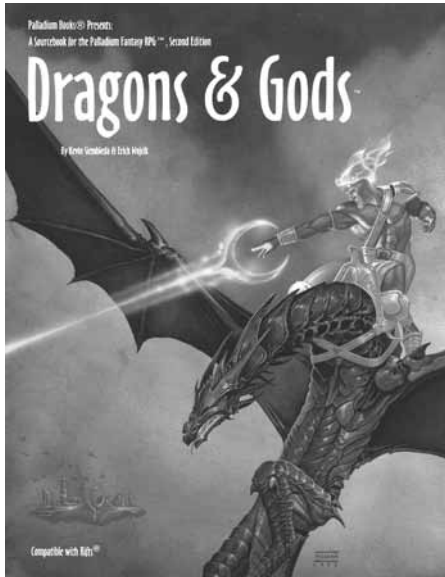


BACK IN PRINT – Rise of Magic™

A Rifts® Chaos Earth® Sourcebook – February

The return of magic has empowered humans with strange and wondrous powers, unlike anything quite yet seen (and different from most conventional types of magic). This only complicates things for Earth's defenders as the line of distinction between "good guys" and "bad guys" begins to blur.

- **Chaos Magic**, new magic specific to the Chaos Earth® setting.
- **More than 100 unique Chaos Magic spells.**
- **New magic O.C.C.s** like the Blue Zone Wizard and Chaos Wizard.
- **New evil magic users** like the Chaos Witch and Demon Caller.
- **More on NEMA and the Demon Plagues.**
- **Written by Kevin Siembieda.**
- **64 pages – \$14.95 – Cat. No. 662. Ships February 24, 2014.**



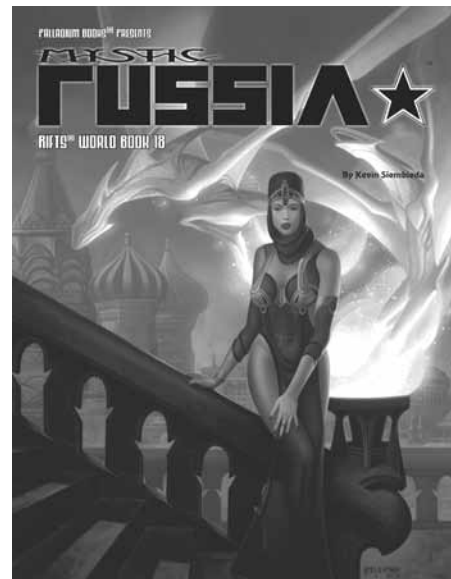
BACK IN PRINT – Dragons & Gods™

For Rifts® and Palladium Fantasy®

This is the 3rd printing of a dynamic sourcebook filled with big ideas and insightful rules for *creating gods* and their followers as well as presenting an array of deities and dragons. The dragon section provides insight to how Palladium Dragons think and function. Great artwork, too. Co-written with *Erick Wujcik*. With the **Minion War™** soon to erupt on Rifts® Earth via **Megaverse® in Flames™**, you may find a book about dragons and gods to be a very useful sourcebook.

An expansive sourcebook, it presents detailed information about the mythical dragons and gods common to the **Palladium Fantasy®** world, but contains notes for use in **Rifts®** and is easily adapted to the **Rifts®** setting. It includes sections about Dragonwright, the Gods of Taut, Elementals, Demon Lords, dragons, and the forces of light and dark. Suitable for use with the **Palladium Fantasy RPG®, Rifts®, Heroes Unlimited™**, and **Beyond the Supernatural™**, or any fantasy game.

- **14 dragons, including the Hydra, Lo-Dox and others.**
- **40+ gods complete with minions, magic weapons & worshippers.**
- **20 Demonic Lords, their goals, enemies and powers.**
- **Elementals and Creatures of Light.**
- **Deific powers of the gods and how they use them.**
- **Rune and Holy Weapons. Magic items made from dragons.**
- **Information on Alien Intelligences and other godlike beings.**
- **Written by Kevin Siembieda and Erick Wujcik.**
- **\$24.95 retail – 232 pages – Cat. No. 451. Available now.**

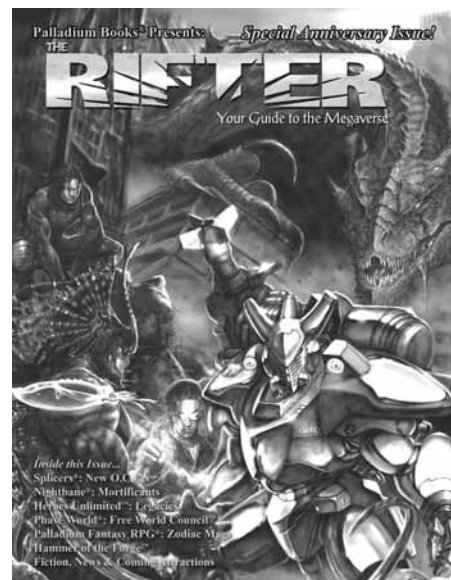


BACK IN PRINT

Rifts® World Book 18: Mystic Russia™

This book is rich in monsters and magic based on Russian mythology and superstition. Rifts Russia is a land unlike anywhere else. The wilderness abounds with mischievous spirits, shape-changers and demons unique to Russia (including a comprehensive look at Necromancy).

- **28 Russian demons & spirits.**
- **Nature and Spoiling Magic. Over 100 new spells.**
- **Living Fire Magic, Bone Magic & Necromancy.**
- **Russian Gypsies, their secrets and magic weapon maker.**
- **Sovietski tanks, war machines and more world info.**
- **Written by Kevin Siembieda. Cover by Zeleznik.**
- **\$20.95 – 176 pages – Cat. No. 833. Available now.**

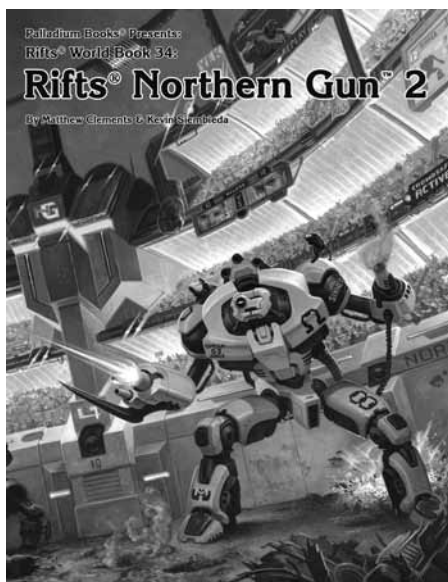


BACK IN PRINT – The Rifter® #50

Special Anniversary Issue

The **Rifter® #50** remains in high demand because it contains all kinds of *official* source material from an All-Star cast of Palladium's most popular writers. Back in print because you demanded it.

- **Official Phase World®/Three Galaxies™ source material – The Free World Council by Braden Campbell.**
- **Official Heroes Unlimited™ source material by Mark Oberle.** A look at fame, glory and heroic legacies.
- **Official Nightbane® source material by Irvin Jackson.** The Mortificant O.C.C., also known as the Death Caller. A sort of modern-day Necromancer.
- **Official Chaos Earth® source material – Psychics by Jason Richards.** Includes three new Chaos Earth® psychic O.C.C.s.
- **Official Spicers® source material by Brandon Aten and Matthew Orr.** Includes three new Spicer O.C.C.s (the Gardener, the Tormentor and the Geneticist) and their Bio-Armor and Bio-Enhancements. Art by Chuck Walton.
- **Official Palladium Fantasy RPG® – Zodiac rules and a type of Elven magic for it, by Carl Gleba.**
- **Rifts® Comic Strip by Madman Mike Leonard.** It is a short, but memorable four page comic.
- **Rifts® Treasure Trove Logic Problem by Julius Rosenstein.**
- **Rifts® – Optional Construction and Vehicle Rules by Greg Diaczek.**
- **Ninjas & Superspies™ – Expanded Combat Rules by Taylor White.**
- **FINAL CHAPTER of the Hammer of the Forge! By James M.G. Cannon.**
- **News, coming attractions, product descriptions and more.**
- **Cover by Charles Walton.**
- **128 pages – \$14.95 retail – Cat. No. 150 – Available now!**

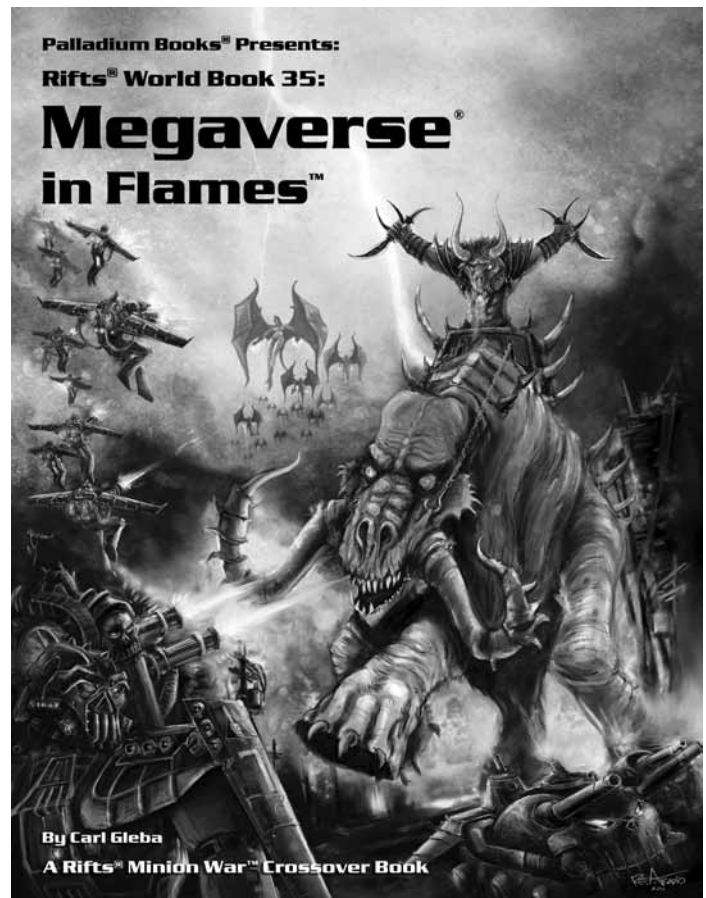


NEW! Rifts® World Book 34:

Northern Gun™ Two

The much anticipated companion to **Northern Gun™ One** is in final production! Expanded to 192-224 pages and filled with all kinds of adventuring gear: New environmental body armor, power armor, hover cycles, robot drones, robot haulers, combat vehicles, other vehicles, robot gladiators and much more. More information about the weapons, vehicles and practices of Northern Gun, including the new rage of robot gladiatorial combat. Expanded page count. Epic adventure.

- **NG robot haulers and drones.**
- **NG power armor suits; an expansive range.**
- **NG M.D.C. body armor, and combat gear.**
- **NG bionics, cybernetic services and other equipment.**
- **NG hovercycles, land vehicles and combat vehicles.**
- **NG jet packs and aircraft.**
- **NG boats, ships and submarines. Pirates and more.**
- **NG Robot Gladiatorial Arena.**
- **Robot Gladiator O.C.C. and robot gladiators.**
- **Written by Matthew Clements and Kevin Siembieda.**
- **Interior Artwork by Chuck Walton, Nick Bradshaw, and others.**
- **Wraparound cover by John Zeleznik.**
- **192-224 pages – \$24.95 retail – Cat. No. 888. February, 2014.**



NEW! Rifts® World Book 35:

Megaverse® in Flames™

The Minion War spills across Rifts Earth, where demons and infernals hope to recruit allies and use the Rifts as gateways of destruction. Their influence shakes things up across the planet, especially at locations where demons and Deevils already have a strong presence. Demons, Deevils and supernatural beings run rampant and wreak havoc across the world.

- **Demon plagues and mystic blights.**
- **Soulmancy and Blood Magic revealed.**
- **Magical and demonic weapons and war machines.**
- **Demonic armies, strongholds and places of evil.**
- **Hell Pits and Rune Forges.**
- **Many Demon Lords, their minions and plans.**

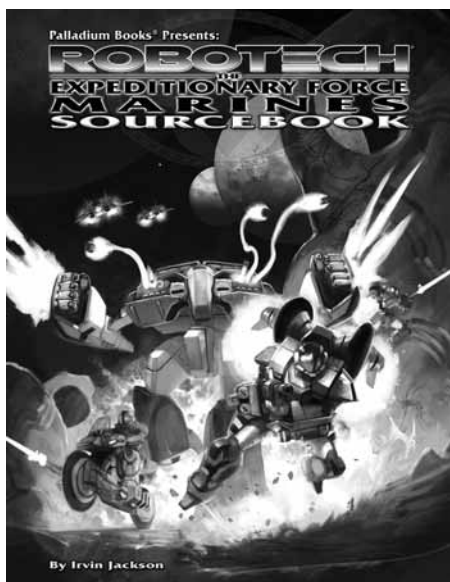
- Calgary, the Kingdom of Monsters; in detail.
- Ciudad de Diablo, Harpies' Island and notable Hell holes.
- Lord Doom, Pain and other demonic leaders.
- Horune treachery, Dimension Stormers and villains.
- Notable demonic generals, mercenaries, people and places.
- Global chaos and demonic legions. Adventure ideas galore.
- Written by Carl Gleba. Part of the Minion War "Cross-over" series.
- 192 pages – \$24.95 retail – Cat. No. 876. March, 2014.

NEW! The Rifter® #66 – April

Every issue of *The Rifter*® is an *idea factory* that helps players and Game Masters to generate new ideas and keep their games fresh. It provides useful, ready to go, source material gamers can just drop into their ongoing games. A doorway to new possibilities and numerous Palladium role-playing worlds. It offers new characters, O.C.C.s, powers, magic, weapons, adventure and ideas for your games. It presents new villains, monsters and dangers to battle, and new ideas to consider. Every issue has material for *Rifts*® and at least two or three other Palladium game lines.

The Rifter® #66 – April, 2014:

- **Heroes Unlimited™** source material.
- **Optional source material for 3-5 settings.**
- **News, coming attractions, product descriptions and more.**
- **Cover by Amy Ashbaugh.**
- **96 pages – \$11.95 retail – Cat. No. 166. April release.**



NEW! Robotech®: Expeditionary Force Marines Sourcebook One

– Name changed from UEEF Marines

Robotech®: Expeditionary Force Marines is a sourcebook that we know will wow and please *Robotech*® fans.

- **New mecha and weapons.**
- **Aliens and space adventure.**
- **Written by Irvin Jackson.**
- **160 pages – Cat. No. 553 – \$20.95 – April release (tentative).**



Robotech® RPG Tactics™ – Spring 2014

This is the game *Robotech*® fans have wanted for decades.

Robotech® RPG Tactics™ is a fast-paced, tabletop combat game that captures the action and adventure of the *Robotech*® anime. Two or more players can engage in small squad skirmishes or scale up to massive battles. Relive the clashes of the First *Robotech* War, engage in stand-alone tactical games, or use the dynamic game pieces to enhance your *Robotech*® RPG experience. Or simply collect your favorite mecha from an expanding range of top-notch game pieces.

Mecha vs Mecha. Take command of the fighting forces of the *United Earth Defense Force (UEDF)* valiantly defending Earth from alien annihilation. Or lead the massive clone armies of the *Zentraedi Armada* to recover an alien artifact of immense power and enslave humankind.

Robotech® RPG Tactics™ Box Set

- Brought to you by **Palladium Books**®, created with **Ninja Division** (the creative minds behind *Soda Pop Miniatures* and *Cipher Studios*).
- Rules by *Alessio Cavatore*, *David Freeman* and *Carmen Bellaire*.
- Full color, softcover rule book; wraparound cover and lots of new, color artwork.
- 24 Battle Dice, 12 UEDF and 12 Zentraedi.
- 40 color game cards (unit cards, etc.).
- 4x VF-1A Valkyries (in Fighter, Guardian, and Battloid modes).
- 1x VF-1J "Officer" in all three modes.
- 4x Destroids: 2 Tomahawks and 2 Defenders.
- 12x Regult Zentraedi Battlepods.
- 1x Glaug Officer's Battlepod.
- 1x Quel-Regult Recon Battlepod.
- 1x Quel-Gulnau Recovery Pod.
- 1/285th scale, high quality, multi-pose plastic game pieces (40mm to 70mm tall). World-class sculpts from sculptors around the world.
- Game rules use D6.
- Turn-based system of play.
- Scalable from small squad skirmishes to mass battles. Can accommodate two to several players.
- Combat is fast and designed to emulate the anime action.
- Measuring tape required to determine targets and distance.
- Small parts and some assembly required. Game pieces come unpainted.
- **Release Date:** May or June 2014.
- **\$99.95 retail price (tentative).**
- **Cat. No. 55100 (Main Box Game).**



The First Six Robotech® RPG Tactics™ Expansion Packs

The initial expansion packs will also ship at the same time as the main box game in May or June. All prices listed are likely, but may be subject to change.

- **UEDF Valkyrie Wing** (2x each, Fighter, Guardian, Battloid) – Cat. No. 55201 – \$36.95 retail.
- **UEDF Destroid Pack** (2x Tomahawks, 2x Defenders) – Cat. No. 55202 – \$32.95 retail.
- **UEDF Spartan Pack** (2x Spartans, 2x Phalanxes), Cat. No. 55203 – \$32.95 retail.
- **Zentraedi Regult Battlepod Squadron** (6x Regults) – Cat. No. 55401 – \$36.95 retail.
- **Zentraedi Support Battlepods** (4x Artillery Battlepods) – Cat. No. 55402 – \$36.95.
- **Zentraedi Command Pack** (1x Glaug, 1x Quel-Regult, 1x Quel-Gulnau) – Cat. No. 55403 – \$36.95 (tentative).
- Additional **expansion packs** to be released in the Fall. More will follow.
- Palladium plans to release the mecha and settings for *ALL eras of Robotech®*. Many other details are still in development.
- Tournament play support is planned. **Ninja Division** will help Palladium to develop and launch the program.

Yet to be scheduled 2014 Releases

Rifts® Chaos Earth® Sourcebook:

First Responders – Coming 2014

The Great Cataclysm has devastated civilization, but humanity fights for survival. The struggles of civilian law enforcement, fire and rescue, and everyday men and women are some of the most epic tales to be told in a world gone to hell. They fight monsters, aliens, the paranormal, the elements, and each other, all with the hope of reclaiming their lives from the Chaos.

- **New D-Bees and monsters from the Rifts.**
- **First Responder O.C.C.s, skills and special equipment.**
- **New “average citizen” Occupational Character Classes (O.C.C.s).**
- **New equipment for NEMA “Roscoes” and other emergency personnel.**
- **Notable rescue vehicles, robot drones, and technology.**
- **Source information and stats for common Golden Age technology (weapons, vehicles, medical tech, etc.).**
- **Apocalypse Plagues brought from other worlds to Chaos Earth.**
- **Adventure ideas and more.**
- **Written by Jason Richards. Additional text by Clements & Siembieda.**
- **96 pages – \$16.95 retail – Cat. No. 665. Spring or Summer.**

Rifts® Chaos Earth® Sourcebook:

Resurrection – Coming 2014

In the shattered depths of Wisconsin, survivors are besieged by the dead come back to life. Zombies. But not just any type of zombie, zombies done Rifts-style. And unless the source of the zombie plague can be found and neutralized by NEMA defenders, North America may be overrun by the dead.

This was actually something Taylor White and I have been kicking around for years, even before we released the *Dead Reign™* RPG line. We think you’ll love it.

- **Something has animated the dead in Wisconsin. It is up to NEMA heroes to find the cause and stop it before it spreads beyond control.**
- **Scrap Zombies of all types.**
- **Snatcher Ghouls, Carrion Cleaners, Screaming Puppet Ghosts, Sour Maggot Parasites, and other monsters.**
- **The Zombie Pox and other dangers.**
- **Setting background, adventure and adventure idea table.**
- **Written by Taylor White.**
- **128 pages – \$16.95 retail – Cat. No. 666. Spring or Summer.**

The Rifter[®]

Super-Subscription Offer

- **Free gift**
- **Free shipping of each issue in the USA**
- **Each issue delivered to your doorstep**
- **Each issue a sourcebook for the Palladium Megaverse[®]**

The Rifter[®] is a quarterly sourcebook series for the entire Palladium Megaverse[®], written by fans and freelancers. Looking for fresh, bold ideas, adventures or source material for your games? Then **The Rifter[®]** is for you.

Every issue of **The Rifter[®]** presents unofficial and/or official source material such as new monsters, magic, powers, weapons, hardware, villains, O.C.C.s, adventure, fiction and new ideas for at least three (often more) adventure settings, from *Rifts[®]* and *Splicers[®]* to *Heroes Unlimited[™]*, *Palladium Fantasy RPG[®]* and/or any variety of other Palladium RPGs and world settings. It also presents the latest news, product release info, and peeks at new game releases. Many out of print issues are coveted *collector's items*. (For a while, people were reportedly paying as much as \$70 for *issue #21*.)

The Rifter[®] is a forum for *new talent*. A place where “fans” and new Palladium talent can cut their teeth while sharing new concepts and characters. Palladium uses **The Rifter[®]** to try new talent with an eye toward future, bigger projects. *Carl Gleba, Jason Richards, Greg Diaczyk, Brandon Aten, Apollo Okamura, Brian and Allen Manning*, and many others, all got their start in **The Rifter[®]** and continue to contribute to it.

Super-Subscription Offer

The cover price of **The Rifter[®]** is **\$11.95** – a steal for 96 pages of RPG source material and adventures – but a subscription gets you **The Rifter[®]** delivered to *your doorstep* and you can select a **free gift worth \$22.95-\$25.90** (available *only* during this special offer, for the cost of shipping and handling). All prices are in U.S. dollars.

- **\$39.80 – USA. That's only \$9.95 each**, a savings of \$8.00, and Palladium pays the shipping! Plus you get to select a FREE subscriber's gift worth \$22.95-\$25.90 (please include \$6.00 to cover shipping and handling). That's *\$45.80 total* including shipping and handling for the free gift. **Note:** This rate is *limited* to subscribers in the *USA only*. Sorry.
- **\$61.80 – Canada. That's \$15.45** for each issue of **The Rifter[®]**, plus you get to select the FREE subscriber's gift (please include \$9.00 to cover shipping and handling). That's *\$70.80* including the gift item. That's still not a bad price for a 96 page sourcebook. Our apologies for the higher cost, but Palladium Books can not cover the cost of postage to other countries. We hope you understand.

- **\$75.80 – Overseas. That's \$18.95** for each 96 page issue, plus you get to select a FREE subscriber's gift (please include \$18.00 to cover shipping and handling). That's *\$93.80* including the gift item. We are only passing along the additional postage cost, but it is hefty. Our apologies. Postal rates are out of our hands. Likewise, the purchaser is responsible for any duty or customs fee.

Note: Please indicate if the gift item is **NOT** wanted. You may decline the gift and get your subscription for the regular price of \$39.80 (USA), \$61.80 (Canada) or \$75.80 (other countries). **Offer ends February 28, 2014.**

A FREE gift worth \$22.95 to \$25.90

You pay only the cost of shipping and handling (\$6.00 in the USA, \$9.00 Canada, and \$18.00 overseas).

Gift choice #1: Best of The Rifter[®] and The Rifter[®] Number 9½ (special humor issue); two books (\$25.90 value).

Gift choice #2: The Splicers[®] RPG, 224 page core rule book, get in on the ground floor before the new sourcebooks are released (\$23.95 value).

Gift choice #3: Gramercy Island Sourcebook for Heroes Unlimited[™] RPG (\$24.95 value). Celebrate the *Heroes Unlimited[™] 30th Anniversary*.

Gift choice #4: Dragons and Gods for Palladium Fantasy[®] (\$24.95 value) – the name says it all; dragons, gods and insight to both. Just back in print.

Gift choice #5: Rifts[®] and the Megaverse[®]: The Art of John Zeleznik (\$22.95 value) – color art book of one of Palladium's most beloved cover artists. Includes sketches, color roughs & other art.

- **Shipping and Handling for FREE gift:** Please enclose shipping and handling to receive your FREE gift: \$6.00 in the USA, \$9.00 Canada, \$18.00 overseas. Thank you. **Note:** You can *decline* the free gift and pay only the subscription price if you wish.

- **Indicate what issue number you'd like your new subscription to start at:** #64 (last issue, and a great one), #65 (this current issue), #66 (next issue, April 2014), or the issue when your current subscription ends (please give the number if you can).

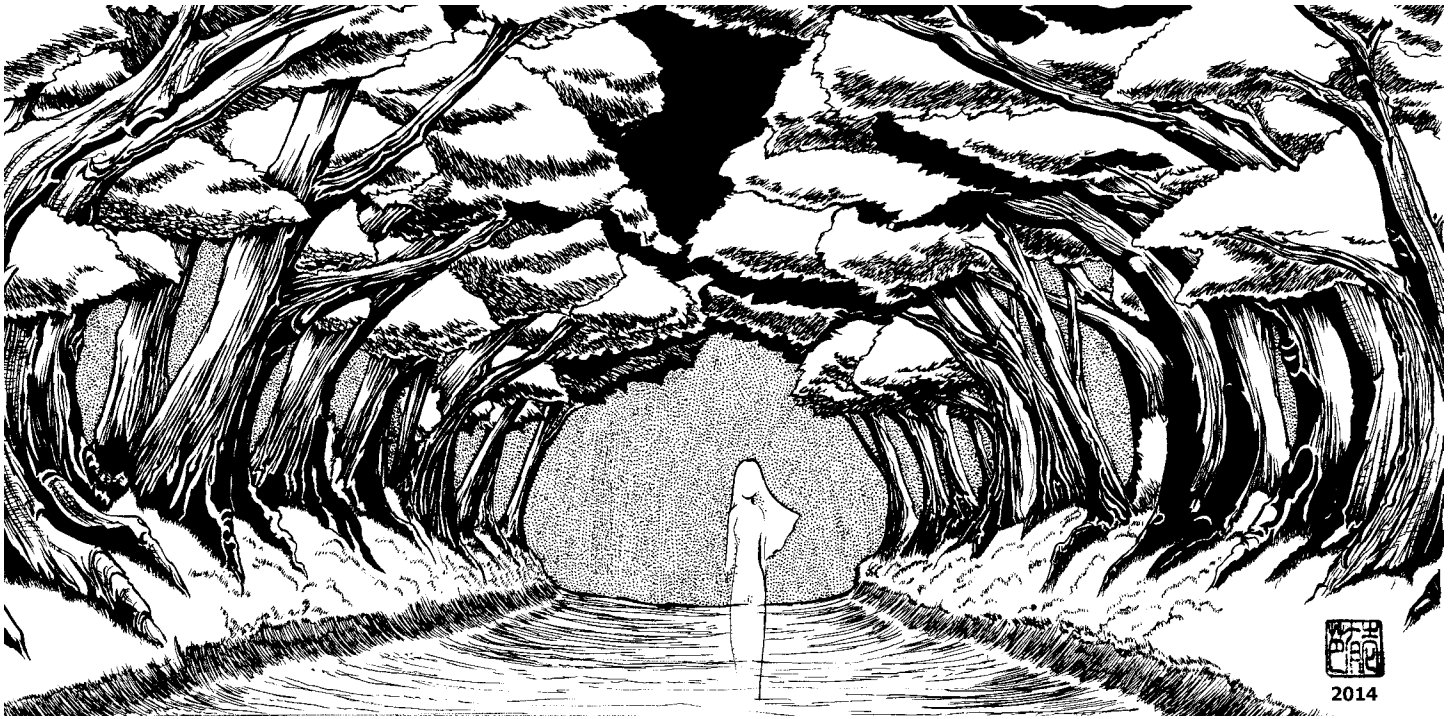
- **How to order.** Send mail orders with a check or money order made out to **Palladium Books** (for *\$45.80* – including handling & shipping of free gift in the *USA*) to:

Palladium Books – Dept R.
39074 Webb Court
Westland, MI 48185-7606

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

This is a great way to support Palladium and get source material and gaming ideas.

Offer ends February 28, 2014



Hollow Road

An Adventure for

Beyond the Supernatural™

By Anthony Uyl

Introducing the Adventure

In this adventure, characters are up against multiple evils; not just of the supernatural, but some of the townsfolk themselves. As the player characters investigate the rumors and stories of the disappearances along an old land road the locals call the “Hollow Road,” they’ll discover that the locals can be just as evil as the Supernatural in their pursuit for power.

The main protagonist in this adventure is an elderly woman who’s made a deal with an evil power and has been sacrificing the townsfolk for years, including her own daughter. The player characters will inevitably have to thwart her quest for power, probably without realizing that she’s the one behind everything. While several of the townsfolk are quick to point fingers at a local reading club for the troubles in the town, there’s very little to back up their claims. Their small-town superstitions and attitudes won’t help the cause either.

Introducing the Characters

The Game Master has a couple of options to bring the player characters into the adventure. The most likely option is for the characters to already be in the general vicinity for an ongoing paranormal investigation already (perhaps in one of the neighboring towns or the nearby city of Campport). They could pick up on the local gossip, rumors, legends and tall tales of the area. This will be a matter of weeding out the stories they hear as they’ll

range from UFO’s to Bigfoot sightings as well reports of local cults, strange animal behaviors, haunted Indian burial sites, crop circles, and something called the “The Hollow Road.”

Of course, player characters are free to pursue these weird tales, but they’ll turn up nothing at first. And the more the PCs poke their noses into small-town affairs, the more attention they’ll draw to themselves. This, in turn, will eventually require local law enforcement to track them down, confronting them about their activities in a secluded area of Campport.

The Sheriff will inform the PCs that there have been several complaints about them at the precinct and he’ll insist that they stop “harassing” his townsfolk. Any questions about the many strange occurrences will solicit a nervous smile while he side-steps their questions.

Note: Characters with the **Psychology** skill, or if a *Parapsychologist* is in the group, or a successful **Perception** roll of 12 or higher should be made to be aware of his reaction.

The Sheriff will hide his nervous look behind a pair of mirrored sunglasses while telling the PCs that there’s a land road outside the small town of Demville the locals refer to as “Hollow Road.” Once he realizes that he’s telling the group exactly what they want to hear, he’ll insist that the local stories of Hollow Road, especially about the “disappearing teenagers,” are just that, stories. The group should note that this is the first time they’ve heard about the “disappearing teenagers.”

If questioned further with the right methods, such as by characters with a Trustworthy bonus, or by a P.C. who’s also law enforcement, or using **Hypnotic Suggestion** while questioning him (“It’s okay sheriff, just calm down and take a deep breath. Now, I think this “Hollow Road” sounds interesting, don’t you? What else have you heard about it?”), he will reveal more of the stories he’s heard about it. If asked what he thinks of the stories, he’ll say that he thinks it’s a madman or some crazed transient that Demville law enforcement hasn’t caught up to yet. After all, he claims, “There’s no such thing as ghosts and monsters, so we all know those stories are bogus, right?”

If the characters talk to the other locals in their area about “Hollow Road,” or do some basic internet research (make a **Computer Operation** roll), they’ll find a blog called “The Weird, The Strange, and The Huh?” It’s not a popular blog but a recent post went up about a story directly related to the “Hollow Road.” The blog write up is as follows:

Missing or Lost?

“Demville, a small town out in the middle of nowhere (the closest place of interest is the City of Campport), has many strange stories and legends to spice up its otherwise quiet history. According to a couple of Demville residents that were interviewed, one of their greater local legends is of one of the old roads out in the country being haunted. Some say its goes through old Indian burial grounds. Some say the air is always chilly when traveling along the road at night. A few of them even went on record saying that people have simply disappeared along the road.

They claim that it’s almost a tradition these days for the local high school kids to head out to the road in the middle of the night for thrills to amuse their daring minds. Some claim that the road is paved with nothing more than myths. Although the road has the very look of being creepy at night, no confirmed reports of anything strange have ever been found in the forested region itself. Some strange effects have been found in a nearby farmer’s field that include some kind of bag full of components, with the most notable: human bone. But beyond the many “ghost sightings” and the police breaking up the occasional group of teenagers who park along it, all that usually happens is illegal drinking and teens daring each other to do stupid stuff on the road.

The real question with all these stories of Hollow Road is this: what’s with the disappearances? Are the rumors of ghosts and spirits somehow related to these events? Although there have been no occurrences of this type for many years, the cases remain unsolved. Is this a sign that the road is truly haunted? Or was there once a criminal mastermind abducting people? Is the criminal mastermind still there, planning to kidnap people again someday?

While many crimes go unsolved, it’s strange that in this small community, the disappearance cases have remained unsolved all these years. The stories of “Hollow Road” stretch on as long as the road itself. While many have attempted to solve its many mysteries, so far nothing has come of their efforts. Will anyone ever be able to fully explain the mysteries of Hollow Road?

The blog does not offer much in the way of information but the Game Master may feel it’s worthwhile to photocopy the blog above and hand it out to the players. Characters should, at this point, take an interest in the case and plan for an investigation at Demville and Hollow Road.

Another way to draw the characters into the adventure is to have them stop by in Demville for some rest or to pick up some supplies, either before or after a planned investigation. There are various stores and shops that might be of interest to the PCs, such as buying groceries and toiletries, breakfast at the bakery, stopping for the night at the hotel, or just getting a cup of coffee. Once they start interacting with the townsfolk, the adventure can begin. For a small town in the middle of farm country, many of its residents may come off as unexpectedly open and unassum-

ing. Most will happily talk to the group, incidentally dropping tidbits of the local myths and legends the characters may or may not have heard already. If the characters have already heard the myths and legends of Demville, and about the Hollow Road, then there’s no need to reintroduce them again (unless the characters ask about them), but rather just follow the directions indicated on the description of the town’s location and the people in it.

Days and Nights in Demville

The first day in Demville will pass uneventfully, allowing the characters to go about and meet the townsfolk freely. Some people will look at them differently (even suspiciously) but will otherwise leave them alone. PCs that have visited small towns before shouldn’t be surprised by getting strange looks.

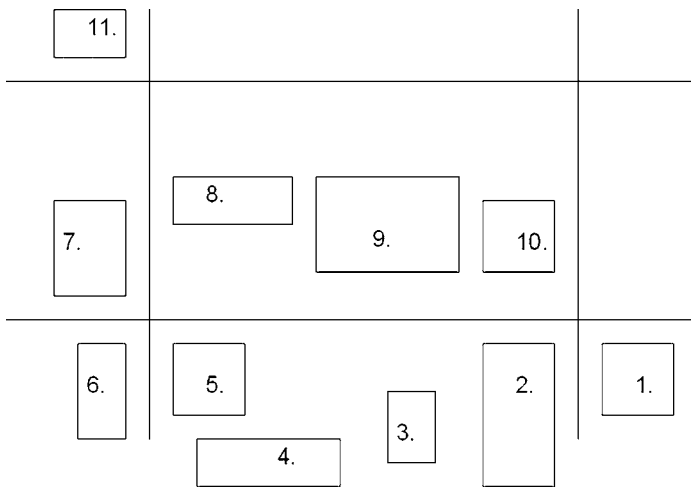
Once the characters start talking to the Demville residents, they’ll stir up a hornets’ nest. Characters sleeping at 2:00 in the morning will need a Perception roll of 15 or higher to be woken to the sounds of chanting. The chanting sounds something like the following: “Eh tu com fha ra.” A successful **Lore: Magic** roll will understand it to be an arcane phrase, possibly Sumerian in origin. The meaning of the phrase is unknown, but characters can research it. If they successfully make a **Lore: Magic** skill roll at -20% (which may require a *Computer Operation* skill for online researching if they don’t have adequate Arcane research materials on hand), the PCs deduce the phrase to mean “Praise to the dark one.”

PCs who hear the chanting for more than 60 seconds will need to make a **Psychology** roll. Characters that don’t wake up when the chanting begins need to make a **save vs insanity** check of 12 or higher; those who wake up to the chanting require an 8 or higher to save. If they fail they will be subjected to a random insanity from the Random Insanity Table for 2D6 hours. **Note:** This is a nightly occurrence and will happen as long as the characters are in town. The voices always sound disembodied and wherever the PCs may go, they will always sound like it’s coming from the very roofs above them. A faint echo will accompany the voices, giving it an unearthly feel. The chanting will always last around one minute before ceasing.

Through the second day, the PCs will be plagued by hindrances and inconveniences. Such things such as tripping over nothing, locking their keys in the car, seeing monsters in reflections, seeing shadows move around corners, or suddenly feeling ill even though they’ve not eaten or drank anything that should make them sick, are all possible ideas. The Game Master should add other random events for the characters to have to deal with that reflects the fears and concern the group already has.

After a day of these events, the Game Master could ask the characters to roll another **save vs. insanity** roll of 9 or higher on the **Random Insanity Table** for 1D6 hours. This last option is completely up to the Game Master, but it could add more flavor to the adventure.

Additional days spent in Demville will be followed with more inconveniences, and then, potentially dangerous situations. The PCs might be attacked by Hauntings (**Beyond the Supernatural**, pages 246-247), Beautiful Ghosts and Harmful Ghosts (**Rifts World Book 29: Madhaven**, pages 111-114). There’s a 10% chance of one of these entities appearing during each scene or area the group looks into. This rises to 30% if a player character is alone.



Demville Locations

1. Emma's Corner

This small coffee shop is the only dedicated coffee and snack shop in the country town of Demville. As can be guessed by the name, an elderly woman named Emma runs the shop and can usually be found behind the counter, chatting up anyone that sits at one of the bar stools along the front counter. She's a kindly looking and very friendly woman who seems genuinely interested in assisting everyone she can. She's also very knowledgeable about the area. If a P.C. asks her anything about Hollow Road, she will be sure to say that there is a lot of "hub-bub" about that road being haunted, but she does not put much faith in any of it. But she's glad to discuss or share some of the local myths and legends, and encourages them to share the stories with others as "curious parties always drums up more business and interesting conversation in my corner. After all, it's what brought you here, right?"

However, if questioned at all about the ghostly nature of the road, she'll frown and tell the characters that she's a devout member of the Catholic Church in town and believes all such talk to be of the devil. She'll then divert the conversation to a local attraction, such as one of the parks or trails just outside of town, encouraging them to go and visit them.

Psychology Roll: "Once the discussion of Hollow Road being haunted had ended, you can't help but notice that Emma's no longer topping off your group's coffee cups, and isn't as interested in helping you (or even talking to you) like she was when you first came in."

Psychic Medium: "The coffee shop is virtually empty of people, but a few entities can be spotted from time to time, sipping on a cup of coffee and reading a newspaper for a few moments before they fade away as quickly as they came. Their style of clothing dictates they're from a variety of time periods."

G.M. Note: If the characters have already been to *Ted's Bar and Hotel* and talked to Norm, he will have directed them to talk to Emma about her daughter being lost along the Hollow Road twenty years ago. Emma will not be happy that Norm revealed this personal information to strangers but she'll talk about it nonetheless. If the P.C. haven't spoken to Norm yet, she might let the details of her missing daughter slip with a successful **Psy-**

chology skill roll, or if one of the characters has a Trustworthy bonus (and the G.M. rolls below his percentage number).

She'll tell the characters that her daughter went out to that "Satan infested road" and the woods nearby it twenty years ago from a dare to spend the night out there and not come back till after midnight. With teary eyes, Emma will tell the characters that neither her daughter (Natalie) nor her friends ever came home. She believes that the kids that dared her did something to them and have remained silent about it all these years. She also tells the players not to trust or go anywhere near Eddie (the manager of the local grocery store) as she's convinced he had something to do with it. She also says that if the group is so darn interested in the Hollow Road, that they should visit the Sheriff's office in town and read the file on the incident. She's convinced that the police are covering something up since Eddie's father happens to be the Sheriff.

Note on Natalie's Ghost: If she's ever asked about her daughter's ghost showing up to warn kids away from Hollow Road, she will flatly deny any such claims, saying that her daughter was a good girl and would never have her soul roaming the world like a lost puppy. As far as Emma's concerned, her daughter is in heaven where she belongs.

After the PCs have talked to Emma about her daughter and leave, the characters will be attacked by a Poltergeist and 1D4 Hauntings (**Beyond the Supernatural:** pages 244-247). Despite this confrontation happening just outside the coffee shop, no one will see this (not even Emma, who was in the back of the shop) and questioning the townsfolk about this event will be responded to with funny looks and shrugging it off, moving about their business (and might be less cooperative about helping them in the future).

2. Ted's Bar and Hotel

As far as roach hotels go, this place ranks as one of the worst, but it's the only bar in town. If the characters inquire, others have tried to open bars in town, but the locals have stayed loyal to Ted and they all eventually close, making Ted's Bar and Hotel THE place in town to drink. The majority of the patrons here are farmers who've just come in from the fields, barns, and ranches, so the stench of cattle and manure fills the air. The ceiling fans do little more than circulate the stench (but at least they help thin out the cigarette smoke).

Ted, the bartender and owner, welcomes the characters when they enter, asking them "What cha' thirsting for?" Several of the patrons will stare at them with funny "out of town" stares. Ted will excuse the looks from his customers: "Never mind them, they don't mean nuthin' by it. They may look like a mean bunch, but they're pretty much harmless."

As far as "Hollow Road" is concerned, Ted knows very little about it except that it's a famous destination for the kids in town. "They all love to head out there to spook each other, seeing who can stay out there the longest." He sees it all as nothing but myths and stories.

When Ted shares this information, let the PCs make a **Perception** roll. A 10 or higher succeeds in noticing a couple of the farmers further down the bar groaning, rolling their eyes and shaking their heads at Ted before going back to drinking their beers. If the characters try to talk to them, they won't be responsive at first, but being persistent, especially by characters with

a high mental affinity, a female character with a high physical beauty or even someone offering to buy them both fresh beers will get them somewhere.

They will introduce themselves as Bill and Norm before stating that peculiar things do happen along that road. Bill will explain that he owns the corn fields that run along “Hollow Road” and that *“it’s not unusual to find dead animals or strange items in his field.”* If asked to elaborate, Bill will say, *“Now that I think on it, I found this earlier today.”* while pulling out a small cloth bag from a pocket in his overalls, tossing it towards the PCs. *“Ya see that there? It’s a witch’s hex bag I tell ya! You can have that one; I’ve got several more sitting in my trash bins by the barn. Along with all the damn empty beer bottles and cans the kids keep chucking in my field.”*

A psychic using *Sense Evil* or *Sense Supernatural* will immediately detect an evil supernatural aura on the bag. If they inspect the bag, they will find a few mineral stones, dried up grass and most noticeably, some teeth (a **Biology** skill roll will determine that they’re human teeth). Bill will use this as proof that there’s something funny happening in the woods behind his fields. Norm will agree to all this and mention that Emma, a friend of his who runs the coffee shop in town, had a daughter that went missing in those woods years ago. *“They say that her ghost sometimes shows up on Hollow Road, warning people to get off the road and go back the way they came.”*

3. Demville Sheriff’s Office

This small sheriff’s station sits comfortably on the main road and usually has one or two cruisers parked out front. The sheriff can usually be found here if he’s not out on a case or dealing with someone’s crazy antics. The sheriff (Ralph Hantor) is a friendly man and easy to talk to. He will make a point of greeting each of the player characters and learning their names. *“I’m really good with names and faces. I’ll remember each one of you, you can be sure of that.”*

He’s also interested in what brings a group of out-of-towner’s to his office. Once asked about Hollow Road, he will let out an irritated sigh, saying something under his breath like *“Here we go again,”* and state that there have been disappearances out on that road, just like they’ve heard, but that’s all. *“I don’t believe in ghosts personally, and if that’s why you’re all here, then you’re in for a disappointing trip. I’d encourage you all to leave now, but I know Ted’s hotel could use the business.”*

With a successful *Psychology* skill roll or a *Perception* roll of 10 or higher, the characters will notice he sounds a little sad when talking about the road. If a player notices this and inquires further, Sheriff Hantor will confide that his son, who works over at the grocery store, had a girlfriend that disappeared out there years ago. *“Sometimes I’m afraid that my boy still loves that girl, even after all this time, and he may never move on. At this rate, I’ll never be a grandpa.”*

If asked about the police files, Sheriff Hantor willingly tells them that the police files are all available for anyone to see and use. He’ll even encourage the group to look them over, saying, *“Who knows, maybe you’ll spot something that I’ve been missing for the last twenty years. Some fresh eyes might do the case some good.”* Unfortunately, there’s not much information in the reports to go on. The reports state that Natalia went missing on May 16, 1992 and that there was no sign of a struggle anywhere in the

forest or around the land road. There’s nothing more here for the police to go on, and it’s the same for the characters.

When asked about any other locals, Sheriff Hantor will simply state that they’re all good people who live by small-town rules. They’re mostly farmers or farm hands that make the best go of a hard life. He will admit that some of these villagers can be a nuisance at times, but they all mean well and he cannot hold any of them to account for much in the area of wrongdoing. He will admit that it’s one of the easiest postings he has ever had and will be sad the day the state forces him to retire.

The only person he has any further information to offer is Emma from the coffee shop. Sheriff Hantor will mention that she runs a private reading group at the local library. *“She’s a very private person, and she’s particular about who and how many she lets into the club. I find it a little strange that she’s created an elitist book club that takes place behind closed doors in a small town, but it’s popular all the same.”* Most of the townsfolk are eager to join her reading group as they’ve heard good things about it, including Sheriff Hantor. In fact, no one can even sit in on the group because she makes sure the library is empty and that the doors are locked whenever her group meets. Sheriff Hantor finds this a little strange but he writes it off as a small-town quirk.

4. Pharmacy Shack

Edward Hamm runs this small pharmacy and is also the pharmacist on duty. There are two other store employees but they mainly run the till and stock shelves. Anything having to do with the pharmaceuticals is all handled by Edward. When the player characters approach, he will introduce himself and immediately ask if they’re new to town, just to make polite conversation. The characters can tell him whatever they’d like but Edward will wonder if they’re there to fill a prescription or not. Once the characters tell him they are there to ask some questions, he’ll seem disappointed (if not annoyed) that they’re wasting his time, but he’ll try to help.

He offers generalized knowledge about the town that anyone could find out. Any deeper questioning about the townsfolk will be met with the statement that he cannot share confidential information. Edward has a habit of speaking out loud however, saying *“This reminds me, Emma was supposed to pick up a prescription and she’s never stopped by to get it. Umm... I shouldn’t have said that out loud, but since I did, if any of you happen to stop by her place, can you remind her that her prescription’s ready?”* Edward will then inform them that he’s overdue for a smoke and will leave the pharmacy counter unmanned.

The other two employees are teenagers who converse and flirt with one another, paying little attention to the characters. If desired, the PCs should be able to get behind the counter without drawing attention to themselves from the employees (add a +10% attempt to *Prowl* skill roll). Back here, the PCs can find what Emma’s prescription is.

They’ll find that she’s taking *Benperidol*. A successful **Chemistry: Pharmaceutical** roll, or a quick online **Research** or **Computer Operation** skill roll later on will reveal that *Benperidol* is the most powerful antipsychotic pharmacy drug on the market. It won’t say why she’s been prescribed such a potent drug, but a successful **Computer Operation** skill roll on the pharmacy’s computer (Edward is clueless to locking his computer while away) will show records that she’s not picked up a refill in the

past year. Once the group has this info, if they don't exit the back of the counter quickly, Edward will return from his smoke break, and he'll be furious at the PCs, threatening to call the Sheriff if they don't leave now, and don't bother coming back.

If the group is no longer behind the counter when Edward returns, he'll ask them if they need a prescription again. If the group says no, he'll get annoyed with their loitering in his store and will ask them to purchase something or leave. If the group purchases something, his friendly demeanor returns, and he'll tell the group that he appreciates them coming in and hopes that they'll come again soon.

Once the characters emerge from either or both the Sheriff's station and the Pharmacy, the characters will again be attacked by 1D6+2 Hauntings (**Beyond the Supernatural:** page 246-247). No one will be around to witness this attack, and no one will believe them if they tell people.

If the PCs ask the teenage employees about the haunting on Hollow Road they will simply laugh and say that they are just silly stories that they use to scare each other. They don't actually believe there are any ghosts on the road.

5. Flora's Bakery

Jackie Flanir runs a small bakery and is a very outgoing and charming girl. As soon as she welcomes the group into her bakery, she'll ask if they would like to sample one of the items she's freshly baked. The bakery smells like heaven on a bun and there's no reason not to consider trying a sample. If the group refuses, a *Psychology* skill roll or a *Perception* roll of 15 will notice that she looks hurt at the refusal of her generous offer. She'll then ask if they're here on business or just passing through, obviously yearning to strike up a conversation with the group.

The conversation with her should impress the characters since she's young, she's pretty and she's intelligent, which the PCs might find rare in this small town. She's also open with information about herself (especially if the group samples and buys some of her goods), saying that she was born and raised here in Demville, left to attend culinary school, then moved back home to open her bakery while staying close to her family. *"The bakery's only a year old, but it's been doing pretty good. In fact, I've been thinking of expanding a bit and going into making specialty birthday and wedding cakes."*

Questions about the townsfolk will usually be answered with an affirmation about how great that particular person is (she's a very "the cup is half full" kinda girl) and that she sees them in the bakery regularly. She'll be a little put off however at the mention of either Eddie or the Sheriff, but is overjoyed if any talk about Emma or Betty (the town's librarian) comes up. Given time, she'll talk the group's collective ears off about how much she loves Emma and Betty, and cannot wait till their next reading group meeting at the library, which is in a couple of days.

She'll openly say she's a part of the reading group, *"but I've only just managed to get into it. Emma is particular about who she lets in and I'm tickled pink that she let me of all people join."* She admits that it's taken some time for Emma to invite her in, but once she got in, it has been more than worth it. She'll not answer any questions about what happens in the reading group, blowing them off with casual remarks like *"Oh, you know, typical book readings and discussions and stuff,"* or clever remarks like *"First rule of Book Club: Nobody talks about Book Club."* She

has a very trustworthy vibe and is obviously too smart to reveal anything, and if the group presses on then she'll block them at every turn.

Once questions about the townsfolk have ceased, she'll once again try and get the characters to buy something (or something more if they already have). If anything, she has to be admired for her zeal in business and her charms; those who chat with her for more than a few moments should make a roll against her M.A. of 18 (50% Trustworthy bonus). A failed roll will result in *"She's such a sweet girl and her energy and positivity is infectious. Buying something from her would only makes her more so. What's the harm in purchasing something"* (or something more if they already have)?

Whatever they end up buying tastes absolutely fantastic and might make them want to go back for more a few times throughout the adventure. It should also be noted that the group is NEVER attacked outside the bakery, unless they upset Jackie in some way.

Psychic Diviner: *"Jackie's mixing a bowl of batter by hand as she talks to the group. While she mixes the batter, you spot a series of patterns in the batter, all of which give signs that say this is a place of comfort and warmth. In fact, it's as if she were being protected somehow."*

Psychic Medium: *"While the bakery smells divine with all the baked goods, you can't help but think you're picking up whiffs of a couple of odors in the background. One of them seems to be Vanilla, while the other is Sour Milk."*

6. Post Office and Library

Being a small town, there is not enough business to keep the post office and library in separate buildings so the municipality has merged the two into one office. Although there's a postal clerk behind the desk, he's gruff and unfriendly, and will not answer any questions from the characters with anything more than a grunt or *"I'm busy right now."* If they persist, he'll look visibly annoyed and say that if they're not sending or receiving anything to leave him alone.

Betty, the town librarian, is a different story however, and will openly greet the characters while apologizing for her postal cohort's rudeness. She simply states that *"there's a lot more traffic moving through here than usual lately, and it's keeping poor old Earl busier than he would like to be."* She mentions that he's ready for retirement, but they won't let him go until they find a replacement. Right now, no one's stepping up to take the job.

She'll ask them if there's any book in particular that they're looking for, and will point them to a few good literary options if the characters don't have anything specific to request. She sorts through book and looks somewhat distracted while she talks to them, so the characters will have to interrupt her work if they want to get information out of her.

Questions about the townsfolk will be met with indifference, saying that the library gets more foot traffic during Emma's reading group days than the rest of the week combined. *"In fact, before the book club had opened, people were hardly coming in anymore, what with computers and those fancy e-books these days. And to my surprise, traffic has increased since the club has opened, much to Earl's chagrin."*

When asked about "Hollow Road," she'll simply state that lots of interesting things have happened along that road. *"The library*

has a book or two on the local history if you'd like to take a look." If the characters take an interest in the history books she'll lead the P.C. to their places on the shelves, pull them out and hand them over. One in particular is a fairly old book titled "Demville: The Small Town with Large Character," but it's a small book and a quick read, so a successful *Read English* skill roll lets the reader finish it in a couple of hours.

Characters who take the time to read through the book (or if skimming it and making a successful *Read English* skill roll at -15%), they'll find a section dealing specifically with the Hollow Road and its haunted past. The book states that the hauntings date back to the colonization of the area by the British. An American Indian tribe had once resided near the Demville area, which became the site of a brutal battle where many Indian braves were killed by the highly trained and better armed British military.

The British had set up a camp, but it was soon abandoned after numerous ghostly sightings and other strange activities were reported. They felt that the place was an affront to holy God and no man should ever reside here. The book also mentions that there was hesitation in the early 1800's to settle the area because of the ghost legends, but it eventually went forward due to its good farmlands and water supply.

There's not much more useful information in the book, but Betty will answer other general questions about the town's history, and will then ask if there is anything else she can help them find. If the characters leave, she will wish them a good day and smile as they leave.

Any questions about the "Hollow Road" after reading the book will simply be dismissed by Betty as strange stories the locals enjoy telling, referring them back to the book that she gave them for the real information. If any of the characters take their time and peruse the entire library, a **Perception** roll of 8 or more will allow them to notice an unexpectedly large occult section that's been set aside for special access only and is under lock and key.

Depending on the equipment the characters have on them, it might be difficult to spot anything of use to their investigation. There's nothing noteworthy in the library proper. The place is very neat and organized, with everything dusted and cleaned to perfection. The basement, however, is another story.

With *See the Invisible* or even with a good black light, characters will see what look like blood marks on the concrete floor and symbols painted on the walls. A successful roll on **Lore: Cults and Secret Societies** will reveal that the predominant symbol is of an ancient cult that worships demons. Different sects of this cult worship different demons who they claim are their benefactors, some of which notably deal in trading souls for power.

Investigating the basement kitchen with a successful *Crime Scene Investigation* skill roll will reveal that many of the knives in the butcher's block are also covered in blood and the sink has been used in an attempt to clean the mess up.

Just after the clues in the basement are discovered, Betty will come down the stairs to see what the characters are doing, and she'll be very insistent that they leave the library once and for all, locking the downstairs door behind them after they go back up the stairs. If asked about the blood, she will deny that anything bad ever happens down there, and that they're no longer welcome in the library. Once they are outside the library, the door is slammed shut, locked, and the open sign is flipped over to "closed."

The characters will be attacked by 1D4+2 Soul Hounds (see below) once they leave the library. Once again, none of the

townsfolk will witness this attack. For some inexplicable reason, there's never anyone around to witness these random attacks.

Note: The group could go back to Sheriff Hantor about the blood stains, but he will only say that there's not enough to go on to write up a search warrant while calling another town to request a mobile crime lab to come out since Demville does not have one. He would need more evidence of wrongdoing in the library to make any sort of warrant go through. This does not make him any less interested in what the characters have discovered; he just wants to make sure they are going the right way with their investigation. He will now confess that he thinks there's more going on with the so called "reading group"; in fact, he's had his suspicions for a long time. But nothing substantial has ever come up to back up his suspicions.

7. Demville First Anglican Church

The church looks like it's a few hundred years old judging by its architecture. A successful roll on either **Lore: Religion, History**, or **Architecture** reveals that it was likely built in the early 1800s. Even so, it's been very well maintained, leaving little doubt that the parishioners of the church have kept it funded well enough for the substantial maintenance a church this old would require.

Adjacent to the church is a small graveyard that looks like it was filled up within a decade of the church being built. Any characters that take a moment to go through the graveyard will see that all the tombstones dates back from the early to mid-1800s.

The church itself is locked when the group checks the door, but Brother Joseph will answer when the characters knock, asking how he can help them. He will earnestly do his best to answer their questions. That being said, he's very good at diverting a conversation and making it go another way when needed. For example, any accusations toward the church will be met with a gentle smile and an affirmation that "*This is a house of God my son, evil has no place here. That's a rather comforting thought, wouldn't you say?*"

If anyone asks about Emma's reading group, he will light up and tell them that "*Emma has run a very successful reading group for the last twenty years, and god willing, she'll keep it going for at least twenty more.*" If the PCs attack her character, particularly if they bring up the fact that Emma's on medication, he'll go on the defensive, saying that it's all the fault of all those silly doctors trying to over-medicate her. He says Emma is in no need of medical attention.

Any questions about Hollow Road will be flat out dismissed. Joseph reassures them that "*There's no such thing as ghosts, my son. You seem troubled by these stories; perhaps you'd care to let me hear your confession?*"

8. Todd's Gas and General Store

This store offers the townsfolk all the basic necessities of living. It provides goods such as ammunition, clothing, camping equipment, tools, food, and a variety of gear and equipment to help the customer with their farms or their homes. The owner, Todd Phillips, is a burly guy with a beard down to the middle of his chest and long, curly hair tucked under a ball cap. At first glance, he looks like he's ready to eat someone alive, but he really is quite friendly. He'll welcome the characters when they

enter the store, but he'll stay behind the counter. If the characters have questions about his merchandise, he'll simply yell out the answer from behind the counter rather than leave it to show them what they may be looking for.

When approached about the townsfolk or Hollow Road, he'll laugh and say, *"This town is full of good people who enjoy a good ghost story now and then. Hell, this town was built over a place people thought was haunted. Anyone who grew up in this town grew up on the ghost stories that come with it."*

He doesn't deny that strange things happen out in the woods from time to time, but to blame that on ghosts and monsters is ridiculous. *"The only thing good to come out of these crazy stories about monsters in the woods is that I sell a lot of ammo. Then again, the zombie craze at the movies and on TV over the last few years hasn't hurt ammo sales either."*

He assumes that since *"it's always the teenagers that report seeing the ghosts"* that they're probably drunk or high when they go out to Hollow Road while looking for trouble, and they eventually start thinking they're seeing things. Todd can't explain the disappearances along the road, but he says that there are a lot of strange people out there, and leaves it at that.

Todd also seems nervous during this whole exchange, constantly drying off his hands and occasionally, he shivers for a brief moment. Any player character that is able to pass a Perception check of 10 will be able to pick up signs of Todd's nervousness. The Perception check will also allow them to see on the counter what looks like a leather-bound book with strange symbols on it and a note pad with symbols for words. It is not in any language the characters would know, making it impossible to read. When asked about the notes, he quickly shoves them under the desk, claiming they're some doodles and nothing for them to be concerned with. He then asks the characters if there is anything else he can help them with. If not, then he's busy and asks them to leave.

If the PCs wait till after dark when Todd closes the store, they will be able to break in and find the book still on or under the desk where the PCs last saw him put it. They'll notice that it is an occultism book that deals with the trapping and transference of souls. If they come back to question Todd about it, he'll claim that he got it from his reading group and will say nothing more about it, asking the PCs to leave.

9. Kay's Grocery Store

Harold Kay owns this small grocery store, but he's nowhere to be found when the PCs enter. The characters can tell that he runs a tight ship, with shelves being well stocked and neat, the floors seem to be cleaned regularly, and the employees staying busy. It seems to be the most disciplined place in the country town of Demville.

Once characters enter the store, a couple of employees converge on them quickly, asking if there's anything they can help the characters find. The characters should recall that Eddie, Ralph Hantor's son, is the general manager, and was the boyfriend of Emma's daughter, Natalie. If they ask about Eddie, they will be told to wait right there, and one of the employees will go get him.

When Eddie approaches, the characters will notice that the employees do their best to look busier. It's obvious that his staff either fears or highly respects Eddie, but either way, they don't want to upset him. Eddie will greet the characters and ask them

what he can do for them. If asked about Natalie, he will become visibly upset and wonder why they are asking about her. After an explanation from the characters, Eddie will explain that he loved Natalie and would never have done anything to hurt her. A tear will fall from his eye as he says that it was Emma and her reading group that killed her. *"Natalie would never have done anything so rash before she became part of that damn reading group!"* He says that Emma and her reading buddies are the real danger, despite what she's been saying about him for years.

After a minute, when Eddie is able to calm down, he explains that he goes out to the road every year where Natalie disappeared and puts a flower memorial up for her along the tree line. He's afraid to actually go near the road that leads into the forest, and he avoids it at all costs. He believes there's something not right about the forest, but doesn't elaborate on what it might be. He simply shrugs and says he has work to do before the owner comes back. The employees all seem in shock after hearing him talk about Natalie.

10. First Demville Bank

This small bank is set up in what appears to have once been someone's house. It's warm and friendly and the tellers will help with any banking needs the characters might have. Most of the tellers are young, either being still in or just out of high school. The older employees are either working in the back or are not working today.

Whatever teller the characters approach, he'll be inviting and insist on the characters opening a bank account with them and/or to initiate transactions. The characters are free to bank with them however they want, but the tellers will know little about Emma, Betty, Eddie, Ralph or anyone for that matter. They will say that they are just kids and do not really know much about the adults in the town. If the characters speak to a manager, the manager, Anne, will arrive, but she too will insist that the townsfolk are all good people. All the talk about disappearances and things happening out on Hollow Road are dreadful, but it's just talk. There's no evidence either way that anyone, including that nice Eddie fellow, was involved.

The tellers will giggle when asked about Hollow Road and they will give some wild stories about ghostly encounters on the road; they've not seen any of it, but know of people who have. They are eager to share their stories, hoping that the characters will have stories to share with them as well. The manager will return to a back office. There's no information to be gained here.

A **Perception** roll of 10 or more will notice that the teller who was helping them is wearing a pendant around her neck. The symbol on the pendant was present in the bottom of the library. If asked about where she got it, she'll say Emma gave it to her at the reading group.

11. Community Pool and Public School

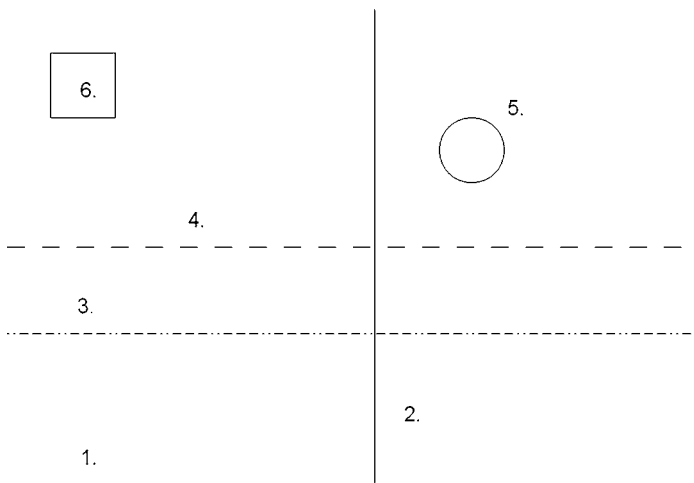
The community pool and public school are tucked away in the back of the community of Demville and are obviously poorly funded. Some of the windows are boarded up and the pool looks like it needs work, depending on the time of year the characters visit. If the characters try to enter the school they will be immediately stopped by security, and asked why there are there. The staff is protective of the children, and are wary about anyone entering the school that's not supposed to be there.

If the characters insist, a staff member will let them speak to the principal, who's in his office and usually busy. Once he sees the characters, Principal George Hollingworth will put down the phone and invite them in. He'll wonder why they're here and will regard them with caution, unsure of why a group of strangers are in his school.

Mostly, he tries to dodge questions, not wanting to try and implicate or blame anyone for the problems in town. He says that the parents seem to be apathetic about the future of their children here in Demville, trying to get the characters to agree with him. He says he's new to Demville and has little information about any of its long-standing community members. And due to the poor shape of the school building and its grounds, he spends most of his time trying to improve it, usually taking his work home with him. At present, he has no real social life to speak of.

George does mention that a lot of the students are interested in Hollow Road, asking to work on projects for it all the time. He does not see the appeal of a "haunted road," despite what the townsfolk say about it. If the characters have not already been to the library, he'll direct them to talk to Betty; perhaps she'll have more information. As for him, he's busy and needs to get back to work.

A **Perception** roll of 8 or more will overhear a group of students near the front doors of the school on their way out, daring each other to go out to the Hollow Road. Some of them will laugh nervously, but eventually they will agree and make plans to see it over the weekend.



Hollow Road Locations

1. Main Highway 56

This is the main highway that connects to downtown Demville, west of Hollow Road. The town itself is about 5 miles (8 km) from Hollow Road.

2. Hollow Road

This road is a single lane road that stretches to another road beyond the tree line. There are corn fields on both sides of the road up until the trees. All the crops near the trees seem to be wilted and/or dying. If the characters ask Bill at the Bar and Hotel about the dying crops, he just insists that it's because of "the evil of this road." It's because of this that he's seriously thinking of

selling these two fields and getting land somewhere on the other side of town.

3. Railway

A railroad track cuts through the corn fields here. The tracks are not used very often, seeing use maybe about every two days. Characters will find no clues along the railroad that will lead them to any information. Of course there could always be a random supernatural occurrence to be found along it.

4. Tree Line

This is the tree line that everyone fears. Nothing of interest has ever happened in the fields in front of the tree line; the disappearances happen beyond the tree line. The trees themselves seem to be skeletal in appearance. When the characters approach, the trees look as if they're trying to reach out and draw them in. Using "Sense Evil" will give a sense of a strong evil within the forest, and the same with "Sense the Supernatural." Characters will almost be overwhelmed with the chilling and oppressive force of supernatural evil that's lurking within the forest.

5. Campsite

The campsite's not been used recently. The lack of use makes the campsite barely noticeable, save for the set of stones set up to indicate a fire pit. If this is the first time the characters have been here, there's very little to see here.

However, if this is the second time the characters have been here, they'll find young Jackie Flanir's body here, tied between two trees. Her body looks as if a knife had carved out a section of her abdomen; blood and other bodily fluids spilled over the campground. A successful **Wilderness Survival** roll also indicates that the fire pit's been used within the last twelve hours.

A **Perception** roll of 16 will notice that the earth looks like it has been scuffed out and symbols were drawn around the fire pit. It's impossible to tell what the symbols were at this point but it should be obvious to the characters that some kind of ritual took place here. A **Lore: Magic** skill roll will reveal that the ritual that took place here was Sumerian in origin and related to the chanting that they experienced late at night as detailed in the "Day and Nights in Demville." The **Lore: Magic** skill roll will also reveal that the ritual was intended to bind a force (which was commonly used to bind a soul), to an area. This same roll will reveal to the characters that the ghost sightings on the road are probably bound souls, and it's very likely that some creature or being is in the area, acting as an anchor and forcing the souls to remain, as is required by the ritual.

A *Psychic Medium* could attempt to contact a soul in the campsite or more specifically, Jackie Flanir. Once contact is made, the soul will only be able to answer basic questions such as "Who did this?" or "What happened?" The answers to these two questions are Emma and the Soul Merchant for the first question and "They stole my soul." If questioned further the soul will just say that it was the ritual that did this to her. Any in-depth questioning however will cause the soul to wail and then sever the link.

Those who are able to pass another **Perception** roll of 8 or more will also be able to see some tracks from someone wearing boots leading away from the camp towards the road. Once the tracks reach the road however, it's difficult to determine where

the trail goes off to. If the characters are able to succeed a **Tracking (people)** skill, they will be able to pick up the trail on the other side of the road, which leads to Jeremiah's cabin.

If the characters contact Sheriff Hantor about the scene, he and a few deputies will come out to investigate. Hantor will set up the campsite as a crime scene and tell the characters that he will have to take it from here. Chances are he will have to contact the State Police in Campport to send some investigators or else call the FBI, which he does not want to do. He will ask them to leave and if they follow any more leads to let him know.

Hantor will start to become more open to the player characters' assistance at this point but will have very little to offer them in the way of new information that the PCs won't have picked up themselves by now.

6. Jeremiah's Cabin

The first day the characters are in Demville, they won't find Jeremiah at his cabin. His house is unlocked however, so characters (especially those with a selfish alignment or lower) are free to go inside and look around. Characters with a good alignment should have a conflict about entering the house uninvited, but using the "Sense Evil" ability will indicate that the house is drowning in evil, which might relieve their moral obligations about entering the house.

The first obvious clue they'll discover in the house is the many symbols drawn all over the windows and inside walls. A **Lore: Magic** skill check will reveal that the symbols are Sumerian in the same relation to the ritual that was performed at the campsite (if the characters have gotten that far). There's not much in the way of furniture, save for a desk in one of the bedrooms and what appears to be an altar in the middle of the living room (on inspection, it's not been used recently).

If the desk in the bedroom is searched, the PCs are rewarded with finding several books (in a language they can't understand), a pencil, and a notebook that lists a series of names, most of which are crossed out. Notable names include Emma's, Jackie's and Todd's. Emma has several tallies marked off beside her name, but what this indicates is unknown to the characters (although they could return to Demville to approach her about it). Emma will deny any involvement with anyone who lives in a cabin in the woods. What involvement Jackie and Todd have in this strange cabin is also unknown.

If this is the second day that the characters are in Demville, then Jeremiah will be home. He's an overweight man in shabby clothing sporting a long, grey beard. He's also smells like he's in dire need of a bath. At first he tries to make small talk with the group. A **Perception** roll of 8 or more will reveal that he is constantly hiding his hands behind his back. The successful Perception roll may also reveal to the characters that he's reaching for a staff leaning against the table. He will continue to try and engage the characters in small talk, but he will also try to lure the characters into a position where they can easily be attacked and drive them off or, if there are not too many characters, try to perform the campsite ritual to trap their souls and increase the amount of souls at his disposal.

Another **Perception** roll of 16 or more, or a **Psychology** roll, will reveal that Jeremiah is trying to get them into a position to be attacked or see that Jeremiah is secretly trying to perform the same ritual at the campsite. Any character with the "Sense Evil"

ability will be able to see that he is actually a powerful supernatural evil. He will know he has been revealed and then tries to converse with the characters and get them to join his cause. He'll explain to them that he deals in souls and there's big business in souls amongst his kind. The characters can become more powerful than they ever imagined if they learn from him, and bring him souls. If/when the characters refuse, he'll call upon outside help in the form of Soul Hounds (see below) to join him and then attack the characters. One of his favorite tactics is to light an area on fire (like the cabin) and drag people into it to burn alive.

Once the characters defeat Jeremiah, they will be able to find all the same details that they could find if they had come here the day before. The desk contents will all be here as well, and this time, Jackie's name in the notebook is crossed out and an additional tally is beside Emma's name, totaling twenty-five. When the PCs make it back to town with the notebook and approach any member of the reading group after Emma is dealt with, they will confess that the tallies represent each person she has given to Jeremiah. Sheriff Hantor will be eager for the notebook and what the tallies mean.

Once the Merchant and his minions are defeated, the characters can continue to look around if desired; there will be information here that wasn't there the first time. In the bedroom, a **Lore: Magic** skill check will show a makeshift altar with the same Sumerian symbols found at the ritual site. They'll find a journal that shows the exact dates that other rituals were performed, including Emma's daughter Natalie. The journal heavily implicates Emma and members of her reading group in the murders and disappearances, even mentioning that the reading group has been hiding the bodies in an abandoned mine shaft a few hours away. Jeremiah seems very intent on keeping the details recorded which will, beyond a shadow of a doubt, show that Emma is more than what she claims. The journal will also show that Emma has made a deal with Jeremiah which has bestowed on her some supernatural powers.

Showing this to Hantor will infuriate him and he will say that Emma always seemed to be such a good person. He will say that he is baffled by these revelations but is skeptical about the claims that she has supernatural powers. He will ask the characters thoroughly about the signs on the walls and windows and will mention that they do seem to resemble the symbols at the campsite as well. He will constantly shake his head in disbelief if the characters try to explain to him anything about the supernatural but he humors the characters anyway. It will be more than obvious to the characters that Hantor is eager to get back to town and arrest Emma and bring her in for questioning. He will ask that the characters accompany him, just in case there is any truth to these "ghost" claims as he quotes her powers as being.

With a successful **Lore: Magic** skill roll, the characters will also be able to figure out a way to break the ritual that's been holding the souls to the area. Once the counter-ritual is performed, a loud wail will be heard, and a violent gust of wind will blow through the area. If the characters are outside at the time, they will see ghosts and souls being blown away towards a light in the distance. If the Sheriff is present he will just write off the windstorm as a freak occurrence and the ghosts and souls as a trick of the light. He will refuse to believe that anything supernatural has happened here.

Hollow Road

Random Encounters

Use the following table to determine any random encounters the characters may come across while in the forested region of the Hollow Road.

01-50%: No encounter, besides the creepy and uneasy feeling of the woods.

51-75%: A group of teens trying to scare each other are running around the woods. The characters probably would have noticed a parked car along the road. They apologize for interfering with the characters and run off giggling.

76-90%: A ghost is spotted by all characters and is waving its arms, trying to warn the characters off. The Game Master may choose, to describe this however they choose but the ghost has a translucent blue effect and could look like a Native American Indian, a British Soldier from the 1800's, a Civil War soldier or a modern-day person. The Game Master should use this imagination to come up with a memorable ghost.

91-00%: A group of 1D4 Soul Hounds are encountered. The characters will be forced to either fight them or flee.

After Jeremiah, the Soul Merchant

When the characters return to Demville after dealing with the Soul Merchant, the tension of the town and potential for hostility will increase. Those who belonged to the reading group will outright avoid the characters, not wanting to even talk to them, and threaten to call the police if cornered.

Emma, however, will be militant, declaring that they should not have interfered. She will proclaim openly that the Soul Merchant had promised her both power and immortality, but the characters have now ruined everything for her. She will say that she was linked to the Soul Merchant and could feel when he was defeated. If the PCs attempt to use their Sensitive abilities on her, they will now be able to detect that she's actually a pretty powerful psychic. The fact that she was able to hide her psychic nature from the group should be made clear. How she reacts at this point can go two ways. If the characters have talked to Hantor about the campsite and the journal at Jeremiah's cabin, he will move to arrest Emma and have the characters assist him in the arrest. She'll try to resist but is taken into custody. If the characters have not contacted the sheriff yet, she'll run to her reading group, where she'll use them to distract the PCs while she makes a run to get out of town. For her old age, she is surprisingly agile and good at fleeing a scene unnoticed. She does not want to engage the characters since she is fairly certain that if they were able to deal with the Soul Merchant, they could stop, if not kill her.

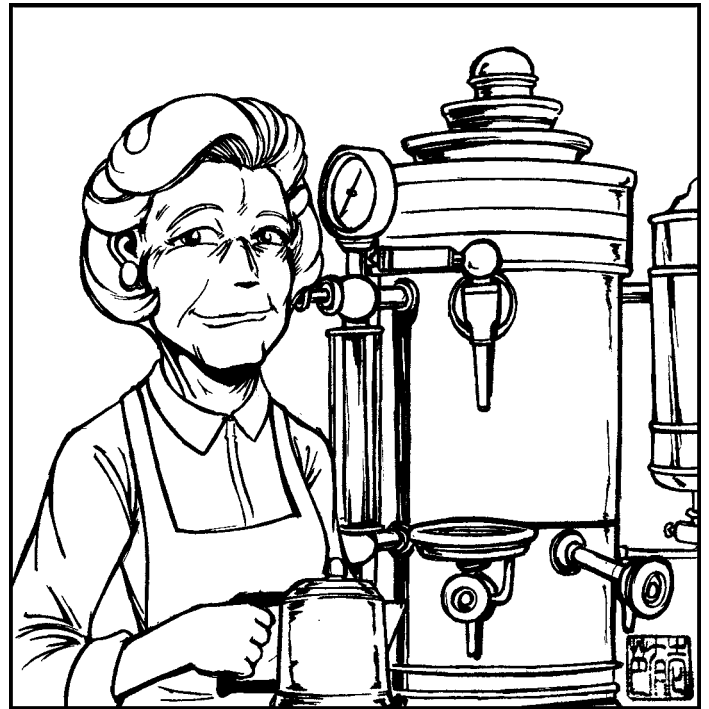
At some point after Emma's either been arrested or flees, Becky, the librarian, and Sheriff Hantor, will approach the characters. The sheriff will explain that Becky confessed to the reading group's activities, and made a statement that Emma was involved with occult practices and was responsible for all of the murders. She also says that Emma has been alive for a very long time since she made a deal with Jeremiah and he gave her power to make her able to do his bidding. It made her supernatural, but Becky didn't know just how powerful she truly was. The Sheriff does not believe the supernatural talk, but he was on his way to arrest Emma for the murders (if he has not done so already) and

saw her flee the characters, so he'll ask them a few questions, but will put out a request for an arrest warrant and an APB to nearby cities and counties to keep an eye out for her.

Eddie Hantor will also find the characters at some point. He'll say that he knew Emma was up to no good, and thanks the characters for exposing her. He says that he is going to do right by Natalie and see that such evil never takes place in Demville again.

Note: If Emma gets away she will not be happy with the PCs. She will inevitably want revenge. Even if she is arrested, she may make a good recurring villain if she ever manages to break out of prison.

Demville and Hollow Road Villains and NPCs



Emma

This elderly lady seems like an innocent coffee shop owner, but in reality, she is more than human now, and has been around for as long as anyone can remember. Sensitive psychics who can sense it will realize that she's at least a hundred years old even though she appears to be in her early sixties.

She's a devout student of the occult, psychic development, and demonology. Through these fields she's made deals with demons that have made it possible for her to develop significant psychic abilities, increase her magical capabilities, and achieve an unnaturally long life and vitality.

To most people in Demville, she's a sweet old lady who would help anyone in a heartbeat and would serve anyone with as much respect as anyone deserves. She pretends to love, interact with, and care about and show concern for people with all the false fervor she can. Her high Mental Affinity carries her façade a long way.

Emma – Supernatural Human

Alignment: Diabolic.

Attributes: I.Q. 15, M.E. 20, M.A. 18, P.S. 11, P.P. 9, P.E. 12, P.B. 10, Spd 13.

Hit Points: 47

S.D.C.: 24

Threat Level: x4

Size: 5.5 feet (1.67 meters).

Weight: 120 lbs (54 kg).

P.P.E.: 35

I.S.P.: 80

Skills of Note: Parapsychology 98%, Research 98%, Streetwise: Weird 80%, Lore: Demons and Monsters 95%, Lore: Entities and Ghosts 95%, Lore: Magic 90%.

Equivalent Level of Experience: 10

Attack per Melee: 5

Combat Bonuses: +2 to strike, +4 to parry and dodge.

Magic: None.

Psionics: All Healing, Physical and Sensitive psionics along with Draw Fire (8), Fire Bolt (10), Part Fire (8), Self-Combustion (12), Steam Blast (5) and Throw Fire (7).

Enemies: Eddie Hantor knows in his gut that Emma's up to no good, and would like nothing more than to see her taken down. He doesn't have the courage to do anything himself, but will assist anyone who plans to deal with her.

Allies: Almost everyone in town likes Emma. She's sincere, friendly and helpful to everyone she meets, and her reading group nearly worships her like a god. The Soul Merchant considers her as a tool and a means to an end however. It's using Emma and has only granted her powers to help her in her quest to feed him souls. He has no intention of holding up his end of the bargain to make her a Soul Merchant one day. He'll also cut and run if things go south for him or when Emma gets into trouble. There are always others willing to make deals with demons.

Habitat: Emma lives above the coffee shop. When she's not in her shop or the apartment above it, she's usually attending the reading club or working on her quest to become a Soul Merchant.

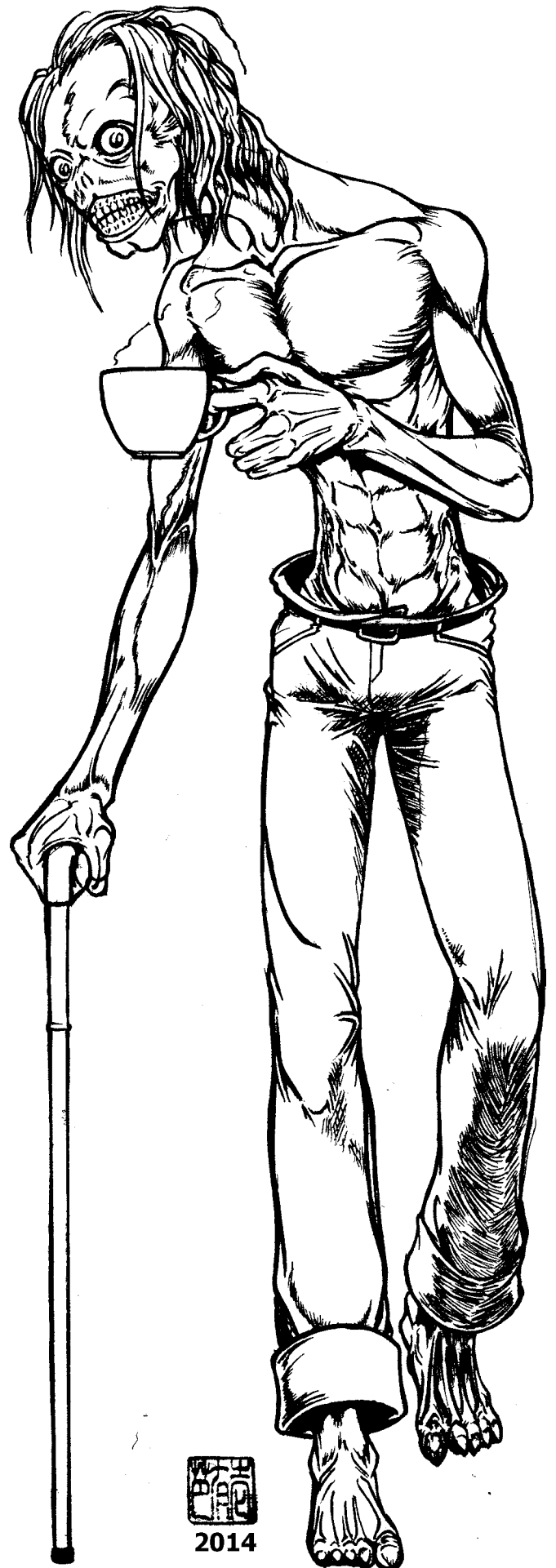
Equipment: Besides using her considerable psychic powers, Emma also carries a light caliber handgun that does 3D6 S.D.C. damage. If caught in the middle of an occult practice, she'll also be armed with a ritual dagger/Athamé that does 1D6+1 damage.

Soul Merchant

This evil creature has been around for ages, and wheels and deals in souls. It has little interest in the things humans consider valuable, but when dealing with humans, in the beginning it will demand favors or tokens that may seem trivial. But in time, as it's pawns get a taste of the power and what it can get them, the Merchant's demands become much more intensive and challenging, both in body and soul.

The more souls they possess, the greater their power, so it is not uncommon to find them setting up shop near communities or in heavily populated areas so they can find pawns to make deals with as they can provide the souls the beings need. It could trap the souls itself, but he prefers to manipulate people to do the rituals required for trapping souls for it. It finds it more satisfying to get others to do the work as it can watch them give way to evil and corrupting their souls.

The Soul Merchant near Demville has been there for some time and has managed to hide its true intentions from everyone



(including Emma). It's never shown the withered true form of a Soul Merchant, preferring instead to look like an overweight hermit in the woods.

Greater Demon

Alignment: Anarchist.

Attributes: I.Q. 21, M.E. 20, M.A. 22, P.S. 16(Supernatural), P.P. 16, P.E. 15, P.B. 6 (in true form, 10 when disguised), Spd 16.

Armor Rating (A.R.): 16

Hit Points: 50

S.D.C.: 75

Discorporation: When slain, the Soul Merchant turns into a withered husk of a body that can't be positively identified. The soul of the creature can be seen sinking into the ground, uselessly clawing around to keep for sinking. The soul goes completely underground within 30 seconds.

Threat Level: x6

Horror Factor: 14 in true form.

Size: 5-6 feet (1.5-1.8 meters).

Weight: 100-180 lbs (45-81 kg).

Average Life Span: Uncertain, most likely immortal.

P.P.E.: 1D6x100

I.S.P.: 5D6x10

Natural Abilities: The Soul Merchant can see in the dark up to 1000 feet (305 meters) and can immediately detect any creature that comes within 100 feet (30.5 meters) of it.

Soul Abilities: The abilities of the Soul Merchant come from its ability to deal and draw powers from souls. The souls need to be attached to an area since that is the only way to ensure that a significant number of souls can feed the powers of the Soul Merchant. For every five souls stored in the area, the Soul Merchant gets an additional +1 to parry and dodge. For every ten souls the Soul Merchant acquires, it gains a +1 bonus to strike and a psionic power of choice.

It can also impart souls to other beings to increase their powers. Imparted souls that are not stored in an amulet have their bonuses halved, making the parry and dodge bonus increasing at every ten souls and the bonus to strike and the psionic power for every twenty souls.

The Soul Merchant along Hollow Road currently has 25 souls captured. There is no limit to the number of souls that can be captured in this way.

Shape Change: Their natural state is that of a tan-colored, withered husk of a body. However, they can change their appearance to look like anything they want. Most Soul Merchants in heavily populated areas imitate homeless people to avert attention and suspicion. They are very good at adapting to different situations and as such, can easily make themselves look acceptable for high-class events and situations as well. It's not that uncommon for Soul Merchants to look like homeless people during the day and then look like a member of high society, all in an attempt to ply their trade. The façade of a homeless person helps to avert suspicion when high society starts asking questions about them and they do not think to look among the homeless.

Fire Immunity: The Soul Merchant is immune to any fire attacks made by the PCs, psionic or otherwise.

Vulnerabilities: Soul Merchants are blinded by regular sunlight and take double damage from magic and psionic attacks.

R.C.C. Skills of Note: W.P. Staff, Interrogation 65%, Lore (all 95%, Concealment 60%, History 75% (does not improve with experience).

Equivalent Level of Experience: 2D4

Attacks per Melee: 6

R.C.C. Bonuses (in addition to attribute and soul bonuses): +3 to strike, +2 to parry and dodge, +4 to pull punch, +1 to disarm, +1 to roll with impact, immune to rolls against Horror Factor. Is impervious to fire, poison, disease and possession. Use the "Supernatural Damage & Hand Weapons" info on page 135 of the main book to determine damage with his staff.

Magic: None.

Psionics: All Healing, Sensitive and Fire Walker powers, including Demon Punch (6), Electrokinesis (varies), Mind Block (4) and Summon Inner Strength (4).

Enemies: Soul Merchants are hated by many in both the mortal and supernatural worlds for their ability to rip the souls of people out and use them as a commodity. Most supernatural beings tend to avoid them and only deal with them when absolutely necessary. Most other supernatural beings see them as a rival for the souls that Soul Merchants try to capture. Other evil beings are often in competition for these souls and often are angered at how the Soul Merchant is able to capture them.

Allies: Only the most evil of supernatural beings will associate themselves with Soul Merchants but only because they want part of the power that is available through dealing in souls. Usually the great supernatural evils have to trick the Soul Merchant into sharing its power and greater evil powers are very capable of doing that. Soul Merchants are manipulative beings and know that there are always greater beings seeking to overcome them and so they make deals with greater powers to protect themselves and allow them to ply their trade.

Habitat: Most Soul Merchants do pretty well for themselves, living in high-rises and nice homes. Some prefer to live out in the woods where they can ply their trade with very little notice from the local authorities. It really doesn't matter where they live as long as there's little sunlight, and they remain hidden from the public view and are able to collect their souls.

Soul Hound

This hound of hell looks like a lean and boney but well-muscled hound with an enlarged snout and sharp teeth. It's not uncommon to see bits of flesh of a recent hunt hanging from their teeth and jowls, giving a rather disturbing appearance.

They're solitary creatures that only prefer the company of other Soul Hounds and the Soul Merchants who treat them as their pets and minions. They possess a predatory animal level of intelligence and a pack mentality, and they see Soul Merchants as their leaders.

Lesser Demon

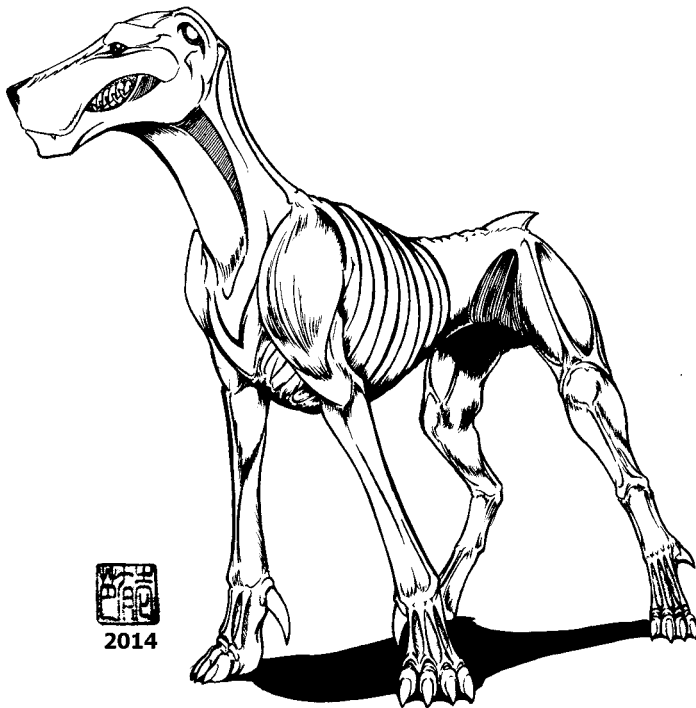
Alignment: Anarchist.

Attributes: I.Q. 1D4+4 (lesser predator intelligence), M.E. 2D6, M.A. 1D6, P.S. 4D6+6, P.P. 3D6, P.E. 4D6, P.B. 1D6, Spd 6D6.

Armor Rating (A.R.): 14

Hit Points: P.E. + 2D6.

S.D.C.: 5D6



Discorporation: When slain, the Soul Hound disappears in a puff of smoke.

Threat Level: x2

Horror Factor: 16 in true form.

Size: 5-6 feet in length (1.5-1.8 meters).

Weight: 200-240 lbs. (90-108 kg).

Average Life Span: Uncertain, most likely immortal.

P.P.E.: None.

I.S.P.: None.

Natural Abilities: The Soul Hound has the ability to detect any creature within 1000 feet (305 meters) by scent. They can see in the dark up to 1000 feet (305 meters).

Fire Immunity: The Soul Hound is immune to any fire attacks made by the PCs, psionic or otherwise.

Vulnerabilities: Soul Hounds are uncomfortable in regular sunlight and take double damage from magic and psionics.

R.C.C. Skills of Note: Hunting, Land Navigation 75%.

Equivalent Level of Experience: 1D6

Attacks per Melee: 6

R.C.C. Bonuses (in addition to attribute and soul bonuses): +3 to strike, +4 to parry and dodge, +4 to pull punch, +2 to disarm, +4 to roll with impact, immune to rolls against Horror Factor. Is impervious to fire, poison, disease and possession.

Magic: None.

Psionics: None.

Enemies: Soul Hounds are very territorial and will snarl, bark at and attack other canine animals without hesitation.

Allies: The only beings that have been able to tame the Soul Hounds are the Soul Merchants themselves. The Soul Hounds are comfortable in submitting themselves to the Merchants, as if they understand in an instinctual way that the Merchants are their masters, and obey them as such.

Habitat: Soul Hounds usually find dark caves or holes to hide in during the day and come out mostly at night. However, they will come out in the day to defend their territory. They also require little rest so they'll patrol their homes and territory regularly.

Demville NPC Quick Stats

Ted

Can be found at **Ted's Bar and Hotel**.

Alignment: Unprincipled.

Attributes: I.Q. 12, M.E. 11, M.A. 16, P.S. 14, P.P. 12, P.E. 15, P.B. 13, Spd 10.

S.D.C.: 20. **Hit Points:** 24.

Combat Skills: Hand to Hand: Basic.

Skills of Note: Business and Finance 50%, Streetwise 32%, W.P. Blunt.

Level of Experience: 4

Equipment: Baseball bat 1D6.

Description and Disposition: Usually wearing a button-up shirt, blue jeans and is friendly to everyone.

Bill

Can be found at **Ted's Bar and Hotel**.

Alignment: Anarchist.

Attributes: I.Q. 9, M.E. 12, M.A. 10, P.S. 14, P.P. 12, P.E. 17, P.B. 10, Spd 12.

S.D.C.: 25. **Hit Points:** 28.

Combat Skills: Hand to Hand: Basic.

Skills of Note: Carpentry 35%, Herding 40%, Wilderness Survival 40%.

Level of Experience: 2

Equipment: None.

Description and Disposition: Farmer's clothes and a tractor themed ball cap. A bit arrogant at times, and likes to share a little gossip. Otherwise, generally nice.

Norm

Can be found at **Ted's Bar and Hotel**.

Alignment: Scrupulous.

Attributes: I.Q. 14, M.E. 14, M.A. 12, P.S. 10, P.P. 12, P.E. 12, P.B. 14, Spd 14.

S.D.C.: 15. **Hit Points:** 22.

Combat Skills: Hand to Hand: Basic.

Skills of Note: Herding 40%, Hunting, Land Navigation 43%.

Level of Experience: 2

Equipment: None.

Description and Disposition: Well dressed for a farmer but is poorly groomed and has unkempt hair. Likes people and wouldn't think of hurting a fly.

Sheriff Ralph Hantor

Can be found at the Sheriff's Office.

Alignment: Scrupulous.

Attributes: I.Q. 12, M.E. 14, M.A. 16, P.S. 16, P.P. 14, P.E. 18, P.B. 12, Spd 18.

S.D.C.: 25. **Hit Points:** 32.

Combat Skills: Hand to Hand: Expert.

Skills of Note: Law (General) 60%, Research 65%, Mathematics (Basic) 87%, W.P. Blunt, W.P. Handgun, W.P. Rifle.

Level of Experience: 6

Equipment: Police service pistol 2D6, nightstick 1D6.

Description and Disposition: Well-groomed and always in his police uniform when on duty. Never seen outside his house when not working. Well-liked, professional and friendly.

Edward Hamm

Can be found at the pharmacy.

Alignment: Anarchist.

Attributes: I.Q. 16, M.E. 12, M.A. 10, P.S. 11, P.P. 10, P.E. 9, P.B. 12, Spd 10.

S.D.C.: 10. **Hit Points:** 24.

Combat Skills: None.

Skills of Note: First Aid 70%, Toxicology 65%, Business and Finance 60%.

Level of Experience: 6

Equipment: None.

Description and Disposition: Always seen in a pharmacy jacket, dress pants and tie. Can be pleasant but doesn't tolerate people wasting his time.

Jackie Flanir

Can be found at **Flora's Bakery**.

Alignment: Unprincipled.

Attributes: I.Q. 14, M.E. 10, M.A. 18, P.S. 9, P.P. 10, P.E. 12, P.B. 21, Spd 10.

S.D.C.: 15. **Hit Points:** 20.

Combat Skills: None.

Skills of Note: Cook 40%, Recycle 35%.

Level of Experience: 2

Equipment: None.

Description and Disposition: Always well dressed with clothing some older folks would consider a little revealing. Outgoing and charming.

Earl

Can be found at the **Post Office**.

Alignment: Anarchist.

Attributes: I.Q. 12, M.E. 9, M.A. 8, P.S. 12, P.P. 9, P.E. 8, P.B. 10, Spd 8.

S.D.C.: 10. **Hit Points:** 14.

Combat Skills: Hand to Hand: Basic.

Skills of Note: Intelligence 36%.

Level of Experience: 2

Equipment: None.

Description and Disposition: Mostly seen in his postman's uniform. Rarely seen outside the post office or his home. He can be friendly but also a little off-putting at times. His post office is his life.

Betty

Can be found at the **Library**.

Alignment: Aberrant.

Attributes: I.Q. 18, M.E. 16, M.A. 16, P.S. 8, P.P. 9, P.E. 10, P.B. 11, Spd 8.

S.D.C.: 20. **Hit Points:** 25.

Combat Skills: None.

Skills of Note: Research 65%, Lore: Demons & Monsters 55%, Lore: Entities and Ghosts 55%.

Level of Experience: 6

Equipment: None.

Description and Disposition: Skirt and cardigan with a jacket in the evening. Well-liked, but a bit of a busybody who is careful about not telling too much to certain people.

Brother Joseph

Can be found at the **First Anglican Church**.

Alignment: Scrupulous.

Attributes: I.Q. 14, M.E. 12, M.A. 16, P.S. 10, P.P. 9, P.E. 14, P.B. 12, Spd 10.

S.D.C.: 18. **Hit Points:** 20.

Combat Skills: None.

Skills of Note: Lore: Cults and Secret Societies 65%, History 60%, Philosophy 65%.

Level of Experience: 6

Equipment: None.

Description and Disposition: If not in his priest's robes, he is wearing a golf shirt and casual pants. He is usually welcoming, calm and peaceful.

Todd

Can be found at **Todd's Gas and General Store**.

Alignment: Anarchist.

Attributes: I.Q. 9, M.E. 8, M.A. 9, P.S. 16, P.P. 14, P.E. 18, P.B. 8, Spd 14.

S.D.C.: 25. **Hit Points:** 32.

Combat Skills: Hand to Hand: Basic.

Skills of Note: Appraise Antiques 45%, Recognize Weapon Quality 40%, W.P. Shotgun.

Level of Experience: 4

Equipment: 12 gauge shotgun (4D6) hidden under the front counter.

Description and Disposition: Always seen wearing a hunters vest with a worn t-shirt and blue jeans. Friendly but little on the lazy side.

Eddie Hantor

Can be found at **Kay's Grocery Store**.

Alignment: Principled.

Attributes: I.Q. 16, M.E. 14, M.A. 16, P.S. 12, P.P. 14, P.E. 16, P.B. 14, Spd 14.

S.D.C.: 20. **Hit Points:** 30.

Combat Skills: Hand to Hand: Basic.

Skills of Note: Business & Finance 40%, Public Speaking 35%.

Level of Experience: 2

Equipment: None.

Description and Disposition: Mostly seen in a shirt and tie and ready for work. Friendly but keeps to himself, mostly.

George Hollingworth

Can be found at the **Public School**.

Alignment: Unprincipled.

Attributes: I.Q. 16, M.E. 14, M.A. 16, P.S. 10, P.P. 12, P.E. 14, P.B. 12, Spd 8.

S.D.C.: 25. **Hit Points:** 28.

Combat Skills: Hand to Hand: Basic.

Skills of Note: Research 65%, Mathematics: Basic 87%, Botany 65%.

Level of Experience: 6

Equipment: None.

Description and Disposition: Always seen in a suit and tie. Friendly, Well-regarded and a bit business-like.

Necromancy and the Power of Death

Optional Material for Rifts® and Other Settings

By Eric Siems

Death magic is viewed by many to be an unnatural and vile practice, but it is also one of the oldest forms of mystical study. Death is something to be feared by all mortal men, so it should come as no surprise that the defiant and the foolish have sought to master it. Through magic, death is a tool, a weapon, and even a companion at times. However, in the quest to master death, most Necromancers become irrevocably tainted by the powers they command. No matter the noble intentions of some Necromancers, they will always be associated with madness, reckless study, and a lust for power over life itself.

What follows is a number of Necromancy spells as well as spells from the sub-branches of Bone Magic and Spirit Magic. These sub-spells can be learned by any Necromancer, but do represent a unique form of Necromancy that is not available to every variety of death mage. Bone Magic is more involved in the trapping and harnessing of latent energies present in the remains of the dead, not the mastery of the energies of life and death. Spirit Magic, on the other hand, is focused on spirits, latent memories trapped within corpses, and time itself. These specialized sub-branches are only truly mastered by those mages who choose to study them at the expense of other Necromantic lore. The Bone Merchant is one such class, while the Spirit Caller is another (studying Bone Magic and Spirit Magic, respectively).

New Necromancy Spells by Level

Level One

Goose Bumps (2)
Lantern of Death (3)
Sense Death (4)

Level Two

Family Legacy (4)
Flash of Truth (5)
Knuckle Spikes (6)

Level Three

Carrion Eater (6)
False Life (8)
Viper Powder (10)

Level Four

Daywalker (10)
Dissonance (14)
Fire Dust (15)
Successor Skill (12)
Vision of Death (10)

Level Five

Bone Shield (12)
Lay to Rest (14)
Mist of Shadows (12)
Self Sacrifice (12)
Surrogate Flesh (15)

Level Six

Death Siphon (20)
Macabre Theater (16)
Serpent Blade (25)
Spiritual Strike (18)
Wall of Bone (15)

Level Seven

Bone Spike (25)
Delay the End (20)
Ethereal Barrier (20)
Malevolent Smile (30)
Siphon Strike (25)

Level Eight

Armor of Vaust (35)
Entropy (40)
Spiritual Consumption (30)
Sword of Vaust (40)
Vengeful Spirits (30)

Level Nine

Bone Curse (45)
Death Charm (50)
Swift Wings (55)
Thirst of Vaust (45)

Level Ten

Corpse Restore (90)
Explosive Entropy (70)
Reaper's Blade (80)
Tide of Dead (100)
Undead Champion (80)

Level Eleven

Blight Bringer (160)
Elemental Immunity (110)
Rot (150)
Spirit Familiar (200)

Level One

Goose Bumps

Range: 40 feet (12.1 m).

Duration: 5 minutes per level of the spell caster.

Saving Throw: Standard.

P.P.E.: 2

Considered one of the weakest of all curses, this spell inflicts a sense of irrational unease on the victim. For the duration, the character has "the creeps" and will be easier to startle. Victims are -3 to save vs Horror Factor, but their heightened state of alert does grant a +2 on initiative.

Lantern of Death

Range: 150 feet (45.7 m) away.

Duration: 2 minutes per level of the spell caster.

Saving Throw: Special; see below.

P.P.E.: 3

Once cast, this spell creates a magical lantern that emits a sickly blue-purple light. This light is barely enough to see by, but that is not its main purpose. While lit, the lantern will attract all dead and undead who see it. Animated Dead will be drawn to it automatically unless their controlling mage is in range to issue them

Level Twelve

Ancestral Guardian (250)
Circle of Death (200)
Earthly Realm (180)
Tectonic Power (220)

Level Thirteen

Living Pawn (400)
Spirit Host (350)
Vampiric Familiar (450)

Level Fourteen

Crown of Bone (600)
Restore Life (500)

Level Fifteen

Everliving Servant (1,000)

Spells of Legend

Undead Colossus (750)
Dark Army (2,500)
Desecration (250)

new commands. Undead creatures must make a save vs magic or be spellbound, unable to do anything but stare at the pretty light for the duration, or until they are attacked. Greater undead creatures like Syvan, Master Vampires, Revenants, and similar beings are immune to this spell.

Sense Death

Range: 500 feet (152.4 m) plus 50 feet (15.2 m) per level of the spell caster.

Duration: 5 minutes per level of the spell caster.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 4

Necromancers are, by nature, attuned to the familiar scent and magical signature of death. Not only does this power allow the mage to sense death within the area of effect, but also the dying. Large amounts of death, like a graveyard or any dying person, can be tracked at 62% +2% per level of experience. Animated dead and undead can be felt within the radius, but only their general number will be known. Those who have killed a great many people will also be detected, as well as generally how many they have killed (a few to mass murderer). This power is an excellent way to uncover graves or track dying enemies that are powerful tools for the death mage.

Level Two

Family Legacy

Range: Self.

Duration: 4 minutes per level of the spell caster.

Saving Throw: Not applicable.

P.P.E.: 4

Viewed as a strange form of divination, this spell allows the spell caster some connection to his family past. While in use, the spell caster will recognize people, places, and things that were known to one or more of his ancestors. This can be used to identify with the past, discover old knowledge, or pick up in the footsteps of other family members. In addition, this can give the character insight into magic, monsters, and enemies of their dead relatives equal to having all Lore skills at 40% and/or +20% to Lore skills known to the character. In this way, the mage can learn from his forefathers, almost literally.

Flash of Truth

Range: 50 foot (15.2 m) radius.

Duration: 1D4 melee rounds.

Saving Throw: -2 to save vs magic.

P.P.E.: 5

With a flash of black lightning, all those concealed by illusions and all undead are revealed for what they truly are. Greater undead and vampires receive a save at -2 vs magic or they are also revealed as undead monsters. In all cases, the effect only covers a 50 foot (15.2 m) radius and those affected are only revealed for 1D4 melee rounds. Lesser undead receive no saving throw. Most Necromancers will use this to dramatic effect to make a point or for theatrical flair, since suddenly revealing undead horrors will force those who witness them to save vs Horror Factor.

Knuckle Spikes

Range: Self.

Duration: 2 minutes per level of the spell caster.

Damage: +2D6

Saving Throw: Not applicable.

P.P.E.: 6

Spikes of bone sprout from the Necromancer's fists, elbows, knees, and forearms as needed or desired upon completion of this spell. These spikes are unnaturally strong and can be used to parry M.D.C. attacks, but are only -2 to do so. Bonus damage is S.D.C. unless the character also has Supernatural Strength. Damage from claws that may be bonded to the Necromancer from Augmentation with the Dead are not cumulative with this ability (use one or the other).

Level Three

Carrion Eater

Range: Self.

Duration: Special; see below.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 6

Carrion Eater is a strange and disturbing spell that allows the mage to eat the flesh of the dead. For the duration of the meal, the mage can eat any dead flesh, even rotted meat, without ill effect. All diseases within the meat are neutralized and the character will never get sick from eating spoiled food. The flavor of the meat is even improved, making it taste fresher, but if uncooked, may be difficult for humans to digest without some effort, at least at first.

False Life

Range: Touch or 10 feet (3 m).

Duration: 10 minutes per level of the spell caster.

Saving Throw: Standard.

P.P.E.: 8

Using a form of illusion, undead minions can be granted the appearance of being alive. Skin will appear smooth and natural, the body will feel warm to the touch, and the corpse will appear to have a pulse. However, as an illusion, some will see the corpse for what it is if they make their save vs magic roll. False Life is most effective when used on fresh corpses or vampires which appear more "normal" and alive in the first place. Rotted or extremely putrid corpses impart a +3 to save vs this spell.

Viper Powder

Range: Varies.

Duration: Instant; lasts until used.

Damage: Special; see below.

Saving Throw: Save vs Lethal poison.

P.P.E.: 10

Using the fangs of poisonous snakes combined with venom and magical energy, the mage can create a poisonous powder. This powder is magical in nature and will affect those who would otherwise be immune to normal poisons. The powder can be used in any way desired, from being thrown to being added to food or drink. Upon a failed save vs lethal poison, the victim will suffer



2D6 damage and another 1D6 per minute for 1D4 minutes in addition to a debilitating fever and weakness, causing -2 on initiative, strike, parry, dodge, and -1 attack per melee for 1D6 hours. Spells or psionics that negate poisons or remove curses will also remove the effects of viper powder.

Level Four

Daywalker

Range: Touch or 10 feet (3 m).

Duration: 5 minutes per level of the spell caster.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 10

Using magic, a mage can shield his minions or himself from the damaging or weakening effects of sunlight. Once cast, the target will be immune to the effects of daylight for the duration, taking no damage and avoiding penalties. This will allow mummies and vampires to survive in daylight, and Shadow Beasts to operate at full strength. Once the duration lapses, the target will immediately suffer any penalties or damage from exposure as normal.

Dissonance

Range: 300 foot (91.4 m) area.

Duration: 10 minutes per level of the spell caster.

Saving Throw: Standard.

P.P.E.: 14

This spell creates a disruptive force that will drive away all Entities within the area of effect. Poltergeists and Haunting Entities will immediately leave (no save), while more powerful haunting type Entities (those that linger in one location for long periods) must save at 12 or higher without bonuses. Other types of Entities, like the Tectonic or Possessing Entity, receive a normal save vs magic, which will cause them to leave their possessed bodies behind. This makes this spell an excellent alternative to Exorcism, though the Entity is now someone else's problem. Once the duration ends, the Entities can return, but the emotions that once attracted them will have been diffused, making the area less attractive than before (and thus less will want to linger).

Fire Dust

Range: 40 feet (12.2 m).

Duration: Instant; lasts until used.

Damage: 4D6

Saving Throw: Dodge at -2.

P.P.E.: 15

This bone powder is made using parts from Fire Worms of Taut. Once created, the mage merely needs to take a handful and hurl it at an enemy for it to combust and create a short-ranged fireball. The fact that it can be created and used later allows this to be a potent weapon that does not adversely affect the mage's energy levels in combat.

Successor Skill

Range: Self.

Duration: 2 minutes per level of the spell caster.

Saving Throw: Not applicable.

P.P.E.: 12

The Necromancer can use this spell to draw upon the abilities and knowledge of his ancestors, gaining access to their skills. Once cast, the mage gains one skill their ancestor knew at the base level of skill or +10% to their own skill level if applicable. The knowledge is fleeting and disappears quickly no matter how many times this spell is used. Obviously, modern skills or alien skill knowledge is likely to be unknown to any of the character's ancestors.

Vision of Death

Range: 120 feet (36.5 m).

Duration: Special.

Saving Throw: Standard.

P.P.E.: 10

This strange spell causes the target to receive a vision of his or her future death. The vision is similar to Clairvoyance and is remarkably accurate, but like all clairvoyant visions is not 100% certain. Seeing this traumatic event can be shocking (save vs Horror Factor of 16) and distracting (-2 on initiative, -1 to parry and dodge). Enemies who make their save vs magic will not see this vision, while those who fail their save but succeed vs Horror Factor can gain some useful insight from the vision. Like a clairvoyant vision, the victim could use this information to change his fate or change the course of events that would lead to his death. Then again, perhaps it is reacting to the vision that leads him to his death?

Level Five

Bone Shield

Range: Self.

Duration: 4 minutes per level of the spell caster.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 12

Using a forearm bone (either one) from an M.D.C. creature, the mage can create a shield in any form desired. This shield is an M.D.C. creation with 10 M.D.C. per level of experience and can parry M.D. melee attacks without damage. The bone to be used



is held in the mage's hand and once the spell is cast, the shield is attached to the mage and is never dropped unless the mage wishes to. Projectile and energy attacks can be parried but the mage does so without the benefit of bonuses.

Lay to Rest

Range: 10 feet (3 m).

Duration: Instant.

Saving Throw: Standard.

P.P.E.: 14

Using a ritual that takes 1D4 minutes, the mage can lay to rest the spirit of one who has recently died. This process makes resurrection of the dead person impossible and prevents the victim's use in Necromancer rituals like Everliving Servant, Night of Vengeance, or similar spells that call upon the victim's life force. This spell grants finality to the spirit, which it may resist with a standard save vs magic. If cast as a 13 minute ritual upon a captured Everliving or Night of Vengeance zombie, this spell can destroy it, releasing its spirit and preventing its use.

Mist of Shadows

Range: 30 foot (9.1 m) radius per level of the spell caster.

Duration: 3 minutes per level of the spell caster.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 12

The Necromancer can conjure forth a cloud of misty grey and green that will render all spirits in the radius of effect visible to all. This spell will reveal all spirits, energy beings, and incorporeal beings within its area of effect for as long as they remain in the radius. This spell is ideal for aiding allies in combating Entities and other invisible threats, but it has no effect on those made magically invisible.

Self Sacrifice

Range: 50 feet (15.2 m).

Duration: One melee round.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 12

It is unusual for a Necromancy spell to be designed to protect others, but this spell does exactly that. Once cast on another, for one melee all damage done to that person will be inflicted on the spell caster instead. Only physical damage is transferred, not damage to armor, but damage inflicted to the Necromancer can be dealt to spell protection first. While at first this power may seem rather selfless, it is often used to protect weaker allies or in conjunction with the spell Living Pawn.

Surrogate Flesh

Range: Self or other by touch.

Duration: 5 minutes per level of the spell caster.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 15

Using an appropriate body part from a corpse, the mage can make a hasty replacement for limbs or organs lost in battle. The body part is temporarily attached and functions just as well as the original (maybe even better). Once the duration ends, the subject will suffer from all penalties associated with their injury, but this is an excellent battlefield medical technique.

Level Six

Death Siphon

Range: Self.

Duration: One minute or until activated.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 20

It is common knowledge to any mage that at the moment of death a person's P.P.E. is doubled. Normally, the only way to capture this P.P.E. is during a ritual sacrifice where the mage is ready to collect the released energy. However, with this spell the mage creates a kind of vacuum that allows the P.P.E. of a victim killed within 20 feet (6 m) to flow into the mage. This spell must have been cast before the victim's death and only the remaining P.P.E. of the victim is doubled. Once the energy is absorbed the spell expires although the mage could keep recasting this spell to reap energy from a battleground.

Macabre Theater

Range: Touch.

Duration: Special.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 16

By touch, the place where a sentient being has died and calling upon lesser spirits, the mage can put on a kind of show. In this case, the “show” is a recreation of the last 1D4 minutes of the victim’s life. The spirits will speak and act out the parts of all those who were within 20 feet (6 m) of the victim during the 1D4 minute period as if the whole thing were a holographic recording. Only people are represented and even then, only hazy representations that would require the person to have met the real thing before in order to recognize them (1-45% chance). The victim is always the focus of the show and everything he does or says is clearly seen and heard. It can take some guesswork to understand everything, but it can be a vital piece of evidence in a case or murder.

Serpent Blade

Range: Self.

Duration: Indefinite.

Damage: 2D6 +poison.

Saving Throw: Save vs lethal poison.

P.P.E.: 25

This blade must be carved from a fang taken from a Tri-Fang Worm of Taut. It inflicts S.D.C. to mortals and M.D.C. to supernatural creatures, plus constantly secretes a deadly poison. This poison inflicts 2D6 damage plus 1D6 damage per minute for 2D6 minutes. In addition, the victim that fails a save suffers from crippling pain, losing initiative and suffering half combat bonuses for the duration of the poison. Only attacks that hit flesh require a save vs poison and the attack must draw blood.

Spiritual Strike

Range: 200 feet (60.9 m).

Duration: Instant.

Damage: 2D6 Hit Points.

Saving Throw: Standard.

P.P.E.: 18

By consuming a spirit or Entity, the mage can unleash a bolt of energy. This bolt is formed out of the Entity’s very essence and inflicts damage through all forms of protection except those within a circle of protection. When cast, the Entity receives a save vs magic to prevent itself from being consumed; if it saves it will likely flee unless it is extremely aggressive. If it fails it is completely destroyed and becomes an energy bolt which is hurled at its intended target. This bolt is hard to aim, but unpredictable, making it -4 to dodge. This bolt can harm other undead and Entities, and makes an effective weapon against such creatures.

Wall of Bone

Range: 20 feet (6 m) per level of the spell caster.

Duration: 5 minutes per level of the spell caster.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 15

By throwing a bone and casting this spell, a wall can be created out of pure bone. This wall is 10 feet (3 m) high and 20 feet (6 m) long plus 10 feet to length per level of experience. M.D.C. of the wall is 30 per level of experience and as bone, can be healed by the Mend Bone spell. This spell is simple, but can be an effective defense or screen for the mage’s activities.

Level Seven



Bone Spike

Range: 50 feet (15.2 m) per level of the spell caster.

Duration: Instant.

Damage: 2D6 +3 per level of the spell caster.

Saving Throw: Dodge at 16 or higher.

P.P.E.: 25

The mage must stab the ground with a piece of bone, such as a femur or bone weapon. Shortly thereafter, a spike of bone will shoot from the ground below the target to strike them by surprise. This attack is very difficult to dodge, but cannot strike a target more than 10 feet (3 m) above the ground. Bone Spike cannot be used indoors, but can be used on concrete or some other man-made surface so long as it is effectively at ground level.

Delay the End

Range: Self.

Duration: 10 minutes per level of the spell caster.

Saving Throw: Not applicable.

P.P.E.: 20

Using a powerful ward against death, the mage can create a form of insurance that will prevent his untimely demise. Once cast, the ward will remain on the mage for 1 hour per level of experience until activated. The ward is activated when the character’s hit Points drops below zero, which would normally render the character unconscious. Instead, the magic of the ward kicks in, keeping the character conscious until his Hit Points drop to P.E. below zero. At that point, the ward is consumed and any excess damage from that last attack is negated. At P.E. below zero the character will fall unconscious and need immediate medical attention, but the character will be +20% vs coma and death.

Ethereal Barrier

Range: 10 feet (3 m).

Duration: 12 minutes per level of the spell caster.

Saving Throw: Standard.

P.P.E.: 20

Entities and astral travelers make tight security difficult with their natural ability to turn incorporeal. An ethereal barrier is invisible and insubstantial to most people but solid to Entities, Astral Travelers, and energy beings. The barrier can be made into a

wall 10 (3 m) by 20 feet (6 m) plus 10 feet per level of experience. If desired, the wall can also be made into a box or cube with the same amount of coverage. These beings can attack the wall but it has 10 M.D.C. per level of experience and regenerates 10 M.D.C. per melee round.

Malevolent Smile

Range: 150 feet (45.7 m).

Duration: Instant; special, see below.

Damage: Special; see below.

Saving Throw: Standard.

P.P.E.: 30

Once cast, this spell creates a connection between the target's life force and the spell caster. The next attack used against the spell caster will now rebound onto the target instead. All damage, effects, and consequences will be suffered by the target of this spell. Once cast, the rebounding effect will only remain for one melee round or until the first time an attack is rebounded. Those who save suffer no ill effects and the Necromancer will know instantly if the spell failed. To encourage enemies, many Necromancers will taunt their opponents to encourage them to attack, hence the spell's name.

Siphon Strike

Range: 200 feet (60.9 m) plus 100 feet (30.4 m) per level of the spell caster.

Duration: Instant.

Damage: 2D6 per level of the spell caster.

Saving Throw: Standard.

P.P.E.: 25

This bolt of energy functions much like the Death Siphon power, except in this case, a bolt of energy serves as the killing implement. A victim that dies from the Siphon Strike will see their remaining P.P.E. doubled at the moment of death and drawn into the mage just as if a ritual had been used. The damage this spell inflicts will bypass most forms of armor and protective fields, but a successful save reduces damage by half. Invincible Armor, Null Sphere, and Death Charm will completely negate this spell.

Level Eight

Armor of Vaust

Range: Self.

Duration: 10 minutes per level of the spell caster.

Saving Throw: Not applicable.

P.P.E.: 35

Vaust was a legendary Necromancer turned vampire that was renowned as an unbeatable warrior. His legacy is a series of spells said to have been created by Vaust. This spell creates a suit of magical plate and chain that covers the user, granting 20 M.D.C. per level of experience. The armor is immune to cold and ice-based attacks (including magic), makes the user immune to gases, poisons, illusions, and curses for the duration, and grants +3 to save vs mind control, Horror Factor, and possession. In addition, blood can be used to repair the armor at a rate of 2 Hit Points, 4 S.D.C., or 1 M.D.C. worth of blood to repair 1 M.D.C. point of

the armor. Just arterial spray in battle is enough to keep the armor in working order, though most Necromancers will deliberately cover themselves in gore to repair the armor quickly. Only fresh blood will do, not blood created by spells or stored in containers.

Entropy

Range: 150 feet (45.7 m).

Duration: 2 minutes per level of the spell caster.

Damage: Special.

Saving Throw: -1 to save.

P.P.E.: 40

The energies of wasting are called upon and directed at the target of this spell, weakening them against further attack. Entropy is commonly used as a first strike spell against a particularly tough enemy. On a failed save, the victim sees all bonuses to save reduced by half and combat bonuses see a -2 to strike, parry, and dodge. In addition, any damage resistances the victim possessed are removed (they now take full damage). As soon as the duration ends, all bonuses come back in full. Those who make their saving throw suffer no ill effect.

Spiritual Consumption

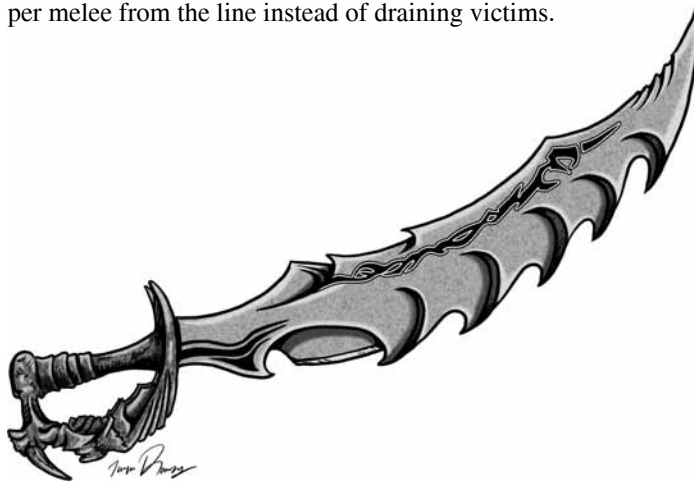
Range: 80 feet (24.3 m).

Duration: One minute per level of the spell caster.

Saving Throw: Save vs psionics.

P.P.E.: 30

For the duration, the Necromancer gains the ability to steal P.P.E. like an Entity. Once per melee, the character can make a draining attack that requires a save vs psychic attack. On a failed save, the victim loses 5 P.P.E. or 20 I.S.P. Stolen I.S.P. is converted into P.P.E. at a rate of 1 I.S.P. to 4 P.P.E., but is only taken if the target has no P.P.E. remaining. This draining attack is a free action and does not use up the character's attacks per melee. If this spell is used on a Ley Line the character can absorb 20 P.P.E. per melee from the line instead of draining victims.



Sword of Vaust

Range: Self.

Duration: 5 minutes per level of the spell caster.

Damage: 1D4x10

Saving Throw: Parry or dodge.

P.P.E.: 40

This sword's thirst for blood is frightening and its accuracy even more so. It always appears as a serrated, long saber with a

blackened and charred brush metal handle. In the hands of even a novice user the blade is extremely accurate, granting a +3 to strike and a critical strike on a 17-19. On a natural 20, the blade causes triple damage. The weapon does not like to parry however, and is -2 to all parry attempts.

Vengeful Spirits

Range: Self; 100 feet (30.4 m) per level of the spell caster.

Duration: One melee round per level of the spell caster.

Damage: Special.

Saving Throw: Standard.

P.P.E.: 30

The Necromancer binds numerous vengeful spirits to himself which lash out at attacks with vicious intent. For the duration of the spell, the mage is surrounded in a nimbus of black energy that seems to coil and writhe around them. Whenever the mage is struck by an attack, these vengeful spirits will lash out at enemies with bolts of lesser entropy. These bolts inflict only 2D6 damage but bypass armor and shields. In addition, the victim struck by the bolt must make a save vs magic or suffer -1 to all saving throws and -1 to all combat bonuses. The duration of these penalties is 1 minute per level of the mage. Multiple strikes have no cumulative penalty but do inflict damage. The bolts can only strike targets within their range.

Level Nine

Bone Curse

Range: 50 feet (15.2 m).

Duration: One hour per level of the spell caster.

Saving Throw: Standard.

P.P.E.: 45

This spell targets the bones of enemies, inflicting often painful or debilitating curses upon their bodies. As soon as the duration expires, all penalties and effects are gone. Each time this spell is cast, the mage can choose to inflict one of the following curses:

Bone Spurs: Painful bony growths form on the feet, making movement painful. This is an extreme case and causes -10% to movement speed, -1 on initiative, and -2 to dodge on foot.

Marrow Disease: Your bone marrow begins to die, causing the immune system to weaken. Victims are -3 to save vs disease and feel tired and weak, and are -1 on all combat rolls. Any other diseases gained during this period do not expire at spell's end.

Brittle Bones: Calcium is leached from the bones, making them brittle and more prone to breaks. Any physical blow that inflicts more the 10% of the character's S.D.C./M.D.C. has a 25% chance of breaking a bone, causing 1D6 Hit Points or additional M.D.C. damage. Other penalties from injuries can be found in the **Rifts®** or **Palladium Fantasy RPG®** main rule book. Any broken bones are not restored at the curses end and must be healed as normal.

Creaking Bones: Every movement creates a series of creaks and pops from the victim's joints. This makes prowling difficult; -20% and causes a small amount of pain and -1 to parry and dodge.

Death Charm

Range: Self or other by touch.

Duration: 10 minutes per level of the spell caster.

Saving Throw: Not applicable.

P.P.E.: 50

Necromancers are fond of saying that death smiles on them. This is almost literally true in the case of the Death Charm. Once cast, the charm will prevent all siphon-based spells, life draining or leeching attacks, and death spells (like Death Word) from harming the character. In general, any spell that does damage direct to Hit Points and has life, drain, or death in the title will probably not work.



Swift Wings

Range: Self.

Duration: 3 minutes per level of the spell caster.

Saving Throw: Not applicable.

P.P.E.: 55

Shadowy wings sprout from the mage's back and allow him to travel in great bursts of speed. For the duration of the spell, the mage can run at 3x normal speeds. This translates into 3x running speed, +1 on initiative, and +2 to dodge while running at max speed, which counts as an automatic dodge (only P.P. and auto-dodge bonuses apply). **Note:** Although the character is blazingly fast, it is only in short spurts. This means he can run at maximum speed for 1 full melee round, but then must slow to normal speed for the next melee round, before he can once again run at 3x speed for as much as another full melee round (15 seconds). Swift Wings is an excellent means to close with opponents and avoid enemy fire, but is not ideal for long distance running.

Thirst of Vaust

Range: Self or other by touch.

Duration: 3 minutes per level of the spell caster.

Saving Throw: Special.

P.P.E.: 45

The mage is instilled with an incredible bloodlust that drives him to kill. This battle frenzy is more controlled than a berserker rage and is only directed against the target's enemies. The target receives +1 attack per melee, +1 on initiative, +3 to strike, +1 to parry and dodge, +6 to P.S., which becomes supernatural, and

gains immunity to Horror Factor. However, every time the mage slays an enemy, he must roll vs insanity at 12+ or slip into a frenzy, attacking friend and foe with equal fervor for one minute until a new save is rolled. During the frenzy, the target gains +2 on initiative, but loses the ability to parry and dodge! The frenzy will continue until the mage saves or the spell expires.

Level Ten

Corpse Restore

Range: Touch.

Duration: one hour ritual.

Saving Throw: Not applicable.

P.P.E.: 90

One of the great limitations to resurrection is the need for serious injuries to be addressed. Missing organs or decapitation make bringing back a victim nearly impossible since healing spells do not work on the dead. Corpse Restore will bring the dead back to full S.D.C. and Hit Points (or full M.D.C.), completely restoring the body to perfect health. Severed limbs and lost organs can be replaced, but there is always an obvious scar where the injury occurred. This power adds nothing to any resurrection attempts success rate, but does make such attempt's possible up to double their normal window of opportunity for any attempts.

Explosive Entropy

Range: 100 feet (30.4 m) per level; 30 foot (9.1 m) radius.

Duration: Instant.

Damage: 5D6 plus penalties.

Saving Throw: Standard.

P.P.E.: 70

This insidious spell causes the mystic potential of the dead to be released in an explosion of entropic forces. The target must be a recently (within 1 week) dead corpse or body part at least the size of a human arm. All those within the area of effect must roll to save vs magic or suffer damage along with -2 to all saving throws and combats bonuses for 2D4 minutes. Damage and penalties bypass all conventional armor and force fields, only striking living tissue. This means this spell has no effect on the dead or machines.

Reaper's Blade

Range: Self.

Duration: 10 minutes per level of the spell caster.

Damage: 1D6x10 plus see below.

Saving Throw: Standard.

P.P.E.: 80

A large scythe like that wielded by the mythical Grim Reaper appears in the mage's hand ready for use. The weapon is a creation of magic and both light and unnaturally sharp, granting a +1 to strike and parry. The blade gives off an aura of fear (Horror Factor of 16) and those struck not only take damage but must roll vs magic as well. A failed save means the victim takes damage direct to Hit Points instead, through any armor or shields. M.D.C. creatures that fail a save take double damage and are stunned, losing initiative and one melee action. The Reaper's Blade cannot be thrown, but can be made to disappear and reappear for the spell's duration at the cost of one action.

Tide of Dead

Range: One mile (1.6 km) diameter.

Duration: One hour per level of the spell caster.

Saving Throw: Not applicable.

P.P.E.: 100

Tide of Dead is more of a terror spell than an effective combat tool. A 10 minute ritual is conducted in which a false holy symbol (an upside down cross is popular among Judeo-Christian cultures) is enchanted to act as a source for reanimation. Once the ritual is completed, all dead within the area of effect will immediately become animated just like the spell Animate and Control Dead. Any new dead, such as fresh victims, will also immediately become animated until the spell's duration expires or the false holy symbol is exorcized or destroyed. All dead created via this ritual can be controlled by the Necromancer as per normal animated dead. In the absence of orders, the dead will attack those who are either named on the false holy symbol in blood, those represented via small idols or dolls, or those who attack the dead.

Undead Champion

Range: Self.

Duration: One hour per level of the spell caster.

Saving Throw: Not applicable.

P.P.E.: 80

An Undead Champion is summoned to serve the spell caster for the duration. This creature is a Bone Fiend (see the Dark Conversions Book), and has the maximum stats for its kind. It will obey any command given to it by the spell caster like a dutiful soldier and is intelligent enough to receive complex instructions or missions. It will never, unless attacked itself, harm another undead. Even if ordered to defend the spell caster from an undead attacker, it will fight only to defend itself (parry and dodge). At the end of the spell's duration, the Fiend collapses and turns to dust.

Level Eleven

Blight Bringer

Range: 150 feet (45.7 m).

Duration: One day per level of the spell caster.

Damage: Varies.

Saving Throw: Standard.

P.P.E.: 160

The Blight Bringer is actually the real victim of this cruel curse. On a failed save, the victim becomes the carrier of a virulent disease of the mage's choosing. The disease can be any semi-lethal virus, but nothing as deadly as Ebola or other fast-acting killers. That is because as part of the curse, the victim is kept alive and is extremely contagious. All those that come in physical contact with the victim must roll to save vs disease or become infected themselves. Those in close proximity (20 feet 16 m) for more than a few minutes must roll to save vs disease at +2 to save. Other than the carrier, the diseases that are spread are completely normal and can be treated by the usual means. At the duration's end or with a Remove Curse, the victim is completely safe from infection, a small consolation for the pain that has been caused.

Elemental Immunity

Range: Self or two others by touch.

Duration: 20 minutes per level of the spell caster.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 110

This powerful spell makes the target completely immune to fire, cold, ice, lightning, heat, radiation, sunlight, and water-based attacks. Vampires and similar creatures will also lose their vulnerability to wood, sunlight, and water, making only magic and silver effective against them. They will even lose their inability to cross water and survive without the soil of their homeland for the duration. This spell is also effective on Mummies, Shadow Beasts, and similar creatures vulnerable to sunlight and light-based attacks. Magic and Psychic-based elemental attacks still inflict half damage, but any extra damage from vulnerabilities is ignored. Living beings will also gain the ability to breathe without air for the duration, making them immune to airborne toxins and drowning. This spell does nothing about pressure. Body armor worn by the target will be protected, but not power armor or vehicles.

Rot

Range: 100 feet (30.4 m) per level of the spell caster.

Duration: Instant.

Damage: Special.

Saving Throw: Standard.

P.P.E.: 150

This spell causes the target to experience rapid decay as if it were rotting or corroding. Living beings receive a save vs magic or lose one quarter of their current Hit Points, -2 to P.S., P.P., P.E., and Spd (adjust bonuses as needed), -2 attacks per melee, -3 on initiative, -2 to strike, parry and dodge, -3 to roll with impact, and -2 to save vs disease and poison. The penalties will persist until the character has completely recovered lost Hit Points. Inanimate objects will lose 1D4x10% of their S.D.C./M.D.C. and -1 to all combat bonuses. Speed and strength of vehicles will also be reduced by 20% and sensors will flicker in and out (-20% to Read Sensory Equipment). Controls of all machines will be sluggish, causing a -10% penalty to all associated skill rolls. In order to recover, the machine must be repaired by at least 10% of its normal S.D.C. or M.D.C. A Remove Curse will immediately restore all bonuses and 10% of lost Hit Points or M.D.C. Machines or objects larger than 5 tons are immune to this spell, though an individual system may be affected to cause -10% to that location's M.D.C. and -2 to all appropriately related systems.

Spirit Familiar

Range: 10 feet (3 m).

Duration: Permanent.

Saving Throw: Standard.

P.P.E.: 200

Like the spell Supernatural Familiar, this spell links a supernatural creature to the mage to act as a servant. In this instance, that creature is always an Entity of some kind. Virtually any Entity can be used and it always receives a save vs ritual magic whether it likes the mage and agrees or not. Once completed, the mage loses 2D6 P.P.E. permanently, which is consumed by the Entity. From this day forward, the Entity must do as commanded by the mage and will serve him to the best of its ability. Both

can communicate with each other over any distance via telepathy (unless they go to separate dimensions), but do not gain any kind of shared senses. An Entity makes a difficult to kill and stealthy servant. A mage can have only one Familiar of any type at a time.

Level Twelve

Ancestral Guardian

Range: Touch.

Duration: 24 hours per level of the spell caster.

Saving Throw: Not Applicable.

P.P.E.: 250

A suit of armor is carved with a number of magical symbols and runes, then marked by a seal of the mage's own blood. This seal serves as the basis for calling back a Black Phantom, a powerful poltergeist that will imprint on an ancestor of the mage. This ancestor spirit is only loosely based on the real thing, but does genuinely want to help its *ancestor* and will do its best to help the mage. The spirit has an I.Q. of 12 and is intelligent enough to offer suggestions or help the mage by performing menial tasks or taking the initiative in a battle. It has 200 M.D.C. and regenerates 2D6 M.D.C. per melee round, P.S. is 30 and is supernatural, and the Entity is never tired or loses interest. Its natural state is to hover and fly (35 mph/56 km) a few feet above the ground. The guardian has 6 attacks per melee, +3 to strike, parry, and dodge, +4 to roll, and is immune to disease, poison, mind control, illusions, possession, Horror Factor, cold, heat, and emotion-based attacks. The Entity can use weapons that are given to it, but do not start with any.



Circle of Death

Range: 50 foot (15.2 m) radius.

Duration: 20 minutes per level once cast; lasts 2 minutes per level once activated.

Damage: 2D6 per melee.

Saving Throw: Standard.

P.P.E.: 200

Like a magic land mine, the Circle of Death activates when a living target enters the area of effect. For the rest of its duration, all those within the area suffer damage and must roll to save vs death. On a failed save, their Hit Points immediately drop to 0 and they must roll to save vs coma. Those that save only suffer the 2D6 damage per melee round until they leave the circle, but

this damage bypasses all armor or energy fields. Victims who fail a save and fall into a coma have twice the usual time before risking death and while unconscious, do not suffer additional damage (at least from the circle). Undead and animated dead that enter the circle regenerate damage at a rate of 2D6 Hit Points per melee round.

Earthy Realm

Range: 100 foot (30.4 m) radius per level of the spell caster.

Duration: 5 minutes per level of the spell caster.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 180

Using raw power, the mage connects this realm to the realm of spirits. This connection allows all spirits and Entities to become corporeal, like physical creatures of the mortal realm. This means that while within the circle, Entities can harm and be harmed by physical attacks. While this would seem helpful in combating Entities, there is one other major effect. Entities within the circle are strengthened by the connection to their home, doubling their M.D.C./Hit Points and gaining +5 to P.S., +2 on all combat bonuses, and +1 on all saving throws.

While in place, other Entities within one mile (1.6 km) will be attracted to the circle, but will not harm the spell caster unless provoked. In addition, Entities within the circle cannot be dispelled or banished for the duration. All Entities gain 10 P.P.E. or I.S.P. per melee round, and are immune to Horror Factor. Necromancers and similar mages will see the cost of all Spirit Magic spells reduced by half while within the circle. The duration of this spell must end naturally; it cannot be dispelled by any known means, even by the spell caster!

Tectonic Power

Range: Self.

Duration: 20 minutes per level of the spell caster.

Saving Throw: Battle of Wills; see below.

P.P.E.: 220

When cast, the mage opens himself to a powerful Tectonic Entity, allowing it to share the caster's body. However, this is a kind of trap as the Entity will be enslaved to serve the caster's will. The caster must win a battle of wills by rolling under his M.A. attribute 2 out of 3 times. If he fails, the Entity assumes control and may use his body as his own, which will likely kill the spell caster. If he wins the battle of wills, the character gains access to the Entity's ability to build a body out of physical material to use like armor. Most mages will prepare a suit of heavy magical armor to use, but basic trash and scraps will work as well (see the Tectonic Entity for the scrap body). For the duration, the mage never tires and has a Supernatural P.S. of 36. In addition, the character gains the I.S.P. and psychic powers of the Entity, including its ability to consume I.S.P. and P.P.E. from enemies.

If the mage's outer scrap/armor body is destroyed, he can spend 60 P.P.E. to use nearby materials and recreate it. On a ley line, the mage would become like an unstoppable engine of destruction, requiring massive amounts of ordnance to destroy. Since the character is already sharing his body with a possessing force, he is immune to other forms of possession for the duration.

Level Thirteen

Living Pawn

Range: Touch; 5 miles (8 km) per level of the spell caster.

Duration: 4 hours per level of the spell caster.

Saving Throw: -1 to save.

P.P.E.: 400

The victim of this curse is typically bound and chained at some secure location. That is because, for the duration, any damage suffered by the mage is transferred instead to the victim of this curse. Each time damage is transferred, the victim receives a save vs magic. If successful, the mage will suffer the damage as normal. However, on a failed save, the victim will receive all damage and penalties intended for the spell caster! This is a double-edged sword, however, as the mage will not know the condition of his victim, and so may expose himself to unnecessary risks. Damage cannot be transferred to a dead target, nor to an undead one, as their lack of vitality makes this link impossible. Another risk factor is that any damage the victim suffers will be transferred to the mage, making the safety of the target a high priority.

Spirit Host

Range: 100 feet (30.4 m).

Duration: 30 minutes per level of the spell caster.

Saving Throw: Not applicable.

P.P.E.: 350

Using a powerful ritual, the Necromancer can summon a large host of Entities. This host includes 1D4 Entities +1 per level of experience. Most often, these Entities are Poltergeists, but there is a 20% chance of receiving others (roll randomly for each Entity or just assume 20% are of another variety). All Entities summoned are also under the mage's control for the duration and can be sent away on short missions or ordered to harass and attack enemies. When the spell's duration ends, there is a 10% chance that some Entities will not return to their home dimension. For an additional 100 P.P.E., the mage can ensure that 50% of Entities summoned will be of some more powerful variety. The only Entities that cannot be summoned with this spell are the Conglomerate Entity and Greater Astral Entity.

Vampiric Familiar

Range: 10 feet (3 m).

Duration: Permanent.

Saving Throw: Special.

P.P.E.: 450

Through this powerful ritual, a Necromancer can take a Vampire as his Familiar. The vampire need not be willing for the ritual to take place, but if it is not, it should be bound by some arcane means. At the ritual's climax, the mage will drink of the vampire's blood, which will inflict 2D4 Hit Points. Whether willing or not, the Vampire receives a save vs ritual magic to overcome the control of its Alien Intelligence creator. If it saves, the Intelligence will know someone has just tried to take one of its minions and have a general idea of where they are (like which town or city they are in). On a failed save, the Necromancer takes possession of the Vampire as if he were its controlling Vampire Intelligence. The vampire must now obey his lord and can never harm him.

The Vampire Familiar has all the normal powers for a vampire, except as they would apply to their old brethren and masters. For all intents and purposes, the vampire is now part of a new family and will not be recognized as part of its old brood (so it may be attacked by old allies). Since the Necromancer is now the Vampire's controlling intelligence, if he dies, his vampire will also likely die. Master Vampires cannot be made into Familiars, nor can vampires without a master, like Necromancer Vampires from the Return from the Grave ritual or Strigoi.

Level Fourteen

Crown of Bone

Range: Touch.

Duration: Indefinite.

Saving Throw: Not applicable.

P.P.E.: 600

The Crown of Bone is a powerful creation of Bone Magic that allows a Necromancer unparalleled control over the dead. The crown must be made from the bones of a master vampire (preserved using magic that is part of this spell), using the ribs and part of the spine. Once completed, the wearer of the crown can command vampires just as if he was a master vampire. In addition, the mage can animate and control 2 more dead per level with his animate and control dead power. Random undead will never attack the wearer without provocation and will acknowledge the wearer as a powerful Necromancer (whether he is or not), giving him an effective M.A. of 20 or +3, whichever is higher. Other minions or creatures summoned by the wearer will also remain for twice as long. The crown itself is a Mega-Damage creation and has 150 M.D.C. and regenerates 10 M.D.C. per hour.

Restore Life

Range: Touch or 10 feet (3 m).

Duration: Instant.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 500

Though Necromancy is so often associated with death, it can also deal with life as well. Restore Life is a powerful resurrection spell that can bring the recently deceased (within 24 hours) back to life. This spell will mend all life-threatening injuries and restore up to 30 Hit Points to the target. Once the 7 minute ritual is completed, the victim will awaken with a gasp for fresh air. There is some chance the soul of the victim may have moved on too quickly (20% chance), making a resurrection impossible. Also, the spells Lay to Rest and Accelerate Decay, or soul stealing powers, can be used to prevent any resurrection attempts. Lost limbs will not be restored, nor will damage to organs unless all lost Hit Points are restored when this spell is cast.

Level Fifteen

Everliving Servant

Range: Touch or 10 feet (3 m).

Duration: Indefinite.

Saving Throw: Special.

P.P.E.: 1,000

Using the body of a recently dead sentient being, the mage can create a kind of greater undead. The Everliving are souls or perhaps greater spirits that have been bound back into their bodies using powerful magic. When creating an Everliving, the mage needs the target's physical body, a sample of the target's blood, a personnel item from the target (like a favorite book, weapon, or jewelry), and a written contract. This contract must state the mage's intent to call back the target's spirit, asks the spirit if it would like to live again, and states the purpose which the spirit will serve. The contract must be clear about the first two sections, but the last can be deliberately vague, like stating the need for a servant but not how the servant will serve. If the spirit declines, the mage can try again with a different contract that is more specific, but since spirits operate in a more fragmented way they are easily duped (save at 14 or higher to resist contract).

Once the spirit accepts, it will fill the body, which will regenerate and appear healthy. However, the Everliving's emotions will become muted and dull, making them act more cold even to those they love. In addition, the Everliving is a servant and must obey the Necromancer who created it. The Everliving has the same stats as its living form, but has no Hit Points, takes only S.D.C. from all attacks, and regenerates 2D6 S.D.C. per melee round. As an undead, it is immune to those things that only concern the living, but has no special vulnerabilities to speak of other than that if its master dies, so does the Everliving. As a greater undead, the Everliving is unaffected by Turn Dead and Lesser Protection Circles. All skills and abilities are frozen at the level they were before the person's death and return as an undead. P.P.E. or I.S.P. is reduced by half, limiting the powers the undead servant can still use.

Spells of Legend

Undead Colossus

Length of Ritual: 13 minutes.

Duration: Special; see below.

P.P.E.: 750

First the spell caster creates a large magic circle around a mound of bodies (20+ corpses). Then the death mage must conduct a 13 minute ritual which climaxes with the sacrifice of a sickly bull. Once completed, the mound of bodies will suddenly rise up to create a massive monster made of corpses! The beast will obey the Necromancer much like a golem, but with a murderous hatred for the living. It will last for 13 minutes, but killing will extend its life by one minute per death of a person or large animal.

Colossus Stats: I.Q. 10, P.S. of 50 (Supernatural), Spd of 30. Other stats are unnecessary as it is immune to anything that will not harm a greater undead. It has 300 Hit Points and takes 1/3 damage from physical attacks. Bio-regenerates 1D4x10 Hit Points per melee and triples that for one melee round per kill. In combat, it has 5 attacks per melee, +4 to strike, +3 to parry, +5 on all saving throws it may need to take, and takes no damage from weapons of blood or bone. Besides its basic attacks it has 3 special abilities it can use. **Corpse Bomb:** Once per melee, it can fire a ball of corpses at its enemies with a range of 150 feet (45.7 m). It inflicts 5D6 M.D. and releases 3D6 animated dead on impact that will attack all living beings they see unless commanded otherwise by the mage. **Gore Spray:** Once per melee, it can fire a spray of burning, putrid slime and gore that does 1D4x10 M.D. to everything in a 100 foot (30.4 m) stream. The gore smells horrible (same effect as the Stench of

the Dead spell) and continues to burn, doing 2D6 M.D. per melee round for 1D4 melees. **Animated Flesh:** If any part of the creature is cut or blown off, that section will produce animated corpses like the Corpse Bomb attack.

Dark Army

Range: Special.

Duration: 24 hours.

Saving Throw: Not applicable.

P.P.E.: 2500

It is believed this spell originated with the God Anubis and is the source for the multitude of undead in and around the Phoenix Empire. The ritual to cast this requires the death of 4 living mortals at once upon a great summoning circle. This is to both fuel the ritual and to inspire fear in the audience the ritual needs (around 100 innocent people will do). Death and Fear fuel a portal which opens to a dimension overrun with the Undead, a prison of sorts.

Once the portal is open, the Undead will pour forth in a great horde and will include nearly every variety with the exception of Vampires and Revenants. The portal is only large enough to accommodate 1D4x10 undead per melee round and will remain open for 1 minute, plus 1 per 10 mortals sacrificed to the circle (typically taken from the frightened audience mentioned earlier). Once the portal closes, the Undead will be under the spell caster's control for 24 hours, after which they are free to do as they please unless the ritual is recast (the P.P.E. is spent, this time with only 4 sacrifices required). If properly prepared, a small cabal could create a formidable army of undead that can be hurled against their enemies. See the Rifts Dark Conversion book for details about the Undead, including an idea of how common some types are (Festulents, Bone Fiends, and Ghouls will be the most common with Blood Wraiths, Harbingers, and Rawheads being the least common). Syvan, Kochei, or similar undead monsters are so rare that they require the G.M. to decide if any appear.

Desecration

Range: Touch.

Duration: Instant; 2D4 melee ritual.

Saving Throw: Ritual Magic.

P.P.E.: 250

Many servants of the Gods and other holy men, insist this spell doesn't exist. Through a brief ritual punctuated by the scattering of innocent blood (often killing the victim), an area can be cleansed of religious influences. Holy Ground, Greater and Lesser Protection circles, Sanctum, and Sanctuary are all removed by this powerful curse. This allows the Necromancer to send in his undead minions without these powerful enchantments holding them at bay. Lesser protections like Holy Wards, Spell Wards, and wall spells like Impenetrable Wall of Force can also be dispelled with this ritual and 1D4 Hit Points worth of the Necromancer's blood. All such protections receive a save vs magic to resist dispelling.

Desecrating a person is also possible, and requires the same ritual listed above with 1D4 Hit Points in blood from the Necromancer. A desecrated person loses all divine blessings, luck charms, and protection from Entities or the undead. In addition, holy symbols and similar items will no longer hold the supernatu-

ral at bay and holy water will burn like a mild acid (doing 1D4 damage). Desecration can be removed via a powerful exorcism ritual from a priest, but the process takes time the victims may not have.

Common or Classic Necromancy Spells (63)

Accelerated Decay	Stench of the Dead
Animate and Control Dead: Simple	Strength of the Dead
Armor of Vaust (new)	Summon Insect Swarm
Blight Bringer (new)	Summon Maggot (monster)
Carrion Eater (new)	Summon Vampire
Circle of Death (new)	Summon Worms of Taut
Command Ghouls	Surrogate Flesh (new)
Command Vampire	Sword of Vaust (new)
Consume Power & Knowledge	Thirst of Vaust (new)
Corpse Restore (new)	Tide of Dead (new)
Curse of Hunger	Undead Champion (new)
Curse of Wasting	Vampiric Familiar (new)
Curse: Death Wish	Wear the Face of Another
Daywalker (new)	
Death Bolt	
Death Charm (new)	
Death Mask	
Death Siphon (new)	
Death Strike	
Delay the End (new)	
Divining Tombs and Graves	
Elemental Immunity (new)	
Entropy (new)	
Everliving Servant (new)	
Explosive Entropy (new)	
Eyes of the Dead	
False Life (new)	
Flash of Truth (new)	
Funeral Dirge	
Funeral Pyre	
Goose Bumps (new)	
Hide Among the Dead	
Kill Plants	
Lay to Rest (new)	
Living Pawn (new)	
Maggots (insects)	
Malevolent Smile (new)	
Mock Funeral (curse)	
Necro-Armor	
Object Read the Dead	
Poison Touch	
Reaper's Blade (new)	
Recognize the Undead	
Restore Life (new)	
Return from the Grave	
Rot (new)	
Self Sacrifice (new)	
Sense Death (new)	
Shadows of Doom (curse)	
Siphon Strike (new)	

Bone Magic Spells (33)

Animate Body Parts
Assemble Bones
Bone & Joint Bonding
Bone Curse (new)
Bone of Invisibility
Bone Scepter
Bone Shield (new)
Bone Spike (new)
Bone Staff
Crawling Bones
Crown of Bone (new)
Fire Dust (new)
Fragile Bone to M.D.C. Bone
Fragile Bone to Stone
Fragile Bone to Wood
Greater Animated Dead
Grip of Death
Knuckle Spikes (new)
Locking Hand
Necklace of Bat Skulls
Necklace of Bird Skulls
Necklace of Dragon's Teeth
Necklace of Goblin Skulls
Necklace of Snake Skulls
Rattling Bones
Recognize the Master
Serpent Blade (new)
Skull of Knowledge
Skull with Flaming Eyes
Summon the Dead
Talking Bones
Viper Powder (new)
Wall of Bone (new)

Spirit Magic Spells (30)

Ancestral Guardian (new)	Receptacle
Cause of Death	Shadows of Death
Curse: To Hell and Back	Spectral Hand
Death's Embrace	Spectral Sword
Dissonance (new)	Spirit Familiar (new)
Earthly Realm (new)	Spirit Host (new)
Eternal Rest	Spiritual Consumption (new)
Ethereal Barrier (new)	Spiritual Strike (new)
Family Legacy (new)	Stench of the Dead
Ghost Ship	Successor Skill (new)
Ghostwalker	Swift Wings (new)
Haunting	Tectonic Power (new)
Lantern of Death (new)	Transfer Life Force
Macabre Theater (new)	Vengeful Spirits (new)
Mist of Shadows (new)	Vision of Death (new)

Necromancer O.C.C.s

Dread Knight O.C.C.

The Dread Knight is an enigma amongst Necromancers. Though they practice the dark arts of death and wield its power almost gleefully, they are different from their brethren in several ways. For one, Dread Knights almost never associate with the walking dead, which includes all greater undead and vampires. They may speak with or keep the company of spirits or guardians, but have little tolerance of the supernatural undead monsters other Necromancers surround themselves with. Most Dread Knights also follow a strange code of conduct (hence their title as “knights”) which discourages links or pacts with other forces. Most Dread Knights avoid leadership positions and service to greater powers, instead following their own compass and pursuing their own goals. It is this deliberate detachment from authority that gives them a reputation as shady drifters and vigilantes. A traveling Dread Knight will often help the innocent or downtrodden in exchange for lodging and supplies. To the surprise of many, they often turn down work for corrupt barrens and cruel warlords in favor of smaller and less rewarding pursuits. Why? Reasons for this behavior vary from knight to knight, but the main driving force behind most Dread Knights is vengeance. Most of these men and women are in pursuit of someone or something that has destroyed their world. The typical story for these knights goes something like this:

“Once I lived a happy life. I had a loving family, friends, and a love I was to marry. But then they (or it) came and destroyed everything. I was forced to watch as those I cared about were tortured and slaughtered, while some suffered fates much worse. At some point, I too was killed, a merciful release compared to the hell I had just witnessed. Then suddenly I was back, and a man stood over my body. “I have brought you back to seek justice,” said the man. “Now stand, we have much to do.”

Nearly all Dread Knights had died, only to be resurrected and taken as a squire by another knight. They are vengeful souls, but also tempered weapons. They are taught not only to seek vengeance, but to use that driving force to focus on their training, seek out evil, and crush the monstrous without mercy or regret.

The methods do not matter so long as the innocent are saved. That means that while some Dread Knights may appear reckless and dabble with dangerous magic, they never knowingly endanger the innocent, and have a deep loathing for those who do. While this would seemingly align them with the forces of good, most Dread Knights have little patience for lawmen who use “due process” and the justice of other men. This puts them at odds with the law and “true” knights, who see these Dread Knights as loose cannons and dangerous wielders of evil magic. Many see the use of Necromancy as proof of the knights’ true purpose. However, to the Dread Knights, death is a constant companion and source of power for their enemies to fear. Death holds no power over these men; after all, they were dead once and will die again. They are just making certain to take *all* of their enemies with them.



O.C.C. Powers and Abilities:

1. Suffered: All Dread Knights have experienced the cold touch of death and numerous terrible experiences before that. Having once seen their world crumble and many of those they love die or turn against them, they are hardened to the horrors of the world. Dread Knights are immune to Horror Factor, shell shock, powers that cause fear, and attempts to Intimidate. Nothing seems to phase or shock a Dread Knight, and they always respond with cold logic and action. This is a bit unnerving to their enemies, especially those accustomed to invoking fear in others, which imparts a Horror Factor of 12 (+1 at levels 4, 9 and 13).

2. Entropic Link: Through their experiences and resurrection, Dread Knights have gained a strange link to the forces of entropy. This connection allows the mage greater access to certain Necro-

mancer spells and increases the potency of entropic spells. ALL Entropy spells (i.e., those that include the words Entropy, Decay, or Rot) cost half their normal P.P.E. cost, and have a +1 to Spell Strength in addition to those from this O.C.C. However, as a result, healing spells used on the character are half as effective unless they involve vampiric regeneration or other life-stealing powers.

3. Driven to Revenge: Their incredible drive for revenge pushes the Dread Knight farther than most men would ever dare. They almost welcome physical pain and work harder and longer than even the most dedicated warriors. This drive to train imparts the following bonuses.

Combat Bonuses: +2 on initiative, +2 to strike, +3 to parry, +2 to dodge, +3 to roll, +2 to pull punch, +1 attack per melee, and high resistance to pain and fatigue (half normal).

4. Impervious to Vampires: Necromancers are impervious to the mind controlling bite and mind powers of the vampire. Furthermore, they cannot be turned into a vampire (but can be slain by them), and they know all the legends about vampires and other undead, and how best to combat them.

Some Dread Knights use this ability to become vampire slayers and to ingratiate themselves among ordinary people, or to earn a place among Demon Slayers, warriors and adventurers – this power is a valuable commodity. Others use this immunity and knowledge only for self-defense and to eliminate competition from the undead.

5. Initial Spell Knowledge: Additional spells can be purchased or learned as described under *The Pursuit of Magic* in **Rifts® Ultimate Edition**.

6. P.P.E. Base: 2D6x10 +20 plus the P.E. attribute. Gains 2D6 P.P.E. per level of experience.

7. O.C.C. Bonuses: +16 to S.D.C., +2D4 Hit Points (or +3D6 M.D.C. for Mega-Damage creatures), Immune to Horror Factor, +5 to save vs Poison, +4 to save vs Disease, +2 to save vs Magic, +2 to save vs Psionics, and +4 to save vs Possession and Mind Control. Dread Knights are tough, both mentally and physically, and bow to no man or monster.

Attribute Requirements: I.Q. 12 and M.E. of 11 or higher.

O.C.C. Skills:

Language and Literacy: Native Language (+20%).

Language: One additional (+10%).

Lore: Demons & Monsters (+20%)

Math: Basic (+5%)

Physical: One of choice (except Gymnastics; +10%).

Tracking: Humanoid (+10%)

Wilderness Survival (+5%)

W.P.: One Ancient of choice.

W.P.: One Modern of choice.

Hand to Hand: Expert; can be exchanged for Martial Arts at the cost of one O.C.C. Related Skill.

O.C.C. Related Skills: Select six other skills, but at least two must be selected from Physical or Weapon Proficiencies. Select one additional skill at levels 3, 6, 10 and 14.

Communications: Any (+5%).

Domestic: Any.

Electrical: None.

Espionage: Any (+5%).

Mechanical: None.

Medical: First Aid or Paramedic only (+5%).

Military: Fortification, Trap & Mine Detection, Demolitions, and Demo Disposal only.

Physical: Any.

Pilot: Any (+5%).

Pilot Related: Any (+5%).

Rogue: Any (+5%).

Science: Math or Chemistry only.

Technical: Any (+10% on Lore).

W.P.: Any.

Wilderness: Any (+5%).

Secondary Skills: The character also gets to select six skills from the Secondary Skills list on page 300 of **Rifts® Ultimate Edition**. These are additional areas of knowledge that do not receive the bonus listed in parentheses. All Secondary Skills start at base level.

Standard Equipment: Same as the Necromancer O.C.C. for standard gear.

Weapons include a silver knife, 2D4 wooden stakes, a wooden hammer, a palm-size mirror, and 1 weapon for each available W.P. skill and 2 clips of ammo for each as needed.

Vehicle is limited to any personal means of transportation, excluding power armor. Generally, the Dread Knight prefers horses, robotic mounts, hover cycles, jet packs, or similar common means of transport.

Money: Starts with 2D6x100 in credits and 1D6x1000 in sellable black market items. Dread Knights rarely accumulate wealth and tend to be very charitable with the poor and desperate, however they are not above splurging on the best weapons and gear.

Experience: Uses the same Experience Table as the Cyber-Knight.

Spirit Caller O.C.C.

Few Necromancers choose to follow the path of the Spirit Caller. These strange men and women possess an almost eerie camaraderie with Entities and spirits of all kinds. They speak to these strange beings almost constantly and sometimes allow their bodies to play host to such forces to gain power and knowledge. A skilled Spirit Caller can summon up numerous incorporeal Entities to do his bidding, fuel his magicks, or to dig up lost secrets from the dead. In fact, most Spirit Callers are considered haunted themselves as numerous uncalled spirits will often linger around the mage or gather to him in places where such creatures are found. It is this perpetual haunting that has led to the Spirit Callers' undeserved reputation as evil troublemakers.

Few Spirit Callers are truly evil. Most of the more vile practices of Necromancy are unknown to these spirit mages, and few consort with the undead or demonic. Instead, most seem to have a kind of distracted apathy. They are more concerned with their Entities, study, and their own needs than any directed malice or wanton greed. It is this apathy that allows their Entities to cause chaos and pain without ever giving a simple command that would force them to stop. The rare good aligned Spirit Caller will use his spirits to protect and never allow them to harm others, but to most people, the mage is still someone to be feared and is unwelcome in most towns. Evil Spirit Callers are truly vile beings who draw comfort from pain and death and feed their spirit minions upon the fear and emotions of their victims.

In any case, the mages are extremely rare, with perhaps only 1,000-2,500 spread across the globe! The greatest concentrations of Spirit Callers are in Russia, where they commune with

the spirits of that land. Their rarity is the result of the fear and misconceptions around them, and the kinds of people that often choose to become Spirit Callers. The typical Spirit Caller is quiet, withdrawn, antisocial, and often is haunted by his or her past. If there is truth to the statement that it is the mage that shapes the magic, then what better person to call upon bygone spirits and haunting forces?

O.C.C. Abilities & Powers:

1. Commune with Spirits: Spirits regard the mage as one of them, and would never attack him without provocation. In addition, the mage can see all Entities, ghosts, and energy beings at all times and can communicate with them as casually as they would any living person. This power is a natural and constant ability of the mage and requires no concentration or effort on his part.

2. Command Spirits: If the mage chooses, he can force one Entity in range to obey one command he gives. This command must be kept simple, like “attack that man,” “stop attacking,” or “leave.” If the Entity is truly angered or enraged, it receives a save vs magic at 12 or higher to resist. However, since most Entities regard the mage as one of their own, they are typically willing to follow simple commands without this power, or do not resist when it is used. This is especially true of lesser Entities like Poltergeists. **P.P.E. Cost:** 5 per command.

3. Haunted: While the mage is likely to have a number of summoned spirits nearby, he also acts as a beacon to other spirits who just happen to be in the area. 1D4 un-summoned lesser spirits are likely to be in the area (500 feet/152.4 m) of the mage. If within 1 mile (1.6 km) of a ley line, that number will likely increase to 2D4 lesser Entities and a 01-10% chance of one mid-ranged Entity (Siphon, Gluttonous, Beautiful, or some Haunting Entities). When within 1 mile of a nexus point, 3D4 lesser Entities are likely to gather around the mage with a 01-25% chance of 1 mid-ranged Entity being among them. These Entities will never harm the mage and will ignore the mage’s companions if given a stern warning, but other people are still targets as normal. It is this aspect of the mage that gives him great power, but causes him to be shunned and feared.

4. Spirit Slayer: The Spirit Caller is immune to all the fear and mind control abilities of Entities and cannot have his P.P.E. or I.S.P. stolen by them. All Spirit Callers know all lore concerning Entities, including their abilities, powers, and weaknesses. This makes them excellent exorcists as they often know the best means to extract an Entity from an area or can command it to leave, which is far quicker than a simple exorcism. In most cases however, the Spirit Caller will try to talk the Entity into leaving peacefully or attempt to lay the tortured spirit to rest permanently by resolving its reason for existing.

5. Willing Vessel: Much like the psychic medium, the mage allows his body to be possessed by an Entity. This is typically done to allow the spirit to interact physically with the world or so that lesser spirits can interact with others who otherwise cannot see or hear them. Unlike the medium however, the mage can choose to “suppress” the Entity at any time, enslaving it and gaining access to its psychic powers. This suppression is frightening for the Entity unless it willingly allows itself to be used to help its friend the Spirit Mage. For the duration the mage has full access to the Entity’s special powers, psychic abilities, and I.S.P. reserve. **Duration:** 4 minutes per level of experience. **P.P.E.:** 10 to suppress a lesser Entity; 20 for a mid-ranged Entity; 40 for

a greater Entity (except for the Conglomerate Entity, Madness Ghost, and Screecher, which cannot be controlled).

6. Initial Spell Knowledge: Begins with Lantern of Death, Family Legacy, Ethereal Barrier, Spectral Sword, Dissonance, and the Necromancy spells of Lay to Rest, Flash of Truth, Death Mask and the Common invocations of Summon & Control Entity and Constrain Being. At each level after first, the Spirit Caller can gain two new Spirit Magic spells or 1 new Necromancy or Common spell that is available to Necromancers. A Spirit Caller can learn Bone Magic, but only using the normal method of acquiring new spell knowledge as described under the Pursuit of Magic in **Rifts®: Ultimate Edition**.

7. P.P.E. Base: 2D4x10+40 plus the P.E. attribute. Gains an additional 2D6 P.P.E. per level of experience after first. The Spirit Caller never develops an impressive magic reserve as they quickly learn to draw energy from their Entities or through their Spirit Magic. They can draw P.P.E. from ley lines, nexus points, people, and rituals as described in **Rifts®: Ultimate Edition**.

8. O.C.C. Bonuses: Immune to Horror Factor, +6 to save vs Possession, +4 to save vs Mind Control, +1 to save vs Poison and Disease, +2 to save vs Magic, +1 to save vs Psychic attack, +1 to initiative, +2 on Perception Rolls, can see the invisible naturally (see Commune with Spirits above). Surprisingly, Spirit Callers are more resistant to insanity than their Necromancer brethren. They only need to roll on the Necromancer insanity table once at levels 7 and 12.

Attribute Requirements: M.E. of 14 and a willingness to be around ghosts all the time.

O.C.C. Skills:

Language and Literacy in native language plus one other of choice (+20%).

Language: One additional (+20%).

Lore: Demons & Monsters (+20%)

Lore: Psychic (+10%)

Math: Basic (+20%)

Pilot Hovercraft (+10%)

Wilderness Survival (+5%)

W.P. Knife or Sword

W.P.: One Energy Weapon of choice.

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

O.C.C. Related Skills: Select seven other skills. Plus, select two additional skills at level two, and one at levels 4, 8 and 12. All new skills start at level one proficiency.

Communications: Any (+5%).

Domestic: Any (+5%).

Electrical: None.

Espionage: Disguise, Forgery, and Intelligence only.

Mechanical: None.

Medical: First Aid only (+5%).

Military: None.

Physical: Any except Acrobatics, Gymnastics, Wrestling, or Boxing.

Pilot: Any (+2%).

Pilot Related: Any (+2%).

Rogue: Any (+5%).

Science: Any.

Technical: Any (+10% on Lore or Writing).

W.P.: Any.

Wilderness: Any.

Secondary Skills: The character also gets to select six skills from the Secondary Skills list on page 300 of **Rifts®: Ultimate Edition**. These are additional areas of knowledge that do not receive the bonus listed in parentheses. All Secondary Skills start at base level.

Standard Equipment: Same as the Necromancer O.C.C. for standard gear.

Weapons include a silver knife, 2D4 wooden stakes, a wooden hammer, a pure iron rod (to dispel illusions), an energy pistol with 1D6 E-Clips, and one other weapon of choice. Preference is toward magic weapons and devices, especially Necromancer creations or Techno-Wizardry.

Vehicle is limited to non-military means of transportation and rarely includes animals, as they are to frightened of the Spirit Caller's ghostly companions.

Money: Starts with 2D6x1000 in credits and 2D4x1000 in sellable black market goods. Spirit Callers are less interested in accumulating wealth than their Necromancer brethren and are more concerned with knowledge and secrets. That said, money is a good way to discover secrets.

Experience: Uses the same Experience Table as the Mystic.

The Bone Merchant NPC

Not Available as a Player Character

Of all the Necromancers, it is the Bone Merchant who truly masters the art of drawing latent power from the dead. Using their magic, Bone Merchants can shape flesh and bone like clay, imbue new power into simple corpses, and even create deadly weapons or potions from blood and gore. However, this power comes at a price. Unlike the other classes of Death Mage, Bone Merchants lack a great deal of offensive power. They lack the ability to bond with the dead personally, and their ability to raise, command, or animate corpses is extremely limited. Of course, this doesn't mean the mage isn't dangerous. On the contrary, Bone Merchants are feared as cruel traders, offering salvation and power at a terrible price. They use their creations to hold favor in courts of kingdoms, or lord over various magical guilds. Since their creations rival those of the vaunted Alchemist, but are easier to learn, they are often seen as rivals and compete for the same pupils. While the Necromancers may have a bad reputation, their offerings are formidable, and appeal to a great many warriors, monster races, and others who aren't afraid to wield the power of death.

O.C.C. Powers and Abilities:

1. Master of Corpses: The Bone Merchant begins with a large number of Bone Magic spells (see Initial Spell Knowledge) and gains them quickly over time. In addition, the Bone Merchant can craft Bone Artifacts that are much more powerful than the simple offerings of other Necromancers. The process for creating these items is listed below and is exclusive to the Bone Merchant O.C.C.

2. Call Power from Bone: By channeling his power through a piece of bone, the Bone Merchant can use any natural ability possessed by the creature the bone was taken from. This process cost 10 P.P.E. for Supernatural creatures and 20 P.P.E. for Creatures

of Magic. Any natural ability can be gained in this way and used as normal for that power for 2 minutes per level of the Bone Merchant. Spells and psionic powers can't be gained in this fashion, only natural abilities. Abilities related to natural limbs like wings or a prehensile tail will see the mage form the limb from bone, as if erupting from his flesh (no damage). These limbs function with the same strength as the mage but otherwise work like the natural ability they were copied from.

3. Mystic Preservation: This rare arcane method is used to preserve the remains of supernatural creatures, most of which vanish from our world when they die. By spending 5 P.P.E. per pound of flesh or bone, the mage can anchor remains to our world so they can be used in the mage's creations. The mage can be selective as to what material is affected, so a bone can be preserved, letting the unwanted flesh simply vanish like normal. If not used in a creation within three days, this power must be used again or the body part will vanish, unless it is preserved in pure alcohol.

4. Impervious to Vampires: Necromancers are impervious to the mind controlling bite and mind powers of the vampire. Furthermore, they cannot be turned into a vampire (but can be slain by them), and they know all the legends about vampires and other undead, and how best to combat them.

Some Necromancers use this ability to become vampire slayers and to ingratiate themselves among ordinary people, or to earn a place among Demon Slayers, warriors and adventurers – this power is a valuable commodity. Others use this immunity and knowledge only for self-defense and to eliminate competition from the undead. The most daring use it to enslave vampires and other undead as their servants and slaves.

5. Initial Spell Knowledge: Starts with Assemble Bones, Bone & Joint Bonding, Fragile Bone to Wood, Fragile Bone to Stone, Fragile Bone to M.D.C. Bone, Bone of Invisibility, Necklace of Bird Skulls, and 3 common Necromancy spells of choice (excluding Spirit Magic).

At each subsequent level of experience, the mage gains 2 Bone Magic spells or 1 common Necromancy spell. Additional spells can be purchased or learned as described under *The Pursuit of Magic* in **Rifts® Ultimate Edition**.

6. P.P.E. Base: 2D6x10 +30, plus the P.E. attribute. Gains 3D6 P.P.E. per level of experience, which may seem like a lot until you consider that some will be permanently spent on Bone Weapon creations.

7. O.C.C. Bonuses: +10 to S.D.C., +1D4 Hit Points (or +2D6 M.D.C. for Mega-Damage creatures), +4 to save vs Horror Factor, +6 to save vs Poison, +4 to save vs Disease, +2 to save vs Necromancy Magic, +1 to save vs other Magic. The Bone Merchant is known for an iron constitution and a morbid sense of humor. Most are quite insane. Roll on the random insanity table under the Necromancer O.C.C. at levels 3, 7 and 13.

Attribute Requirements: I.Q. 12 and M.E. of 11 or higher.

O.C.C. Skills:

Language & Literacy: Two languages of choice (+20%).

Language: One additional (+20%).

Lore: Demons & Monsters (+20%)

Math: Advanced (+15%)

Chemistry: Basic (+10%)

Skin and Prepare Animal Hides & Bones (+15%)

Identify Plants (+10%)

Wilderness Survival (+5%)

Blacksmithing (+10%)

W.P.: Two Ancient of choice.

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

O.C.C. Related Skills: Select seven other skills. Plus, select two additional skills at level two, and one at levels 4, 8 and 12. All new skills start at level one proficiency.

Communications: Any (+5%).

Domestic: Any (+5%).

Electrical: None.

Espionage: Disguise, Forgery, and Intelligence only.

Mechanical: None.

Medical: First Aid or Paramedic only (+5%).

Military: None.

Physical: Any except Acrobatics, Gymnastics, Wrestling, or Boxing.

Pilot: Any (+2%).

Pilot Related: Any.

Rogue: Any (+5%).

Science: Any (+5%).

Technical: Any (+10% on Lore or Writing).

W.P.: Any.

Wilderness: Any.

Secondary Skills: The character also gets to select six skills from the Secondary Skills list on page 300 of **Rifts®: Ultimate Edition**. These are additional areas of knowledge that do not receive the bonus listed in parentheses. All Secondary Skills start at base level.

Standard Equipment: Same as the Necromancer O.C.C. for standard gear.

Weapons include a silver knife, 2D4 wooden stakes, a wooden hammer, a palm-size mirror, around a dozen bones and 2D4 jars of body parts, including eyes, ears, tongues, liver chunks, and brain chunks. Plus the Bone Merchant is likely to have 1 greater bone weapon of choice with 1 greater and 3 lesser enchantments and one lesser item with 2 lesser enchantments.

Vehicle is limited to non-military means of transportation, but typically something with some storage space like a wagon, carriage, truck, ATV, or riding animal with saddlebags if traveling light.

Money: Starts with 2D4x1000 in credits and 3D6x1000 in sellable black market items or bone magic materials. Most Bone Merchants will spend their money quickly to acquire materials to create more powerful items. Even those that sell their creations tend to spend as fast as they create.

Experience: Uses the Dragon Hatchling Experience Table.

Necromantic Bone Crafting

This method of enchantment is largely exclusive to the Bone Merchant O.C.C., although elder Necromancers (level 9+) with the proper knowledge could learn to enchant bones as well. These creations are examples of the power of living souls and the latent energies they leave behind at death. The trauma of a creature's death is so great that some of its natural energies are permanently imprinted on their remains. However, these energies are faint and must be infused with additional power in order to reach their full potential. This is where the death mage comes in. It is the Necromancer who can most easily identify these latent energies and

who can unravel their composition and power. Armed with this knowledge, the mage uses his personal P.P.E. to infuse the dead, enhancing what power remains and giving it new form. The result is a powerful kind of magical enchantment that can create many useful items. Unfortunately, due to the fact that these items are created literally from the dead, there is a negative stigma surrounding them. Some Bone Merchants have, in fact, engaged in murder to create suitable materials, or to draw the power needed to perform their enchantments from their victims.

Below is a list of common creations of Bone Crafting, including creation costs, and a guide for creating some of the more powerful Artifacts. Each component includes a P.P.E. cost to the mage which may include permanent investments. P.P.E. spent permanently is never regained, even if the Artifact is destroyed or disassembled to be re-used in another project. Because of this permanent investment, most Bone Merchants will charge a great deal for their most powerful creations, often including services or years of servitude instead of money. Lesser Artifacts that simply require temporary P.P.E. are by far the most common and affordable, especially if the merchant in question owns a shop and has apprentices (rather than traveling merchants).

Potions

Potions are created from blood and typically, powdered organic parts. Most function very similar to Alchemical potions but include a few different creations exclusive to Bone Crafting. Unless otherwise stated, all potions last 10 minutes per use. Each is around 2 ounces (59 ml) minimum (one dose for a human).

See the Invisible: Requires blood from any supernatural creature as well as its dried and powdered eyes. Creation Cost: 30 P.P.E. plus components and 1 hour cooking time. Market Cost: 5,000 credits.

Turn Invisible: Lasts for the entire duration but otherwise as per Invisibility: Simple. Creation Cost: 30 P.P.E. plus powdered skin and blood from a creature that can turn invisible. Market Cost: 10,000 credits.

Chameleon: Nearly identical in creation to the invisibility potion above. Creation Cost: 25 P.P.E. plus skin and blood from a creature with magical chameleon. Market Cost: 6,000 credits.

Undead Strength: Blood and dried muscle tissue from virtually any supernatural creature, and grants a P.S. equal to the supernatural creature it came from. Creation Cost: 35 P.P.E. plus blood and powdered muscle. In the alternative, can be made into a jerky type food for the same effect. Market Cost: 15,000-50,000 credits.

Tireless Dead: Made in the same manner as the strength potion with the same ingredients, it prevents exhaustion for the duration. Creation Cost: 40 P.P.E. plus blood and powdered muscle. Market Cost: 15,000 credits.

Undead Speed: Same as the spell Swift Wings, but lasts only 2 minutes. Creation Cost: 65 P.P.E., plus blood from a bat and wings of a fly that was born from maggots that fed on corpses. Market Cost: 50,000 credits.

Bio-Regeneration: Heal 2D6 S.D.C./Hit Points or M.D.C. per minute for the duration. Creation Cost: 90 P.P.E. plus the blood and marrow of a creature with supernatural bio-regeneration. Market Cost: 50,000 credits.

Negate Poison: Uses the blood of a creature with poison attacks to create a potion that negates all poisons for the duration. Creation Cost: 50 P.P.E. plus blood. Market Cost: 12,000 credits.

Resist Fire: Half damage from all forms of fire, including magical. Creation Cost: 20 P.P.E. plus blood and skin of a creature resistant to fire. Market Cost: 18,000 credits.

Daywalker: Grants the drinker the effects of the Daywalker spell for 1 hour, and is highly coveted among vampires and other monsters of the night. Creation Cost: 50 P.P.E. and some blood from a vampire. Market Cost: Varies between 300,000 to 450,000 credits a dose, due mostly to demand among monsters.

Stench Bomb: The same as the spell Stench of the Dead at 3rd level strength. Used as a gas grenade or burned like a candle. Creation Cost: 15 P.P.E. plus feces and rotten mucus (yuck). Market Cost: 1,500 credits.

Delay the End: Works as per the spell of the same name with an active duration of 1 hour. Creation Cost: 25 P.P.E. plus hair and blood from a child (non-lethal amounts). Market Cost: 8,000-12,000 credits, and is popular among warriors and blood sport gladiators.

Accelerated Decay: Poured over a body, it functions exactly like the spell. Creation Cost: 20 P.P.E. plus lye and lime (the mineral). Market Cost: 20,000-50,000 credits since it is most often used by those trying to conceal a crime.

Eyes of the Dead: As per the spell, with 10 minute duration. Creation Cost: 30 P.P.E. and some eye jelly. Market Cost: 10,000 credits a dose.

Jewelry and Lesser Artifacts

These are creations that are not weapons, but that have some inherent magical properties that are either “constant” or “replenishing.” Constant artifacts provide their powers as long as they are worn, making them, by far, the most practical. Replenishing artifacts regenerate a magical payload over time that can be used toward their built-in powers. Many of these creations are similar to Alchemy, but differ in their creation process and the available abilities. Unless otherwise stated, all function at 6th level in strength.

Replenishing Artifacts

Ring of Turn Dead: As per the spell, 3x daily. Market Cost: 100,000-150,000 credits; fair availability.

Mark of Summoning: Summon the Dead 3x daily. Market Cost: 500,000-900,000 credits; rare.

Ring of Undead Strength: Strength of the Dead 3x daily. Market Cost: 300,000-500,000 credits; poor availability.

Corpsewalker’s Ring: Hide Among the Dead 3x daily. Market Cost: 30,000-40,000 credits; fair availability.

False Life Spike: A stud piercing that works as per the spell False Life 3x daily. Market Cost: 40,000-60,000 credits; poor availability.

Stud of Sense Death: Typically made as an earring to Sense Death 4x daily. Market Cost: 30,000-50,000 credits; fair availability.

Ring of Gore: Casts Necro-Armor at 5th level strength, 3x daily. Market Cost: 200,000-300,000 credits; poor availability.

Lifebane Necklace: Casts Elemental Immunity 2x daily. Market Cost: 150,000-200,000 credits; poor availability.

Animator’s Ring: Casts Animate and Control Dead (lesser) 3x daily. Market Cost: 300,000-500,000 credits; poor availability.

Deathbringer’s Ring: Animate and Control Dead (greater) 3x daily. Market Cost: 1.2-1.5 million credits; rare.

Ring of Tomb Sense: Divining Tombs & Graves 3x daily. Market Cost: 80,000-100,000 credits; poor availability.

Vicious Ring: Cast Death Strike 3x daily. Market Cost: 400,000-700,000 credits; poor availability.

Corpse Burner: Funeral Pyre 3x daily. Market Cost: 100,000-150,000 credits; fair availability.

Constant Artifacts

Cold Iron Lantern: One of the simplest and most common constant artifacts. This lantern functions the same as Lantern of Death when lit, equal to 5th level in strength. Creation Requirements: An old lantern, and wax made from a smashed beehive. Market Cost: 30,000-60,000 credits; fair availability.

The Death Mask: Another simple creation that uses the common Necromancy spell of Death Mask. This mask functions exactly like the real thing, but without a duration. Creation Requirements: The weathered facial skin of any corpse. Market Cost: 120,000-150,000 credits; fair availability.

Nemesis Ring: Grants the wearer the effects of the spell Daywalker as long as it is worn. Its name comes from the fact that it is most often used by vampires and other undead enemies of the living. Creation Requirements: The fangs of a vampire combined with its ashes made into a resin. Market Cost: 12-15 million credits. Most Bone Merchants are reluctant to make these items, even for undead allies.

General’s Mark: Made from the bones of a Bone Fiend, this ring gives the wearer the ability to Turn Dead (as per the spell), and Command Dead that fail a save vs magic at 12 or higher. The command must be a simple instruction like “attack them,” or “leave this place,” and cannot include attacking its true master. However, this item will work on virtually any undead creature encountered (except Master Vampires)! Creation Requirements: The finger bones of a Bone Fiend. Market Cost: 1.2-1.8 million credits; very rare.

Vampire Ward: Protects against the mind control and pheromone powers of vampires, but does nothing to prevent the wearer from becoming one. Creation Requirements: The tooth of a vampire. Market Cost: 120,000-250,000 depending on the area and demand; fair to poor availability.

Weapons and Armor

Such items created through Bone Crafting are powerful artifacts capable of great feats of magic. Though hardly a match for true Rune Weapons, these creations are still impressive to behold even compared to many Alchemical creations. They are heavily reliant on what they are created from and as such, can vary fairly greatly in power level. To aid the Game Master in creating these items, they are presented in stages. The first is the **Base**, which makes up the main part of the weapon or armor. Next are the optional components of **Blood** and **Metal**, which add a small amount of power to the item. Finally, there is the **Adornment**, which includes parts like eyes, teeth, ribs, tongues, and similar attachments that alter the item’s power.

Base Components

Most base components include bone and/or horn, teeth, or shell. These serve as the body of the construct and its main structure. An example would be a sword made of bone for the handle, and a large tooth for the actual blade. All base components must

come from at least a supernatural creature that was also Mega-Damage in life. The M.D.C. value of such weapons is generally around 50 M.D.C. for knives/hatchet-sized weapons, 120 M.D.C. for short swords/axes/clubs, 180 M.D.C. for long swords/spears/battle axes, or 240 M.D.C. for pole arms/lances/great swords. All bone weapons regenerate 10% of their M.D.C. every hour and can only be damaged by attacks that deliberately target the bone weapon. If the weapon is reduced to zero M.D.C., it will not regenerate and is destroyed.

Damage is equal to the S.D.C. equivalent of the weapon created, but the bone weapon will inflict S.D.C./Hit Point damage to S.D.C./Hit Point beings and materials, and M.D. to M.D.C. armor, structures and beings. In addition, these weapons receive some amount of supernatural help based on the power level of the creature used. Weak supernatural creatures, such as supernatural predators or those without magical abilities, provide only the base damage. Powerful supernatural monsters like Gargoyles, Brodkil, Spiny Ravagers, or similar, add +1D6 to the weapon's damage. Magical supernatural monsters (i.e. those with magic powers) add +2D6 damage. Demons or creatures of magic are more potent, and double the weapon's base damage. (**Note:** If more than one of these applies, use only the largest bonus.)

Blood and Metal

The addition of blood or metal into a bone creation can alter its basic properties and grant it additional powers. Blood is typically applied by soaking it into the hollows of the bone through baking, or containing it in sacs or hollows within the weapon like reservoirs. Metal is often inlaid into wards or runes on the weapon, or coating the weapon's blade. In either case, the type of blood or metal used is what provides specific bonuses. **Note:** No more than one type of blood or one type of metal can be added to a weapon.

Blood of a Monster: 1 pint of blood from any supernatural monster will increase damage done to supernatural beings by +6.

Vampire Blood: 12 fluid ounces (355 ml) of vampire blood will increase the damage done to vampires and other undead by +6.

Poisonous Blood: 12 fluid ounces (355 ml) will allow a bladed weapon to poison enemies upon a successful attack that comes in contact with the target's flesh. Victims must roll to save vs lethal poison at 12+ or suffer 2D6 damage direct to Hit Points/M.D.C., and -15% on skill rolls and -2 on all combat rolls for the next 10 minutes. Subsequent poisoning attacks inflict additional damage, but will only increase the duration of the penalties, not their severity.

Demon Blood: 1 pint (177 ml) of blood from a demon will render the weapon more effective against Deevils. Inflicts double damage against all "true" Deevils (not minions). Deevil blood has the same effect when used against demons.

Faerie Blood: 6 ounces (177 ml) of Faerie blood (can be gathered from multiple Faeries) will grant the weapon uncanny speed and precision: +2 to strike and parry in addition to any bonuses from other sources.

Dragon Blood: 1 pint (473 ml) of dragon blood will turn the weapon into a Dragon Slayer, inflicting triple damage to dragons and causing them to heal such damage at half their usual rate.

Copper: Inlaid copper wards grant the user protection from lightning attacks. With the weapon held in hand, the user is im-

mune to normal lightning and takes half damage from magical lightning.

Iron: The weapon can now dispel illusions by striking them, and can dispel magical barriers on a roll of 12+, minus any Spell Strength bonuses the barrier may have.

Mercury: This is often stored in the same way as blood, and makes the sword slippery and fluid. +2 to parry, and -2 to all disarm attempts against the wielder.

Steel: Runes of steel render the weapon the bane of technology. Artificial constructs, including enchanted constructs, take +6 to damage.

Adornment

Despite the name, it is the Adornment that determines what exactly the bone weapon's role is. An Adornment can be used for almost anything in the item, but often is part of the cross guard on swords or pommels. Most Adornments are difficult to acquire, making them expensive additions, but their value often far exceeds their monetary cost. A bone weapon can have only a single Adornment.

Sphinx's Eye: Grants the wielder the ability to read and write all languages, and grants the equivalent of the powers Clairvoyance, Speed Reading, and Total Recall 3x each daily.

Faerie Wings: Used to wrap handles, most often. The wielder is immune to Faerie Magic and Foods and gains the equivalent of the spell Escape, 3x daily.

Demon Horn: The wielder becomes stronger and more ferocious. Can cast the equivalent of the spell Magical Adrenaline Rush 2x per day with penalties only lasting 1 melee round!

Deevil Hoof: Gains the Devil's Own Luck. Can cast the equivalent of the spell Beat Insurmountable Odds once per day, and again on a roll under the character's M.A. with each subsequent attempt, adding +3 to whatever is rolled. (So under M.A. the first time, then die roll +3 for a second casting, die roll +6 for a third, etc.)

Medusa's (or Maggot's) Eye: Once hit, the target must roll to save vs magic or become petrified. Maximum weight affected is 500 pounds (255 kg), but large objects will see portion of themselves turned to stone. Effects last for 1 hour, so in this case, not permanent.

Dragon Tooth: Grants the user immunity to dragon breath and +2 vs all forms of magic and dragon psychic powers or abilities.

Champion Sword: Created using the lower rib bone of a Godling. This Adornment grants +2 to P.S., +1 to all other physical attributes, and +1 on all saving throws!

Mermaid's Scale: Incorporated into the weapon's handle. Grants the user the ability to breathe underwater and survive at twice his normal depth, for as long as the weapon is held in hand.

Vampire's Fang: The weapon becomes a life-drinker. Whenever the weapon inflicts damage to a living opponent's flesh (NOT armor), some of the damage is transferred to the weapon's wielder *as health*. If the target is an S.D.C. being and takes at least 10 points of damage, the wielder receives 1D4 S.D.C. or Hit Points of healing. If an M.D.C. target takes at least 10 M.D., the wielder receives 2D4 S.D.C. or Hit Points, or 1D4 M.D.C. if he is an M.D.C. being.

Other Adornments likely exist and could easily number into the hundreds, but these are the most common to Rifts Earth and the Megaverse at large.



Rifts® Black Market: Rise to Power

Optional Source Material for Rifts®

By Maxwell Kautsch

Part One

As you probably inferred from the title, I really dug the **Rifts® Black Market** sourcebook. As a criminal defense attorney, I have come to realize that crime is just second nature to some folks, even in a society based on the rule of law where the consequences for criminal behavior are laid out in black and white. Criminality and vigilantism are even more common in a post-apocalyptic setting like Rifts Earth, so material dedicated to the bad guys is a great addition to the canon.

One of the many things that stood out to me about the **Rifts®** criminal underworld was how the Immaterial Hand became one of the Five Factions of the Black Market only over the last twenty years or so. That relatively quick and recent ascent got me thinking about what the Hand could have done to expand its sphere of influence over that time period. Given the relative prevalence of practitioners of magic within the Hand's ranks, especially in its earlier days, it seemed natural for the organization to found a Techno-Wizard arms company to capitalize on the booming weapons market. Further, if the company's manufacturing facil-

ity were on a nexus point, it would be appropriate for the Hand to build a Nexus Hub to protect it. Then, perhaps the Hand would develop that Nexus Hub into a Market Town, giving the organization a point of distribution for the company's products directly to the consumer. The Market Town's profits would then be poured back into Hand operations, helping secure its place among the Five Factions.

As it turns out, the Hand has executed just such a plan, at the urging of a particularly visionary High Magus Black Marketeer. The project has exceeded even their wildest expectations, and the town known as **Singer** is now more city state than Market Town. But Singer's advent has not gone unnoticed, and its affluence and relative proximity to Free Quebec make it an enticing target for the nearby Le Marche Noir. Conflict between the two Black Market factions highlights Singer's urban intrigue.

With that, I thank you for joining me on another foray into the Rifts North America criminal underground.

On Market Towns

Market Towns are a consumer's paradise, offering the widest range of products in one place almost anywhere, save major city states, MercTown, and the Splynn Dimensional Market. The greatest beneficiary is, of course, the Market Town's founding organization or organizations, which own the majority of the businesses in town and have an effectively captive audience for their products.

Black Market Organization or Community Builder?

Despite these apparent advantages, there are few Market Towns in Rifts North America. Le Marche Noir owns only two, and one is mobile; Bandito Arms is building just its third Market Town; the Chicago Network has actually reduced its Market Town holdings since the Coalition States' war with Tolkeen; El Oculita has only one well-known Market Town; and the only Market Town under Immaterial Hand control, other than their enterprise near Cincinnati, became Singer, the city state outlined in these pages.

Although wildly successful given the right plan and sufficient resources, there are a few reasons why the Market Town business model is not as prevalent as one might expect. First of all, it is difficult to find and organize enough trustworthy Black Marketeers to even get the project off the ground. The myriad of moving parts involved with establishing a Market Town, mainly related to its construction and the associated supplies and labor, make it vulnerable to insider deals and corruption that can doom the project from the outset. Only a loyal, well-financed crew has the wherewithal to start such a venture, and those are in short supply.

Furthermore, once established, a modicum of decorum, not a traditionally strong suit for Black Market organizations, is required in order for the Market Town to succeed as a seller's venue. Market Towns are profitable only when consumers can acquire desired goods safely and at reasonable prices, so it is in the organization's interest to install a peacekeeping presence that, at minimum, ensures visitors can reasonably expect to be able to enjoy their purchases (i.e., not get robbed on their way back to their vehicle). Unless the Market Town's founders have an actual interest in law *enforcement*, the enterprise is little more than a department store for rival factions and traitorous Black Marketeers.

So rather than assume its customary role as the enemy of authority, the faction or factions that found a Market Town automatically *become* the authority.

This distinction may not matter in some facets of Black Market operations; after all, busting heads in the name of crime or crime-stopping is all the same to the crew doing the busting, and each individual establishment is ultimately responsible for its own security. But the founding organization finds itself in the counterintuitive position (for criminals, anyway) of desiring to keep the peace and maintain social stability to some extent. Therefore, rather than make a score against neighbors, local businesses, or the government, actions that would ordinarily be Black Market stock and trade, members of the founding organization who reside and work in the Market Town have significant incentive to stay loyal and build a real sense of community.

Temptation Abounds

Some thrive under these law-abiding circumstances (it's good to be king!), but others can't help but get involved in the criminal activity inherent in the buying and selling of goods in bulk. Unfortunately, succumbing to that temptation violates the trust of the founding organization, resulting in the appropriate penalty upon discovery.

Even so, substantial inventories make Market Towns breeding grounds for bribery, more often than not with theft as the endgame. For example, paying a security guard at an after-hours storage facility for a "give-up" rather than a "holdup," is a time-honored scheme, and quite the temptation for any Market Town-residing Black Marketeer with questionable loyalty and the right connections.

The likelihood of this sort of action increases if that security guard happens to owe a large debt, which is, of course, a rather typical circumstance in Black Market circles. Easy lending due to the readily-accessible Black Market bank, not to mention inevitable bookmaking operations, means lots of borrowers, and the loans are subject to steep interest, or "vig." The prevalence of these loans naturally results in a certain percentage of Market Town borrowers unable to pay their debts and often facing imminent consequences at the hands of the founding faction (i.e., you can't go to work with two broken legs).

Making matters worse, many Market Towns are havens for gamblers, sporting events and gladiatorial contests, further increasing the likelihood of loans and delinquent debts. This debtors' culture creates a climate of desperation that can lead to strapped borrowers accepting bribes or going along with a scheme against the interests of the authority, usually for a portion of the spoils, just to try to get out of debt, risks be damned.

Keeping the Peace

So if town security is necessary to protect the founding faction's financial interest, in some cases literally from itself, how is law and order maintained in a city that is one big criminal enterprise? Actual regulation fluctuates widely from Market Town to Market Town, depending on the Market Town's founding faction and the whims of its bosses. What is considered illegal in one may be a signature service elsewhere.

Even if the crime is universally reviled, such as theft, there is a wide range of possible punishments, which are ordinarily meted

out through some combination of backroom dealing, kickbacks and retaliatory hits. When a Black Market organization suspects or witnesses actions against its interests, the difference between getting shot on sight and looking the other way depends less on the severity of the crime and more on the "criminal's" connections. For example, a lone pickpocket or shoplifter may well suffer execution or exile, even for what could be considered petty theft, as there is no one to take his part. On the other hand, a major conspiracy to heist significant inventory or funds may not mean death to the conspirators, provided they have the right people paid off and/or protection from a rival organization.

With the death penalty always an option for the generally cut-throat individuals doling out the sentences, acting against the interests of the founding faction is risky business. But desperation begets ingenuity (criminality?), and Market Towns see enough crime against the authority to justify, at minimum, the Peace-keeping Force referenced in **Market Town Step Four: Town Security**.

Singer, New York

– Immaterial Hand City State

Although the Immaterial Hand only has one Market Town in the Magic Zone, near the ruins of *Cincinnati*, it founded another on an island peninsula off New York's St. Lawrence Seaway coastline, about fifty miles (80 km) northeast of pre-Rifts *Kingston, Ontario*. Featuring the Hand-owned Techno-Wizard manufacturing company Artesian Arms, the community that was originally little more than a glorified Nexus Hub, then burgeoning Market Town, is now the thriving independent city state of **Singer**.

The Hand has benefitted tremendously from Singer over the last quarter century. Its thriving economy continues to churn out profits from arms sales and ownership interests in various enterprises, streamlining the organization's operations throughout North America. This prosperity, combined with inspired leadership, unique culture, and favorable geography, has resulted in a remarkably safe and stable city state.

Despite these assets, Singer is far from idyllic, and sees its share of conflict, both armed and otherwise. Civil unrest, debauchery, discrimination, and political backstabbing are the order of the day. However, Singer's educational, recreational, and commercial opportunities make it much more destination than dead end in comparison to most of Rifts Earth. Thanks to the Hand, most citizens' standard of living has steadily improved, even rivaling that of notable city states such as Lazlo.

Racial Breakdown. Although the town that became Singer began as little more than a refugee camp, its population today exceeds 4,000 permanent residents and may include up to 500 (1D4x100+100) transients at any given time.

40% Humans.

41% D-Bees, particularly the races found in **Rifts® World Book 20: Canada** and **Rifts® World Book 11: Coalition War Campaign**, "freeborn" mutant animals, and Elves.

10% Other nonhumans, such as dragons, Temporal Raiders, Sphinx, and other enlightened creatures of magic.

4% Dwarves, mostly former residents of Kingsdale looking for a change of scene.

4% Faeries. Only five years ago the Faerie population was twice what it is now.

1% Entities.

Occupational Breakdown. In Singer, magic is a way of life, and that attitude is reflected in the residents' O.C.C.s. About half of the population are also Black Marketeers.

22% Techno-Wizards.

20% Miscellaneous practitioners of magic, especially Shifters, Ley Line Walkers, and Ley Line Rifters.

17% City Rats, Operators, and Merchants, most of whom are also Black Marketeers.

15% Wilderness Scouts, woodsmen, and similar.

10% Farmers/Vagabonds, mostly Exempt Citizens.

8% Men-at-Arms, particularly Pirates and Headhunters.

5% Rogue Scholars.

3% Other.

Note on Transients: Travelers in the Eastern Wilds are equally likely to be D-Bees, well-armed humans, traveling Natives, or creatures of magic. The vast majority of transients' O.C.C.s are some variation on men-at-arms or adventurers.

City Overview

Commerce is the name of the game in Singer, and anyone with money to spend is generally welcome to spend it. Two primary commercial districts, along with a bustling nightlife, meet the wants and needs of visitors and Singer natives alike. Parts of town are rowdy, and others are downright dangerous, but for the most part, a customer who keeps his mouth shut and an eye on his purse strings can usually make a purchase and depart without incident. But with the drinking, gambling, prostitution, eclectic arena and bar scene, and unique recreation opportunities, who wants to leave?

Geography

The tiny city state known as Singer occupies Wellesley Island's northern peninsula, which juts westward into the Thousand Islands region of the St. Lawrence River. Its territory runs from the portion once known as Grandview Park to the island's northeastern shores. The southern half of the island marks the northeast edge of the Horror Forest, and is separated from Singer by both a tree line known as the Thickening and the walls of a pre-Rifts castle, which did not exist on the island until more recent times. How it arrived is a mystery, but its crest and other clues indicate it was called "Singer Castle." Whether this castle is related to, or actually is, the castle that existed on nearby pre-Rifts Dark Island (now submerged), is unknown.

Before Singer was founded, the Eastern Wilds had fully reclaimed the island's gently rolling hills, yielding only to the sandy shores of the bay and the rocky outcroppings protruding into the St. Lawrence. A river now known as Eel River flows from its Lake of the Isles headwaters into Eel Bay, dividing the western third from the rest of the peninsula. The roadway that used to be Interstate 81 has been mostly overgrown, and the bridges connecting the island to the United States mainland and Hill Island, Ontario, have long been destroyed. The peninsula's lone nexus point, now known as Nexus Styx, is near the tip of the western peninsula, which protrudes far enough into the St. Lawrence to create a small cove known as Eel Bay.

Wildlife

Animals in the area include deer, moose, wolves, foxes, beavers, raccoons, skunks, squirrels, eagles, hawks, and owls. D-Bees common to southern Canada and the Eastern Wilds, Native tribes, particularly the five that make up the Longhouse Preserve, and the Ghost Rider Shemarrians (see **Shemarrian Nation™**, page 23), are the most likely to be encountered in the woods around Singer. D-Bee monsters such as the Rhino-Buffalo, Nexus Knights from Madhaven, and creatures of magic like Neuron Beasts might also be found wandering through the northern Horror Forest at any given time. See *Random Encounters in the Eastern Wilderness*, **Shemarrian Nation™**, page 94, for some ideas about what adventurers might run into near Singer.

Government

Like most Market Towns, Singer was originally considered a benevolent dictatorship. High Magus Rembrandt, the Immaterial Hand Boss who took the lead on the Singer project, was the Fist's proxy and de facto leader of the settlement. For over a decade, Rembrandt had absolute authority to make decisions on behalf of and impacting the settlers.

However, his authority was conditional from the very beginning. The Hand had negotiated the right to settle on what was known in pre-Rifts times as Wellesley Island with the native population of Faerie Folk. That agreement, known as the **Faerie Edict**, entrusted the Hand a few more responsibilities than typical for a Black Market operation. Certain commercial opportunities ordinarily available on the Black Market were declared illegal in Singer from its founding, including Body-Chop-Shops, Juicer, Crazy, and other technology-based augmentation, due to the Faeries' distaste for such procedures. Bio-Wizardry, Necromancy, and the sale of corpses or body parts of intelligent creatures were likewise strictly prohibited. Violators, then and now, are exiled or executed on sight, their assets seized in their entirety.

Despite the moderate commercial regulation inherent in the Edict, Singer became a haven for Black Market enterprises of all other kinds, especially Techno-Wizard augmentation, entertainment, and arms distribution, so Singer's population grew rapidly. Rembrandt prided himself on approaching problems from a myriad of perspectives, applying the creativity element inherent in him as a High Magus to solving the administrative problems of his burgeoning community. But by 100 P.A., although the population had seen undisputed improvements in its standard of living, and perhaps because of Singer's unique culture and close proximity to Lazlo's democracy, citizens clamored for a voice in the government. This clamor appeared to border on revolution.

In response, rather than crushing the rebellion in totalitarian fashion, the Hand attempted to modify the typical Black Market benevolent dictatorship to include the trappings of democracy. The Hand officially sanctioned what by then had developed into the city's five neighborhoods, allowing citizens from each neighborhood to elect a representative to make their interests known at the Town Council. Generally speaking, Singer's population is comfortable with this new regime, and is confident (delusional?) that further change can be effected if necessary.

These days, Rembrandt is careful to overrule Town Council decisions only when they are directly contrary to Hand interests, which hardly ever happens. Local scholars are puzzled, but

pleased, with Rembrandt's apparent flexibility, and applaud the Hand's stab at democracy. Singer, for the most part, truly is a safe haven, as citizens current on their tribute and honest about their holdings (which determines the amount of tribute on a case-by-case basis) can participate in a society safe enough that every citizen need not focus the entirety of their resources on survival alone; a luxury in Rifts Earth. Instead, citizens are free to concentrate on what is really important to the Black Market: profit.

Today, Singer appears as safe and prosperous as any nation on Rifts Earth. As the new regime approaches its first decade of existence, and prosperity continues to abound, even Singer's greatest skeptics seem to forget that Singer's government could probably best be described as "a faux democracy, in the grip of a benevolent but cutthroat dictator."

Law and Order

Rembrandt understands that a city state based on a Market Town simply has too many Black Market elements to maintain authority with an iron fist. He has installed the necessary surveillance and law enforcement elements, and although he makes it his business to learn everything he can about Singer's residents and his own underlings, he is ordinarily content to let the system he created resolve issues without his involvement. As a consequence, he mostly pays lip service to Singer's law and order, pointing to the considerable funds spent on town security, and devotes as much energy to his lab as he can.

However, Rembrandt is truly concerned about Le Marche Noir's increased presence. His sources tell him that the organization subsidizes at least one street gang, and the recent increase in sophisticated thefts seem to indicate an increased confidence among his own people to go behind the back of the authority. But as long as the Fist keeps realizing profit from Singer-related revenue, the Hand finds the idea of encroachment from the traditionally isolationist rival faction to be far-fetched.

Singer Security is often the front line of Singer's law enforcement, and whether a case is even filed in Singer's court system largely depends on how the particular squad handles the encounter and whether it's on the take. Generally, Singer Security punishes the most serious offenses without the need for due process or a trial. These include violations of the Faerie Edict, murder, rape, acting against the interests of the authority in any way, and engaging in any revenue-generating activity, from gambling or arms sales to housecleaning or baking, without paying the Hand its cut. Suspects are subject to immediate exile or death. Even petty theft may result in exile or death, but usually only if the suspect is a Docksider or otherwise unconnected. Failing to make timely payments on a loan usually results in a 30-day grace period, followed by expulsion and asset forfeiture if the debt is not brought current in that time frame.

For all other crimes, from littering to weapons infractions to disorderly conduct, Singer Security, Singer's police force, will issue citations to the "defendant" that include the fine amount and "pay or appear" dates. The majority of the penalties are financial in nature; revenue from municipal tickets is one of Rembrandt's favorite rackets.

If the defendant disputes the citation, or if citizens have a dispute between themselves, the issue is taken up with the Lord and Lady of Singer, who are usually available to hear cases on a daily basis. If a crime, the authority is represented by prosecutor **Sarius**

Clifques, 5th level mutant dinosaur-turned Rogue Scholar Black Marketeer from an alternate universe, whose calculating but fair demeanor (Aberrant alignment) has served him well before the Lord and Lady. The accused can hire any number of attorneys to assist in their defense, and lawyers are also available to represent citizens in complaints against other citizens.

As in Lazlo, Kingsdale, and other enlightened city states, light Mega-Damage weapons such as sidearms are permitted within city limits. Anything larger than a light energy rifle must be checked at the gate. Most, but not all, individual establishments require patrons to check their weapons at the door. Prostitution, gambling, and the sale and use of drugs are all legal, but only in the Gametown and Dockside neighborhoods; anyone caught running a non-sanctioned operation is subject to immediate exile and asset forfeiture.

Defenses

Singer has only one wall, but it's a doozy, running east to west and dividing the northern peninsula, Singer's territory, from the rest of Wellesley Island. Now known as the Southern Wall, the barrier began as a pre-Rifts castle that somehow appeared at the eastern terminus of Styx Major. Over the years, the Hand has added on to the structure, and it now stretches across the peninsula to protect Singer's southern city limit. Many of the wall's battlements feature Interior Defense Force soldiers, one of three branches of Singer's military, and all funnel the rare traveler toward a single gate. Visitors are welcome, but are required to check any weapons larger than energy rifles at the gate and into a large warehouse where they are tagged until their owner returns with a valid claim slip. Security checkpoints operated by Singer Security dot the interior of the town, while Eel Bay and the St. Lawrence coastline are well-patrolled by the River Watch. Vessels seeking to land in Singer must communicate with the Eel Bay Port Authority in advance, and any passengers or crew seeking to enter Singer are required to leave anything larger than an energy rifle on board their ship. Further, many of Singer's key buildings feature Techno-Wizard Defenses such as Energy Absorbers, Image Generators, Defensive Shielding, Cloaking Device, and Enhanced Defensive Shielding (see **The Rifter® #58**, page 26, for details on TW Defenses).

Power Generation

Singer relies on a minor nexus point as the community's primary source of power. Over 90% of the Singer's homes have built-in connections to the city's water supply, sewer system, and P.P.E. Channeling Network. With the help of an Atlantean Stone Pyramid built directly atop Nexus Styx, and also due to Singer's small land area and population, the Channeling Network has completely replaced electricity as Singer's primary power source. Provided as part of Singer's Tiered Tribute System to all residents in good standing with the Hand relative to their use, the Network pumps energy needed to light, heat, and power each home. Residents are also able to recharge TW devices as easily as they might plug an electrical appliance into an outlet; each home receives the equivalent of 20 P.P.E. per hour for this purpose, and that P.P.E. cannot be used to cast spells. Each of those homes also include an entertainment/information terminal with a monitor capable of accessing local intranet and local content, mostly produced by the

Singer Media Corporation (a subsidiary of the Hand). Drinking water is supplied from the Eel River, and purified at a TW water treatment plant in the Wellesley Park neighborhood. Only a few homes in the Dockside neighborhood and on the Outskirts are off the grid. The backup power supply is a wind-powered turbine that also doubles as a Techno-Wizard Weather Control Station.

What Would Become Singer

In pre-Rifts times, Wellesley Island was a summer vacation spot known for its lush state parks and pristine golf courses. It also served as a border crossing between the United States and Canada, although the coming of the Rifts washed the checkpoint that was on the island's northeastern shore into the river. Many of the town's pre-Rifts residents worked at the park or were otherwise engaged in the tourism industry, and the population was always significantly greater in the summer. Thus, when the Rifts came on the Winter Solstice of 2098 A.D., the actual loss of life was not particularly great.

Regardless, the coming of the Rifts exterminated any human presence on the island, as the rivers and seas, including the St. Lawrence, bucked wildly with ley line energy. As it happened, a nexus point flourished near the tip of what was Grandview Park, less than a half-mile (0.8 km) from the peninsula's western coast. Although the nexus point consisted only of two short ley lines, neither longer than three miles, the energy released was catastrophic.

Once humanity began regaining its foothold in the world, the St. Lawrence River became one of the premier trade routes in North America. These economic circumstances allowed piracy to flourish in its waters and along its shores. Pirates were always on the lookout for new coastal and island hideouts, and that search inevitably led to the possibilities afforded by the Eel Bay peninsula's return to its primal, verdant state. Moreover, the spires of the nearby castle poking through the overgrown canopy enticed pirates and explorers alike.

The first known attempted settlement began around 20 P.A. Three pirate bands consolidated their forces for safety, and decided the Eel Bay peninsula, with its picturesque landscape and defensible position, made even more so by the castle, would be perfect. In honor of the remarkable pre-Rifts structure suddenly under their jurisdiction, the pirates dubbed their settlement **Singer**.

Unfortunately, the mostly human settlers underestimated two key dangers: the threat of the nexus point and the sheer number of Faerie Folk living in the nearby so-called Horror Forest. As the Faerie population was not quite as pervasive on the peninsula as it would become later in the century, the settlers were able to establish something of a permanent encampment without overt interference from Faeries. Still, there was a nagging trend of bad things happening at the wrong times (e.g., fire at the supply shed just after a rare shipment arrives, winch breaking down just as a job is almost done, etc.) that seemed to put every project behind schedule. Refitting the castle was proving especially daunting, as only a select few settlers could even get up the gumption to enter its gates.

Then, on the second Vernal Equinox of the settlement's existence, a rampaging Baal-Rog demon burst through the nexus point during a Ley Line Storm, overwhelming the town's defenses and exterminating almost half of the population. The surviving settlers tried to soldier on, but continued to be thwarted by what appeared to be extreme bad luck. Food would spoil, construction projects would be sabotaged, and morale faltered. Less than five

years after arriving, the group of settlers abandoned Eel Bay, and moved on to the Pirate Kingdom of Montreal.

Over the years, two or three different bands of settlers have attempted to take advantage of the abandoned structures, but never with any "luck." By 85 P.A., whispers of haunted houses, curses, and rampant Faerie Mounds were common, and the island peninsula referred to as Singer was considered, by most, a destination for only the foolhardy or desperate.

High Magus Rembrandt and the Immaterial Hand

Rembrandt Karosh began his journey to Immaterial Hand Boss and de facto ruler of Singer as an apprentice High Magus. He chose that path, or the path chose him, because of his obsessive interest in magic from a young age, specifically in synthesizing magic with technology to design and build weapons. While his peers were playing "guns," a practice parents certainly endorsed in a post-apocalyptic world, Rembrandt was more likely underfoot at his uncle's fledgling Techno-Wizard workshop in Stormspire building his own. To no one's surprise, the Lords of Magic issued their call on his 13th birthday.

Those experiences in his uncle's shop caused him to fall in love with Techno-Wizard weaponry early on. Accordingly, he focused much of his High Magus training on the design and construction of such weapons, even though his teachers tried to discourage that interest as "too human." Even so, Rembrandt diligently studied throughout his teen years, patiently waiting for when he would complete his training and eventually try his hand in what he saw as a potentially burgeoning futures market: Techno-Wizard arms sales.

When the Coalition States declared war on the Federation of Magic in 12 P.A., Rembrandt, still in training, briefly left his studies and joined the fledgling Immaterial Hand. In its infancy, the Hand was as much resistance movement as Black Market organization. However, the excitement of guerrilla warfare soon wore off, and as the residents of the Federation retreated to their ethereal cities and fading farmland, Rembrandt's passion cooled. Although he, and others, were beginning to fully grasp the brilliant market niche the Coalition's ban had created, he filed the information away and returned to his guild house. After a stern reprimand and more than another decade of study, he concluded his studies and was deemed a High Magus.

Though Rembrandt's idealism had tempered significantly since his teen years, his desire to learn had not. Determined to take advantage of the opportunities available to one afforded the lifespan of a High Magus, he set out on Sojourns in the spring of 25 P.A. that would take him throughout Rifts Earth and the Megaverse itself, seeking to perfect his weapon design and production techniques. His travels lasted over a half-century, with occasional returns to his stomping grounds mixed in, and concluded for good only when he felt he was ready to apply the lessons he had learned to the furtherance of his ultimate goal: for the world to appreciate his creativity.

In the spring of 85 P.A., Rembrandt returned to Federation territory and made contact with the Immaterial Hand, hoping its infrastructure and resources could jumpstart his plans. The Fist had only recently come to power, and Black Market etiquette would ordinarily prevent Rembrandt's return to the fold. However, Rembrandt's founding role in what would only later become a

sophisticated organized crime ring, combined with the Fist's interest in acquiring powerful allies, allowed him immediate Hand membership as an Advisor.

Although the Hand was respected among other black market organizations for its area of smuggling proficiency and ingenious system of Nexus Hubs, it was not considered one of the most influential criminal organizations in 85 P.A. Rembrandt was convinced that converting one or more Hand Nexus Hubs into Market Towns would go a long way toward leveling the playing field with the Chicago Network, among others, and also enhance the opportunity for a creative outlet for himself. The Market Town he proposed would be home to a weapons company that would compete for market share with Bandito Arms and Stormspire alike. His Market Town would not only be a jumping-off point for smugglers, but would also be the greatest Techno-Wizard arms manufacturer Rifts Earth had ever seen.

The Fist took his suggestion to heart, and identified a location in Cincinnati that seemed perfect for such an upgrade. However, reluctant to incur the expense of full-scale arms manufacturing, the Fist developed the Cincinnati Market Town as a sophisticated trading post rather than manufacturing plant.

Though the Cincinnati experiment proved successful in its own right, Rembrandt's vision would not be denied, and his ideas, skills, and collateral he had acquired over the decades gave him a voice in the organization. After some further discussion with prospective investors from the Hand's upper echelons, the Fist was finally convinced enough to give Rembrandt his opportunity. In exchange for a 25% ownership interest in Rembrandt's enterprise, the leadership trio agreed that the organization would provide the financing and manpower for what they intended to be the crown jewel of Hand Market Towns. The company would be more than a TW arms manufacturer; it would be a proxy for the Hand at large, responsible for developing the Market Town as a whole. In exchange for overseeing those obligations, Rembrandt would retain a 75% ownership interest and be awarded the title of Boss, along with accompanying unilateral authority on behalf of the company. He would be allowed to draw all necessary loans, but agreed to consult directly with the Fist on initial startup expenses. Further, he suggested regular shareholder meetings, an act of transparency appreciated by everyone. Optimism was high, but Rembrandt was well aware that things could easily become dicey if he failed to meet expectations.

An Enticing Peninsula

The first step to realizing his goal of building the premier TW arms manufacturing plant and design studio, of course, was to find just the right nexus point, a relatively easy task for the Hand considering its smuggling methods. Although the Fist proposed various existing Nexus Hubs at the first shareholder meeting in July of 85 A.D., Rembrandt was most interested in a minor nexus point on a small peninsula in the St. Lawrence Seaway on the outskirts of the Horror Forest. Hand operatives had slated the site for a potential future Nexus Hub, but had so far held off due to the high concentration of Faerie Folk. As far as the Hand was concerned, Faeries were too unpredictable to negotiate with, and fighting them would simply be bad business. Although Rembrandt shared those misgivings about the current inhabitants (so wild and uncontrolled, when creativity requires patience and a steady hand, powered by a consistent stream of original thought),

he had an inescapable feeling that if he could set up shop at this place, the world, sooner rather than later, would be forced to recognize him as a master craftsman. He spent some of his carefully stockpiled political capital within the organization and convinced the shareholders to explore it further.

In August of 85 P.A., a party led by Rembrandt and Fist Boss Ava Marcuse made their way via ley lines and horseback to what pre-Rifts maps called Wellesley Island and its Eel Bay peninsula. What they found was a "free" nexus point in the sense that no human, D-Bee or criminal organization had established any permanent encampment nearby. The longer ley line, which they named Styx Major, ran east and west along the length of the peninsula, neatly bisecting the north and south. It began just off the coast and ended less than three miles later, making an "L" with the northernmost ramparts of an apparent pre-Rifts castle, its faded crest labeled "Singer." The castle walls ran northeast, almost parallel to the island's northern shore, and absolutely teemed with various Entities. The shorter ley line, Styx Minor, ran almost directly north and south for about a mile, placing the nexus point on the peninsula's western rocky beaches, a figurative stone's throw from the largest shipping route in North America.

A few islands, some bigger than others, dotted the horizon south of Eel Bay, a natural inlet perfect for shipping and recreation. An inland river, running nearly parallel with Styx Minor, divided the peninsula from east to west as it flowed into Eel Bay. Inland, the beaches quickly gave way to lush, hilly forest. The pre-Rifts parkland had renewed itself with such vengeance, entwining the castle and the other ramshackle structures in thick green, it was no wonder Faerie Folk had made it their home. Any intelligent life would have to contend with them, a fact driven home when the party, in spite of its best and ordinarily effective efforts at stealth, had separate encounters with a Leprechaun and an entire Spriggan feasting party within the first half hour the peninsula was in sight. If they needed more proof, Rembrandt pointed out that the few dilapidated buildings, as well as the castle, were crumbling due to age and disrepair, not violence – overgrown monuments to Faerie dominion.

From his point of view, the essentially haunted nature of the peninsula in general, and the castle in particular, was more blessing than curse. For one thing, there was no sign of civilized life to confront. The nearest rival Black Market faction, Le Marche Noir, was cause for some concern, as its territory stretched from Free Quebec to the St. Lawrence and included a relatively nearby Market Town of its own near the ruins of Wingham, Ontario. However, Le Marche Noir tended to stifle itself with isolationist, Coalition States-centric policies, and the Fist was confident the organization would not place a high priority on interfering with non-aggressive Hand activities south of the Canadian border. The Longhouse Preserve and its five tribes, the most established bastion of humanity in the area, seemed to give the peninsula a wide berth despite their location near pre-Rifts Albany. Any pirates hiding out on the nearby islands appeared to stay off the mainland. Thus, most of the logistical problems, including Splugorth Slavers, could be classified as foreign relations.

That left the domestic concerns. The Entities living in Castle Singer would be a relative cinch to handle for the plethora of practitioners of magic in the organization, but the Faeries would be another matter. By Rembrandt's estimation, there were simply too many to uproot, via magic or otherwise, without incalculable collateral damage.

Still, at the shareholder meeting upon the party's return, almost everyone, including the Fist, was in favor of a scorched-earth approach. But after hours of discussion, a consensus was reached that exterminating the Faeries in what had become their native land would not only be impossible, as they knew every crevice of an island the Hand had only begun to explore, but also counterproductive, because the survivors would no doubt harass any new settlers mercilessly. None wanted to rehash the failed settlements of Singer's past, so Rembrandt, who had championed negotiation from the beginning, was naturally charged with the first attempt at removing the obstacle.

Alliance of Necessity

Rembrandt knew better than anyone that the Faerie population could foul the whole operation if it wasn't handled just right. It seemed to him that if at all possible, the best-case scenario would involve an arrangement that would entice the Faeries to leave the peninsula without any ill will toward those who moved in. He freely admitted that such a trick would require negotiation skills far beyond his own. Faerie Folk just don't take High Magi seriously; for example, the Spriggans they met on Singer doubled over in laughter for more than five minutes after one look at what they referred to as his "super-serious" bioformed visage. Furthermore, the Hand's roster didn't include anyone he trusted to have the patience and the basic goodness to appeal to the Faerie Folk. Although some of the shareholders objected to bringing in outsiders, there was eventually a consensus that the right negotiator would be better than any internal, and likely heavy-handed, approach.

Rembrandt considered his rather short list of well-meaning contacts. Given that dragons and Elves traditionally appeal to Faeries on a primal level, it didn't take him long to think of **Orin** and **Tessa**.

Rembrandt had met Orin Steelgaze, a Cyber-Knight of great psionic talent and the son of the god Thoth, and Tesselashpha, a female Ice Dragon, on a Sojourn that had taken him to Tolkeen in 52 P.A., long before it became the victim of Coalition aggression. Along with their longtime companion **Carven**, an elite Elven Wilderness Scout, the trio had become the protectors of a small farming community just north of Solomon in what was pre-Rifts Minnesota. In other words, by the summer of 88 P.A., far too close to the Xiticix Hivelands for anyone's good.

As fate would have it, Rembrandt's mystic communication to Tessa on August 8 of that year happened to be the day after a Xiticix swarm had slaughtered over two-thirds the town's population, seemingly at random. Despite the trio's prowess, there were just too many bugs for them to do more than temporarily drive them off. Rembrandt couldn't believe his luck, perverse as it was, knowing that the townspeople would now surely be looking for a new home. He and the Fist outlined the Hand's plans for Singer, focusing on the desire to build a thriving economy based on the Techno-Wizard arms company. He impressed upon them that their people would have job opportunities and would stand on equal footing with Hand families who would make their way to Singer. All the trio would have to do would be to convince the Faeries to leave.

Orin, Tessa, and Carven had heard of the Immaterial Hand and were not naive enough to believe the organization had any goals other than wealth and self-aggrandizement, but the mere fact it was interested in working with the Faerie Folk at all impressed them. Additionally, the three of them were extremely well-qualified for

the task at hand, especially considering Rembrandt's contacts, and at this point, the 50 or so survivors, mostly humanoid D-Bees of all ages drawn to the outdoors and agriculturally-inclined races like Fennodi and Elves, would truly be better off elsewhere. They accepted Rembrandt's offer, but on the condition that he would not meddle with their negotiations, and with the understanding that the endgame was to allow civilization to flourish at Singer, not necessarily to lure the Faeries off the peninsula.

With the help of the Hand's ley line smuggling routes, the refugees, along with Rembrandt and a heavily-armed contingent of Hand enforcers, Ley Line Walkers, Rifiers, Shifters and Techno-Wizards, arrived at Nexus Styx less than two weeks after Rembrandt's initial contact. Although the uninitiated in the party expected and even hoped to see some of the legendary Faerie Folk immediately, they were disappointed to find little more than what appeared to be abandoned, albeit in some cases, extremely detailed, Faerie Circles. Experienced and long-lived, Orin, Tessa and Carven had traveled through various Faerie-rich forests in several dimensions, so they knew that the intricacy and frequency of the mounds and circles indicated a large and entrenched Faerie presence.

Tessa and Carven made ready to enter the dense forest to the east, while the rest of the party began the initial stages of constructing a Nexus Hub. At dusk, Orin, Rembrandt and the others watched as the pair faded into the light woods that seemed to grow more dense with their every step.

The Faerie Edict

At dawn a week later, August 27, 88 P.A., Tessa and Carven returned, excited and triumphant. Amidst the sound of chirping birds, the two of them delivered the terms of the agreement they called the **Faerie Edict** to the small but rapt audience.

After visiting Faerie Folk throughout the region, emphasizing their people's plight as refugees, Rembrandt's benevolence, and their own good names, the pair could report a loose consensus. The Faeries had agreed not to harass the settlers and their construction projects, despite the objections from the more independent and territorial of their number. Although it was acknowledged that the most evil and aggressive Faeries would likely make it a point to disregard the treaty, and would have to be dealt with accordingly, most of the rest would either try to bond with the new arrivals or leave for greener pastures. In exchange, the settlement would be required to create a culture of honor and respect for Faeries, demonstrated through the construction of shrines at which to leave offerings such as sweets, shiny things, and mead, and a pledge to rely on magic energy above traditional industry. Furthermore, the settlers could build only on the northern half of the island, down to a tree line the Faeries called "the Thickening," which signaled the beginning of the Horror Forest in earnest, about a mile south and east from the castle walls. Finally, and most importantly from the Faeries' perspective, the settlers agreed to defend the peninsula against what had proved to be an increasingly dangerous threat: Splugorth Slavers.

For Orin, Tessa, Carven, and most of the Minnesota refugees, the Edict represented an opportunity to start over. They would be forever grateful to the Faeries who had stepped aside and allowed them to build new lives for themselves in exchange for protection from the Splugorth. They were determined to comply with the Faerie Edict to the letter, and makeshift Faerie shrines began to crop up that very night.

For Rembrandt and the Hand, the Edict was full of unfortunate concessions, but obstacles were to be expected. Fist leaders Jacob Caine and Yull Thedersworn were opposed to confronting the Splugorth, regardless of how tacitly, and were also against a long-term partnership with those they considered country bumpkins. But Ava's passion for the plan was overwhelming, and after a heated discussion, the Fist agreed to abide by the terms of the Edict.

Almost immediately, the Hand began to funnel equipment, tools, and subcontractors toward the construction and defense of the settlement. Grudgingly, the Fist also deployed a handful of Enforcers to patrol the Horror Forest, as per the Faerie Edict, while Orin, Tessa and Carven agreed to volunteer themselves and other qualified refugees to assist in fulfilling that duty.

Culture Clash

As difficult as it had been to convince the Fist to go all in on the project, Rembrandt knew the real challenge would be whether these two strikingly disparate groups, Tolkeen-area farmers and Black Market operatives, could coexist peacefully enough to form the bedrock of the Market Town's population. At first, the issues of leadership and government paled in comparison to building the settlement. In those early days, the Minnesota refugees worked to renovate salvageable structures, construct new buildings, and clear the light woods from the northeastern quadrant of the peninsula for farmsteads. Most kept to themselves. Orin and Tessa met with Rembrandt almost daily to coordinate the distribution of resources, which the Hand shared with the refugees in the spirit of cooperation and mutual benefit. Meanwhile, Hand operatives, mostly subcontractors and truly interested parties such as Rembrandt and Ava, focused on developing the fortified encampment that was to become first a Nexus Hub, then a Market Town.

The Minnesota refugees were efficient and productive workers, utilizing the allocated resources with remarkable efficiency. Rembrandt quickly realized that requiring repayment for those resources would prove counterproductive. In a very real sense, the Hand would not be able to occupy prime real estate along the St. Lawrence but for the refugees' leaders, and by extension, the refugees themselves.

The Fist was not pleased with the thought of failing to recoup its assets, but not blind to the refugees' intrinsic value over the long term. This group of generally good-hearted humans and D-Bees would help provide the culture of respect for Faerie Folk the Edict required. Perhaps as importantly, the refugees' ability to exploit the potential agricultural resources on Singer's fertile ground far outstripped the Hand's, giving the organization a ready-made inroad to self-sufficiency. Rembrandt also understood that the Hand's nefarious ways were likely to turn the refugees against them at some point, and that if the refugees were to become trusted allies, they would need to be simultaneously empowered and deceived.

Exempt Citizens

Thus, in recognition of Tessa and Carven's integral role in settling the peninsula and the agreement between Rembrandt, Orin, and Tessa, the Hand decided against treating the former refugees as low-level Black Marketeers who were fortunate enough to receive a favor. Instead, via word-of-mouth decree issued in the winter of 89 P.A., Rembrandt announced to the former refugees the Hand

was going to "call it even," giving them a clean slate with the Black Market and allowing for individual homesteads of up to 5 acres throughout the peninsula's northeastern quadrant. Although this arrangement would cause the Hand to lose some earning potential, as some of the former refugees were truly isolationist types who just wanted to be left alone on their land, Rembrandt guessed this tactic might cause others to be lured into future Black Market opportunities, for good or ill, eager to become involved with an organization as benevolent and honest as the Hand. Moreover, it represented the Hand's grudging acknowledgment of Orin, Tessa, and Carven's role in establishing the settlement.

This exempt status applied to all of the 50 or so original refugees, consisting of essentially eight different family or tribal groups. Going forward, they owned their own estate, the right to the profit from the sale of any yield the land could produce, and implicitly, incentive to start or increase their families. However, there was also an understanding that the Hand would continue to operate Singer in its own best interests, and would have no obligation to obtain consensus from anyone before acting in those interests. Furthermore, unbeknownst to the now former refugees, Black Market operatives were to be dispatched to identify, record, and continuously surveil them. As long as their agriculturally inclined neighbors went about their business, kept up appearances with the Faeries, and sold their crops to the Hand at reasonable prices, the Hand would allow this unique arrangement to continue. It does to this day.

Eventually, this special status would develop into an elite social class in Singer, now known as Exempt Citizens (derogatorily known as *Zemps*), which would forever be hard-pressed to view the Hand in a negative light despite the fact that they were essentially subjects in a benevolent dictatorship. While Rembrandt and other Hand operatives were always cordial, there was no mistaking the Hand's authority. There was literally no mechanism for Exempt Citizens or anyone else to directly participate in the town's governance, as subsequent residents and business owners were simply subject to the Black Market organizational hierarchy.

But after a year or two of reservation, the vast majority of Exempt Citizens began to relish their amazing turn of fortune. Although most would swear they never would have "joined" the Black Market but for their desperate circumstances in Minnesota, their safety and prosperity were beyond anything they had previously experienced, or hoped to experience. That currency purchased their loyalty far more effectively than any threat or bribe.

Singer Established

With a solution to the culture clash in place, the Hand's focus, and the key to Singer's productivity and long-term viability, was to harness the energies of Nexus Styx, preferably via an Atlantean Stone Pyramid. Fortunately, the Hand counted among its ranks the True Atlantean Stone Master **Artemis**, a malcontent who claimed he joined the Hand after abandoning True Atlantean society (rumor has it he was exiled). Temple Artesia, under the auspices of the company that would soon become **Artesian Arms**, was constructed in under six weeks, and a burgeoning TW-powered infrastructure began to flourish around it. Shortly thereafter, the company completed a full-scale TW manufacturing plant, just across the street from the Stone Temple itself, and by spring of 89 P.A., Rembrandt was finally able to focus on designing, manufacturing, and marketing his creations.

The Birth of Artesian Arms

Artesian Arms' first product hit the market in the autumn of 91 P.A., to rave reviews. The weapons were designed to quickly incapacitate rather than engage in the long and dangerous process of killing a foe, making them ideal for many adventurous psychics and practitioners of magic. The company's first big hit was the AA-S1 Spinning Sword, an Elemental Fusion between fire and air known for its wicked, flaming blade and expelling fiery cyclones to engulf its targets at range.

After the Spinning Sword was released in 94 P.A., Singer and its weapons company began to snowball. Travelers up and down the St. Lawrence Seaway spoke of the idyllic town, safe and prospering, smack dab in the middle of a Faerie forest. In addition to buying up Artesian Arms products for resale elsewhere, merchants found Singer full of willing consumers for their wares. Nearby city states such as Queenston Harbor and New Lazlo brokered deals with the Hand to provide weapons to those cities' armed forces.

By 98 P.A., after follow-up products including the Daystar Multigun (coveted by psychics for its array of cheap, effective combat-oriented settings), Singer was a boom town with no bust in sight. Private enterprise, usually in the form of Black Marketeers throwing in with the Hand and opening their doors to offer a wide variety of wares and services, really began to take off. The big draws were access to Black Market lines of credit, usually by taking on the Hand as a 10% co-owner, and a safe, commercially viable area in which to do business. As the Black Marketeers, other Hand operatives, and independent investors moved in, the former refugees' farmsteads were a mere footnote, their owners no more than potential customers. The number of transients and would-be settlers grew at a rapid rate, and just two years later, the town had over 2,000 permanent residents, with another 100-250 transients at any given time.

As this wave of development crested in the fall of 100 P.A., and as more and more Black Market-owned businesses moved into Singer, distinct social classes began to emerge. The ruling class was represented by the Hand leadership, and included Rembrandt, his functionaries, the Fist, and any of the original investors in Singer, some of whom had taken up residence in town. The upper middle class consisted of Exempt Citizens, who by 100 P.A. numbered just over a hundred. The single largest class was a middle class made up of thriving business owners, mostly Black Marketeers, who flourished despite being subject to the Hand's Black Market financial policies. Finally, although many businesses flourished in Singer, more than a few were unable to repay their loans and found their property repossessed. Those who remained in town for one reason or another made up Singer's lowest class.

Even though the arrangement between the Hand and the Exempt Citizens had virtually become common knowledge, the majority of Hand business owners and residents were indifferent. As far as they were concerned, the former refugees had leveraged their squatters' rights into a good deal. Furthermore, few participated in markets other than agriculture, minimizing the competitive advantage inherent in their exempt status.

However, jealousy began to fester among some Black Marketeers, both successful and not, who believed allowing "Zemps" to operate independent farmsteads, regardless of their contributions to the current status quo, was irresponsible and bordered on insanity. Vandalism of Exempt Citizen property subsequently became more prevalent. By 100 P.A., increasing dissent among

Black Marketeers, the disenfranchised, and sheer weight of numbers made Rembrandt apprehensive that revolution could be brewing. Given the state of social unrest, Rembrandt understood that although what amounted to bribery had worked to some extent with the Exempt Citizens, simply buying off the majority of the businesses in the Hand's Market Town was not an option.

From Market Town to City State

Instead, and despite strong misgivings from the Fist, who favored the simplicity of strong-arm tactics, Rembrandt proposed deviating from standard Black Market protocols and creating the appearance of a representative government. Tantamount to a city state, he proposed dividing the town along neighborhood lines that had grown up along with the town in the last decade. Each neighborhood would elect an individual to represent that neighborhood's interests in the new government, which would, of course, have no actual authority over the Hand. He argued that such a construct would provide Singer's residents a forum for registering their complaints that did not involve violence. This conciliatory stance also would be the perfect opportunity to compensate for the ostensible empowerment of Singer's citizens with the implementation of social institutions such as a widely accessible and subtly invasive communications network, state-sponsored media, and a massive public works project. These overt "favors" would also go a long way toward ensuring pliability among the predominantly Black Marketeer population. Finally, it would also establish the necessary governmental framework to elevate Singer beyond a mere Market Town to become an actual city state, which could only help the Hand's reputation abroad and increase profits at home.

Although the Fist scoffed at Rembrandt's idealism, arguing (speciously) that becoming a city state was irrelevant to the bottom line, it reluctantly agreed to let him try to squelch the grumblings his way. The first step was to put a happy face on Hand leadership, so on July 4, 100 P.A., in an almost universally attended ceremony at the newly-completed Artesian Arena, the Fist appointed Orin and Tessa the Lord and Lady of Singer to preside over the Singer Town Council. As the keynote speaker, Rembrandt told the people of Singer that the Council was created to give Singer's population a forum to voice its disputes with each other and with the Hand, and that the Lord and Lady were to be the heads of what he touted as Singer's "new regime," and as a nod to pre-Rifts North American history, each subsequent July 4 would be celebrated as Regime Day. Revered as real-life heroes, and respected by Exempt Citizens and Black Marketeers alike for their role in the alliance with Faerie Folk, Rembrandt's announcement of their appointment was met with cheers.

Rembrandt proceeded to tell the crowd that the couple was to preside over monthly Town Council meetings consisting of representatives from each of Singer's five designated neighborhoods. Anyone wishing to be a neighborhood representative, or N-Rep, had to obtain at least 50 signatures in support of his or her candidacy and be approved by the Hand. An election would be held every two years on the Autumnal Equinox, and the candidate with the most votes would become the representative of that neighborhood for a two-year term. It would be the duty of the N-Rep to host Neighborhood Conclaves on a regular basis in order to resolve disputes between neighbors and, ostensibly, to give the neighbors a mouthpiece to Singer's leaders. The deci-

sion of the N-Rep could be appealed to the Lord and Lady at the Town Council. He concluded by noting that these town bylaws would be available in both tangible and electronic review, and was happy to announce that their adoption marked Singer's official transition from Market Town to independent city state.

Then, Orin and Tessa took the floor, to thunderous applause. They announced that the first act of the new regime would be to help make sure everyone in Singer received the benefits of the town's increasing wealth, and to do so, were hereby authorizing the Singer Improvement Project of 100 P.A. They declared the establishment of the Singer Media Corporation, a multimedia company charged with keeping the public informed about the government's decisions. They promised that the Nexus Styx power grid would be upgraded to function on par with the P.P.E. Channeling Network found in the Free State of Lazlo, and would include telephone and intranet services to access content online. Each house would be fitted with one or more monitors connected to the network on which to access intranet and Singer Media Corporation (SMC) content. They also announced the founding of the Singer Games, an annual event beginning each Summer Solstice and lasting two weeks, that pitted residents from each neighborhood against each other in games of skill and combat.

The crowd cheered wildly, but Orin raised his hands for silence as Rembrandt returned to the stage. He told those assembled that these amenities would not be free. Artesian Arms was willing to commit as much as possible, but it had commitments to its shareholders, and would need some help. He announced the imposition of a the Tiered Tribute System, which dictated that each Singer resident would pay monthly tribute in equal proportion to that person's real estate holdings. Orin and Tessa had previously advised the Exempt Citizens of this plan, who, for the most part, were aware of the resentment from some quarters and were more than willing to pay a relatively higher tribute to help offset that animosity and support Singer at the same time. The crowd's reaction ranged from ecstatic to indifferent; Singer's small land area meant lower tribute obligations for everyone but the folks living in Wellesley Park. Finally, he reminded everyone that the tribute would be waived for any Hand-backed enterprise, the implication being that the burden would fall squarely on the Exempt Citizens.

Thunderous applause ensued, and the town was aglow with revelry for the following week. Petitions were drafted and signed all around town, and election preparations began almost immediately. However, the true genius of Regime Day was not that it served to resolve disputes more efficiently, or even that it disproportionately taxed the elite class, but that it divided the citizens along lines other than Black Marketeer and Exempt Citizen, focusing their energies on civic happenings such as rivalries with adjoining neighborhoods. A layered electoral and judicial system, the Singer Improvement Project, a designated media watchdog, and events such as the Singer Games, would further divide and pacify the people.

Singer Improvement Project

Remarkably, the Hand followed through on the vast majority of its promises to one extent or another. At the outset of the Project, Rembrandt devised a simple development plan that would set aside land area for roads and parks, maximizing the relatively small amount of land area available for development under the terms of the Faerie Edict. The Hand built M.D.C. structures to house the militarized forces, emergency services, and govern-

mental affairs, and expanded Castle Singer's walls to become the Southern Wall, a massive fortified barrier spanning the southern edge of Singer's territory. It retooled the Nexus Styx power grid to function nearly on par with the P.P.E. Channeling Network found in the Free State of Lazlo, and would include telephone and online services. In every home, the Hand installed consoles connected to the grid, allowing information to travel to and from every home (and also allowing Rembrandt a window into virtually every building in town).

Hand practitioners of magic worked to banish troublesome entities inhabiting Castle Singer and elsewhere on the island, with good success. Private investment was also welcome, and loans for the improvement of Singer were readily available from the Hand, although borrowers were subject to the standard vig rates and other obligations. Black Marketeers and others from within the organization took the opportunity to gain a foothold in the fledgling community, either by investing in a local business, building a residence, or both.

Mass Transit

The crowning jewel of the Project was an industrial-scale mass transportation system that would not curtail traditional travel via car, horse, and hovertruck: a TW Iron Horse train network, complete with physical tracks and depots, mostly about 30 feet (9.1 m) above ground, its cars as comfortable on the rails as on ley line energy 1,000 feet (305 m) in the air. It features stations at strategic points along the route, providing stops for both commercial and industrial purposes throughout Singer. Each station is fitted with a variety of Techno-Wizard defenses, and Singer Security includes them all in its patrols. Patrons rarely have to wait longer than 15 minutes at any given stop before a train arrives, even in the wee hours.

Military

Other funds were earmarked for mercenaries to sometimes supplement, but more often replace, volunteers who had guarded Singer to date, in some cases since the day the Faerie Edict was ratified. In response, the Hand divided the military into three branches. The Interior Defense Force (IDF) was created to scout the Horror Forest and neutralize threats headed for Singer. Singer Security consisted exclusively of Hand operatives and drew its ranks from the network that had been collecting data on Exempt Citizens and other Singer residents for years. Singer Security was primarily responsible for tacitly surveilling Exempt Citizens, enforcing the payment of tribute, expelling from the city limits any business activity unsanctioned by the Hand, and rooting out the occasional rogue Faerie. The Hand also founded the River Watch to defend the community against threats from the St. Lawrence, again mostly replacing fatigued volunteers with well-paid mercenaries. In many instances, the influx of troops was a welcome reprieve, and more than 85% of the veterans took the opportunity to step down from their civic duties.

Enter Le Marche Noir

The Hand's initial read on their rival from Canada, that Le Marche Noir's isolationist policies would essentially remove them from the equation, was correct. But once Free Quebec seceded from the other Coalition States in 105 P.A., Canada's pre-

mier Black Market faction began to enjoy boosts of sales and expansion into new markets, including the Eastern Wilds of North America. Now able to shift focus away from the Prosek regime, it didn't take long for the organization to realize that Singer was the primary competition for market share, and the likely reason behind the slow but steady decline of revenue at the Wingham Market Town over the last few years. In other words, a rival who was simply too close for comfort.

In response, since early 106 P.A., Le Marche Noir has committed significant resources to oppose Singer. Among other things, it has successfully inserted sleeper agents in many government institutions, including each of the military branches, although it has yet to place an inside source anywhere near Rembrandt; purchased silent shares in a myriad of businesses throughout Singer, giving a wide range of insight into Singer's inner workings and how best to disrupt them; and subsidized Singer's street gangs as a more direct challenge to the Hand's authority. The faction's impact has been undeniable, and it has established a foothold as the "real" black market in Singer.

Above all else, Le Marche Noir focuses its energies on stealing. Infiltrating (or owning) shipping companies is a favorite scheme, allowing access and insight into Singer's vibrant import and export business. One of its favorite tactics is to bribe low-level Artesian Arms employees to give up information about products, security details, and shipping routes, allowing Le Marche Noir the least amount of resistance when it relieves product from its owners' possession. The organization bribes or has an ownership stake in any number of Singer's TW modification companies, providing either a front to sell or outlet to buy hijacked TW components, depending on the needs of the particular job. A successful heist is a win-win for Le Marche Noir; Singer's efficiency and reputation suffer while the organization profits.

Anti-Singer operations are headquartered at Le Marche Noir's Market Town near Lazlo, known as Wingham. **Rex Oldquist**, who oversees the project, a 7th level, Aberrant, Enforcer Black Marketeer and captain in the organization, was in charge of the Market Town's security prior to undertaking this new assignment about three years ago. He is also a degenerate gambler, and had been disappointed in the decrease in action Wingham seemed to suffer over the last couple of years. The idea of losing market share (and action) to a D-Bee haven such as Singer has stuck in Rex's craw, for although he has no qualms about dealing with whoever is necessary to get the job done, he is a human supremacist at heart. Although he tends to run things from Wingham, as his leadership style allows for freedom among his trusted (human) crew members, he has visited Singer on more than one occasion in order to get a feel for the enemy. So far, Rex's crew has established a foothold in Singer, and Le Marche Noir's presence is an increasing threat to consumers' faith in Singer and the Hand's bottom line.

Singer: Present Day

(Late Summer, 109 P.A.)

Today, on the surface, Singer is a diverse, well-defended and prosperous community. Its shops, recreation opportunities, and the well-established school of magic make Singer very appealing to most any D-Bee, practitioner of magic, or psychic looking to settle down or pass through. Most of Singer's residents believe they are lucky to live in such a safe and free-thinking place, and

consider the associated financial burdens simply the cost of doing business.

Entrepreneurs granted license to set up shop in Singer are also allowed to build a homestead if they choose, but are of course subject to the annual requirements under the Tiered Tribute System commensurate with their holdings. Even though there is little undeveloped land left in Singer, there is enough turnover in the business community that enterprises are regularly moving in and out of storefronts. The businesses most likely to remain long-term usually take on the Hand as a 10% "partner."

Those seeking employment at Singer, or simply to settle down, are required to meet with a Hand representative, usually Rembrandt, to obtain permission to build or remodel and negotiate a loan or tribute. In the early days, a license was granted to virtually any prospective business who agreed to the terms, as more residents meant more disposable income. At this point, very little of the portion of Wellesley Island available for settlement under the terms of the Faerie Edict remains undeveloped in some manner.

Singer's safety is renowned region-wide, as there has never been a major armed conflict with any foreign power or civil war in its history. To its residents, the members of the Interior Defense Force and other branches of the Singer military are heroes, and the primary reason why Singer is safe. The Southern Wall separates the settlement on the northern half of the peninsula from the edge of the Horror Forest on the southern, forcing visitors overland from the south to gain admittance through the only gate to the city. More than half of the town's buildings are Mega-Damage, and more than half of those also include TW Defenses. The military branches occupy various outposts throughout the city, from the bay to the Southern Wall.

Although Singer is very clearly a magic-friendly community, the Hand values anything that gets the job done (within the confines of the Faerie Edict), and has no qualms with using technology. Thus, purveyors of most any kind of good or service, magic or not, are generally welcome in Singer. However, the years show that enterprises dealing primarily in magic weapons, items, and services are more successful than their more traditional counterparts.

No Splugorth in Singer?

As Le Marche Noir has expanded its sphere of influence over the last half-decade, it has become intimately familiar with the Splugorth menace, and has sought to provide protection to fishing villages and wilderness towns from the threat. Strangely, to Le Marche Noir's knowledge, Singer had never suffered an attack at the hands of the Splugorth, and its leaders and citizens seem blissfully unconcerned of attacks in the future. Clearly, a deal has been struck, but exactly how Singer has apparently achieved protection from the Splugorth through nonviolent means remains a mystery. Of all Le Marche Noir's Singer-related schemes, getting to the bottom of why the Splugorth give Singer a wide berth might be the most lucrative.

"Guys, I think it's just over that ridge," Cade Willison whispered over his shoulder.

"Really? Hey, Bobby, how many times have we heard that one this fine evening?" Zak grumbled.

"I don't know, six?" Bobby's face was the picture of irritation. Zak, nearly stumbling over a partially-buried root, couldn't help but concur. This wasn't his first time on one of Cade's wild

goose chases, and he swore to resist his friend's impulsiveness next time.

"Shut up, guys," Cade replied. "Professor Thicketround's lecture today told us just where to find—"

"Cade, the Professor also told us this whole freakin' forest past the Thicketing was off limits to everyone in Singer but the Interior Defense Force. Instead, what are we doing?"

"About to become men, that's what. Just shut up and follow me."

Zak sighed. They were well into the wilds of the Horror Forest, more than a mile from their rooms at the Artesian Academy of Magic. Sneaking out was a time-honored tradition at the school, conveniently located on the edge of town, with nothing but rolling terrain and light forest between the face of the wall and the Thicketing. Besides, school had only just started, and the boys weren't quite ready for summer to end. But at this point, Zak was just ready to be done with this little excursion.

"It's not like we're just gonna come up on a bunch of 'em or something. They're pretty good at hiding, especially from human lugs like us," Bobby whispered.

"The Professor did say the full moon draws them out. It's a full moon tonight," Zak observed.

"Which is exactly why we're here!" Cade whispered. "Now, come on!"

The three of them, Cade in the lead, made their way cautiously from a muddy creek bed up the lightly wooded ridge. Though this was far from his first time beyond the Thicketing, being a teenage boy and all, Zak was still struck by the sheer majesty of the surrounding trees and wilderness here in the Horror Forest, so different from Singer's sculpted parks. After all, most of the wilds of Singer had become farmland by the time he'd turned ten.

They were almost to the ridge top when Cade held up his hand, stopping the others in their tracks. "Hear that?" he whispered, a slow grin spreading across his face. "They're singing!"

Not making a sound, their lives spent playing in these woods, the three boys crept to the top of the ridge. In the clearing before them, bathed in the full moon's light, not more than 300 feet away, scores of tiny Faerie Folk danced around and on top of a mound of packed dirt not more than a few feet off the ground and about that many feet wide. The mound was ringed with wildflowers and mushrooms, and gentle, up-tempo music cascaded around the dancers, from voices and instruments both seen and unseen.

Zak was floored. "I... I see Greenwood Faeries, Silverbell Fae—"

"Are those Night Elves?"

"Wow, a Bogie!"

"We're going to have quite the story for the kids tomorrow!"

Wide eyed, the boys stared, transfixed at the scene before them. Even Cade was still, lessons of Faerie Magic lore reminding even him the clearing was best left alone.

But without warning, the music stopped. Every dancer ceased. For a brief moment, an eerie stillness filled the air. Zak thought he could see tiny faces contort in fear.

A high-pitched whine broke the silence, and the Faerie Mound exploded into a rapidly expanding cloud of smoke. Faeries engulfed in the smoke simply keeled over. Screams and the chanting of arcane words filled the air.

"Ummm, guys, let's get the hell out of here!" Bobby's harsh whisper snapped Zak out of his shock. But Cade held his finger to his lips.

"Do you see that?" From the opposite edge of the clearing, the ominous hiss of a hovering Splugorth Slave Barge heralded the arrival of a hideous, tentacled Slaver and its cadre of Warrior Women. The Women hopped down, brandishing what seemed to the boys to be some kind of glowing satchel, and dropped felled Faeries within as if they were picking flowers.

Cade licked his lips. "OK, I'd say it's our time to—"

"Cade, wait." Zak's heart leapt with unexpected joy. "Is that an Interior Defense Force squad out there?!" He felt terrible for the Faeries, but with Singer's legendary military branch to the rescue, everything would be fine.

"Oh wow! We're really gonna see some fireworks now," Bobby gushed. Sure enough, a squad of five heavily armed humanoids, clad in standard-issue IDF camouflaged environmental armor, appeared at edge of the clearing.

A cheer stuck in Zak's throat, and a chill came over him. Why weren't their weapons in their hands?

"Maybe we should tell 'em we're here!" Cade said, beginning to rise.

Zak grabbed his arm. "Stay down! Let's think about this. Why..." His questions went unspoken. Why weren't the troops saving the Faeries? Why weren't they even pointing their guns at the bad guys? A curious sense of dread, more intense in its way than the horror of witnessing the ruthless attack, kept Zak's gaze transfixed on the edge of the clearing where the IDF soldiers had appeared.

"...aren't they doing anything?" Cade finally finished Zak's sentence. Sure enough, as the boys remained behind the top of the ridge, they saw the humanoids wearing IDF gear slip away from the clearing. The high-pitched whine of Faeries screaming pierced the air. The Warrior Women closed in.

The boys looked at each other, their faces mirrors of each others' fear and horror. Wordlessly, they made their way as quickly and quietly as possible down the ridge and back to Singer. Would they ever think of home the same way again?

Most curious to Le Marche Noir and others is how Singer thrives in the Eastern Wilds, an area well-known to be routinely patrolled by the Splugorth. The party line from the Hand is that Singer is just too small to warrant any attention from the Splugorth, but that is rapidly losing credibility as Singer is approaching regional power status. Speculation runs rampant that Singer has struck a treaty with the Shemarrian Nation, and believe entire war parties of Shemarrians comb the Horror Forest, protecting Singer from Splugorth attack. Others theorize that the Splugorth are not really that powerful anyway, and wouldn't have any interest in taking over a mostly human town. A few suspect Rembrandt's Stone Master underling is really a spy from Atlantis. Most Singer residents don't have a good answer, and are just thankful that their little community has apparently escaped Splugorth attention.

In reality, certain Slavers have been aware of Singer since its infancy. However, the Splugorth had little reason to involve themselves at first, as the Faeries displaced from the Wellesley Island peninsula as a result of the Faerie Edict tended to migrate east and into Splugorth traps. Through 98 P.A., Ava and other perimeter defenders averaged about four Slaver encounters per year, and never more than a pair of barges at any given time.

Shortly thereafter, Splugorth contacts began to spike sharply. In the spring of 100 P.A., with Splugorth encounters at an all-time high, a concerned Artemis advised Rembrandt to secure the

temple and await a communication from Atlantis. The pair proceeded to the temple's bowels to find Narcophagus, the resident Shifter, babbling about "him."

Once they arrived in the nexus chamber, the voice of Splynncryth himself echoed through their minds. The voice said he was impressed with Singer, but that it had flourished in Splugorth territory. His position was simple: as Black Marketeers first and foremost, they should be comfortable with the concept of tribute. Here, that tribute would be to ignore or assist Splugorth incursions on the island and allow the slavers to harvest the Faerie population, as it had in the decades prior to the construction of Singer. In exchange, Singer would be spared. If his offer was rejected, Splynncryth promised to send whatever force was necessary to obliterate the city state. He indicated he would return in 48 hours for Singer's response.

Rembrandt had no love for the Faerie Folk and no qualms about making whatever deal would allow him to keep making progress, but he suspected (rightly) that Ava, Orin, Tessa and Carven would be much more inclined to combat the Splugorth than to make a literal deal with the devil. Rembrandt had no doubt that the inevitable collateral damage Singer would suffer as a result of such a conflict would destroy everything he had built over the last decade. To him, there was no choice. He decided to quietly accept Splynncryth's terms.

Rembrandt was well aware that if word got out about the agreement with Atlantis, it would be political, and very likely literal, suicide. The first step would be to relieve any good-hearted volunteers from their duties protecting Singer's borders in the Horror Forest. To make that transition politically viable, he hatched the plan for the massive public works initiative that became the Singer Improvement Project, which would not only benefit the community, but also allow him to create a state-sponsored military to replace the volunteers currently engaging the Splugorth on the island. Naturally, the vast majority of the new soldiers would be mercenaries loyal to the Hand's money, and ultimately, Rembrandt himself.

Thus, the Singer Improvement Project actually weakened the Faerie support system while appearing to the public that the Hand was taking greater steps to ensure Singer's safety, paving the way for the Splugorth to discreetly harvest their tribute.

Neighborhoods

When Rembrandt deemed it necessary to create political districts to assist in the appearance of a representative government, he wisely divided the city roughly based on the neighborhoods that had developed along relatively natural boundaries over Singer's early years. The transition was particularly smooth because in most cases, captains, advisors, and other high-ranking Hand operatives tended to have de facto control over the neighborhoods anyway. These folks usually either became Neighborhood Representatives or closely allied with the N-Rep.

Dockside includes Singer's western coastline, and its inland streets are notorious for conflict with Singer Security. It features the One Night Stand Flophouse and Campground, a charitable (some would say cut-rate) establishment that charges just a few credits a night to those looking to pitch a tent on the grounds and a few more to stay in one of the dorm-style rooms. Many of the "Docksideers" are barely surviving, and many are on the run from Singer Security, but Dockside also includes Singer's thriving harbor. Prostitution, gambling, and drug dealing are all legal.

In contrast, **Artesian Arms Industrial Park** is a bustling industrial area and sees the least amount of conflict. Singer Security only patrols it in cursory fashion. Much of the population lives at the Artesian Arms complex, which includes full-service living, dining, and recreation quarters for its employees.

Gametown is the rough-and-tumble entertainment district featuring Rogue's Mall and Carnival, and Artesian Arena. While the action is rowdy at night, the neighborhood is relatively safe during the day. It features apartment-style living quarters and more than a few bars, restaurants, and shops. Prostitution, gambling, and drug dealing are all legal.

The **Eel Bay Market District** is the place for much of Singer's commercial activity, and is home to the two most vibrant shopping districts in the city: Downtown and the Open-Air Market. Most active during the day, Singer Security patrols are most concerned with shoplifting, mediating disputes between buyer and seller, and investigating non-sanctioned commerce. Many of the shop owners live in apartments above their stores.

Wellesley Park consists of rolling hills and flourishing farmsteads. It is larger in land area than the other four districts combined, and its population is the lowest. Most Exempt Citizens call this neighborhood home. It is an eclectic mix of academic and agriculture, but most everyone values education above everything else.

Singer Loans and Lines of Credit

For the most part, an essentially free market thrives in Singer. The vast majority of businesses, especially in the fields of entertainment, agriculture, and magic, have reaped the benefits of ready access to Immaterial Hand-backed lines of credit and a steady stream of growth and tourism fueled by the St. Lawrence. All the loans listed in **Rifts® Black Market** on page 75 are available, and certain enterprises have access to Alternative Black Market Loans. Rembrandt himself secretly authorizes lines of credit with more lenient repayment terms to businesses he considers particularly important to the design and manufacture of TW weapons, or he considers his pet projects, such as Wayback Mining. He finances any shortfall out of his own pocket, and is content to do so for the foreseeable future to ensure progress in his field.

Whispers of these inequities are beginning to reach Singer's streets, and Rembrandt realizes that the variance in these arrangements is likely to be a source of unrest. To combat this, all loan agreements with the Hand are confidential by law, and anyone suspected of revealing any such terms results in a swift and stern visit from Singer Security. Even so, rumors about incentives given to some enterprises and not others have been pervasive throughout Singer's history.

Unsurprisingly, there is turnover, as not every business and resident can keep vig or tribute flowing to the Hand. Singer's ever-increasing population and the Hand's ostensible no-tolerance policy for debtors has resulted in a growing lower class of poor and disenfranchised. This includes failed business owners and their offspring, gamblers who have crapped out, and refugees or stowaways who make their way to Singer by accident or desperation, and choose to remain.

While the smart money would seem to be on anyone in debt to the Hand leaving Singer immediately, economic realities often prevent an exodus. Instead, the poor have gravitated toward the Dockside neighborhood along the island's northern, rocky shores, finding refuge in tent communities, prefabricated home

parks, and flophouses. Singer Security regularly patrols the area, looking for debtors to remove from the city.

Despite the Hand's investments in the community in the areas of law enforcement, infrastructure, and emergency services, there are no apparent allowances made for those who could not pay their tribute, debts, or vig. The fastest way get crossways with the authorities in Singer is by failing to pay a debt owed to the Hand. Failing to pay vig results in a visit from a Singer Security squad at the delinquent's home or business, who administers a grim reminder that failing to get caught up in 30 days would mean a forfeiture of the person's real estate, assets and fixtures within Singer. Although Singer Security is famous for its intimidation tactics, it rarely roughs anyone up unless that individual has the audacity to still be there when they return to confiscate the property a month later. Some of their biggest battles have involved debtors who refused to leave the premises. If the individual is smart and is long gone, Singer's armed forces may or may not attempt to track down the debtor depending on how much value he or she left behind.

Gang Activity

Although the favorable economic circumstances allow many in Singer to thrive, the nature of the debtors' culture prevalent in any community with Market Town roots dictated that others would fail. It is the growing underclass that may well pose the greatest threat to Singer's prosperity. Some of these disenfranchised residents have sufficient incentive to act against the authority. One overt way to do so is join one of the many small pockets of dissent running rampant in Singer. A few are organized enough be considered gangs, and three of them are outlined here.

The Backhand

One of Rex Oldquist's first missions as head of Le Marche Noir's anti-Singer operations was to take advantage of what he considered a virtual department store less than 100 miles south from his headquarters in Wingham. As a closet human supremacist, he felt disrespected that a cadre of practitioners of magic were flourishing too close to Le Marche Noir territory, and felt entitled to redistribute some of Singer's wealth.

He took his time, building his crew from scratch. A handful of Le Marche Noir operatives eventually made contact with a few disgruntled Hand Black Marketeers, and an alliance against authority was formed. The gang focuses on subtle conspiracies designed to heist inventory, usually wholesale deliveries. These schemes are relatively simple to execute because there are typically several individuals, from the item's arrival to its delivery at the contracting establishment, who come into contact with the shipment. The Backhand only has to get to one or two of those people to execute the theft and for everyone to have plausible deniability. Furthermore, the presence of another one of the five major factions to provide protection bolsters the confidence of Black Marketeers who would otherwise have too much to risk in acting against the authority.

Membership, and value of the scores, is increasing, and Rex is happy. Each member is carefully vetted, but he knows it is just a matter of time before the scheme is exposed. He hardly cares, rarely leaving his Wingham headquarters. Until then, the gang he has gleefully labeled the Backhand will continue to be a thorn in Rembrandt's side.



Membership: Between 25 and 30, and growing steadily if not quickly.

Racial Breakdown: 60% human, 40% D-Bee, reflecting Rex's racist tendencies.

Common Gang Member Alignments: Anarchist, Miscreant, and Aberrant.

Colors: None. The gang members are essentially Hand double agents disinterested in calling attention to themselves.

Weapons: Could be anything depending on the individual member's preference and personal inventory, but often include light M.D. weapons that are easily concealable.

Body Armor: Depends on each member's preference and personal inventory.

Bionics and Cybernetics: About 15% of the gang has 1D4 cybernetic implants.

Gang Leaders: Although Rex is the Boss, the Backhand's leader on site is Pat'ryn Niblis, 9th level Phlebus Merchant Black Marketeer, longtime Singer resident, and owner of *Pat's Bodega*, a popular Docksider restaurant and grocery store. Originally a con artist from Old Bones, Pat used his winning personality and Le Marche Noir-backed funds to get in early on Singer's boom in the early part of the decade. His establishment is a hub of activity, and Pat has always been in the know. He has parlayed that knowledge into his role as Docksider's N-Rep, winning his election on sheer name recognition in 108 P.A. The role has given him even more influence in Singer, and in turn, gives his parent organization a key conduit into Hand operations.

Gang & Criminal Activity: Theft, usually of goods at the point of ingress and egress from Singer. For example, an establishment doesn't receive a shipment of wholesale goods it ordered, or saleable goods are hijacked before getting to the establishment's point of sale via export. Artesian Arms, which both buys wholesale goods and sells retail product, suffers more than any other establishment from Backhand activity.

Notes: Currently, the authority has yet to identify any of Backhand's membership, and the gang has a good little scam going. Rembrandt is just now starting to grasp the Backhand's impact on Artesian Arms' bottom line. If he discovers the identities of any actors, he will make a public spectacle of their execution. Although he is ordinarily above such drama, he would feel compelled to emphasize that such traitorous conduct is severely discouraged.

Regulators

In Singer, many of the underclass have united to form one of the major gangs in Singer. They call themselves **Regulators**, in honor of the pre-Rifts populist movement along the East Coast that some say was a precursor to the sentiments that ignited the American Revolutionary War. Its members style themselves as swashbuckling resistance fighters battling an oppressive government, and most blame the Hand for their economic and social plight. As the natural attrition in the free market increases, the number of failed business owners and disenfranchised residents grows, rapidly increasing the gang's ranks. It has also recently formed a relationship with rival Black Market faction Le Marche Noir to assist in the resistance efforts.

Membership: Fewer than 100, but growing fast.

Racial Breakdown: Same as Singer proper; membership in the gang is based on class status, not race.

Common Gang Member Alignments: Anarchist, Unprincipled, and Aberrant.

Colors: Inmate garb, such as a jumpsuit, usually dark grey, blue or black. The motif represents how the gang believes economic circumstances have trapped them in Singer. The gang insignia is a "no smoking" sign, except the scales of justice replace a cigarette.

Weapons: Usually armed with at least two TW weapons if a mage or psychic. Otherwise, could be anything, but often include light M.D. pistols and explosive devices (perfect for sabotage).

Body Armor: Light M.D. jumpsuits (16 M.D.) are usually worn underneath Plastic Man or Crusader-type environmental suits.

Bionics and Cybernetics: About 10% of the gang has 1D4 cybernetic implants.

Gang Leaders: The 9th level Changeling Rift Runner formerly known as Landry Mardon was once a trusted member of the Fist's inner circle, but his gambling nature left him short on vig one too many times, and he was expelled despite his years of otherwise loyal service. Landry had been especially adept at negotiating with the Chicago Network and the other major Black Market Factions, but his successes in that arena did not prevent his expulsion from the organization in 106 P.A. when he hit a run of bad luck betting on Juicer Football and couldn't pay his losses. Although he begged for leniency in a personal audience with the Fist, he was told in no uncertain terms he had to have the money in 48 hours or else. So rather than face the Hand Enforcers he knew were on their way, he dropped out of sight.

In 108 P.A., he moved to Singer under the name of **Marco Landries**. Though he did not particularly fear being outed, as he and Rembrandt had never crossed paths, he thought it wise to remain as inconspicuous as possible. He took up residence in the One Night Stand Flophouse, and began to mingle with Docksiders. He quickly concluded that there was enough dissatisfaction with the Hand that he could potentially hone that sentiment into a weapon against his former employer. His charisma, charm, and attitude make him the gang's natural leader. He has reinvented himself as a self-styled freedom fighter, utilizing his stealthy magic abilities to cloak attacks on Hand interests, his knowledge of Hand protocols to plan such attacks, and his remarkable audacity and confidence to pull them off. Although he claims his hatred of the Hand lies in their brutal economic policies, the truth is that he finds leading the Regulators to be the best way to get back at the organization he once considered family.

He has recently established contact with members of the Backhand, who in turn put him in touch with their "silent partner." At this point, Le Marche Noir is not offering the gang its protection, but happily sells weapons and explosives at cost as another facet of its anti-Singer operations.

Gang & Criminal Activity: Their activities include sniping the River Watch when their patrols enter the Wharf, attacking Hand establishments and deliveries, and receiving and distributing unsanctioned shipments of aid and weapons to Singer's poor. The Regulators run the true "black market" in Singer.

Notes: Currently, Rembrandt is unaware that the leader of the hated Regulators is a former Hand operative. If the Hand learns about Landry's new role and identity, the Fist is likely to take whatever steps are necessary to root out the Regulators, regardless of the consequences for Singer's population and infrastructure.

Faerie League

Another faction of dissent in Singer is the Faerie League. Less a gang and more a sociopolitical movement, this organization believes the government is not doing enough to protect the rights of Faerie Folk. Its turf is on the opposite side of the peninsula from the wharf, in the rural areas to the northeast, and the organization has existed for only the last two years. Many of its members are Exempt Citizens, and though they owe their lives and circumstances to the alliance between Orin, Tessa, and the Hand, the increasing plight of the Faeries has stirred unrest among Singer's wealthy.

Membership: 118

Racial Breakdown: 70% human, 30% other, mostly humanoid D-Bees who live and work on the farms on the northern half of the peninsula.

Common Gang Member Alignments: Principled, Scrupulous, and Unprincipled.

Colors: None. The League hides in plain sight. When on a mission, members are sure to wear helmets or other headgear that obscures their faces. The gang insignia is an image of the Common Faerie.

Weapons: Usually armed with at least two TW weapons if a mage or psychic. Otherwise, could be anything, but often include crossbows, bows and arrows, and explosive devices (perfect for sabotage).

Body Armor: Literally anything, depending on what the individual member happens to own.

Bionics and Cybernetics: Less than 2%.

Gang Leaders: **Mathis** and **Suzanne Kellog** (see Circle K Ranch, Notable Place, below), were, and ostensibly still are, longtime friends of Orin and Tessa, and two of Singer's most well-known Exempt Citizens. Despite having prospered greatly since participating in the founding of Singer itself, over the years their loyalty has shifted from the Black Market organization that enabled their success to the Faerie Folk. Extensively versed in Faerie Lore, they were well aware that Faerie life in the Eastern Wilds had been difficult ever since the advent the Splugorth and their slave barges generations earlier. They have taken great pride in building Singer to be something of a Faerie sanctuary, in the spirit of the Faerie Edict. In that same vein, the local Faerie population cooperated with their human and D-Bee friends in a remarkably amiable and helpful fashion. To Mathis and Suzanne, the Faeries were at least as responsible for Singer's prosperity as the Hand.

Things have been different over the last few years. The Faerie Folk do not sing like they used to. There are fewer of them around town. Faerie offerings go untouched, even to the point of spoiling. Even the Kellogs' cadre of house Faeries has been reduced to a single Brownie, most leaving because it just didn't "feel right" to stay.

The Kellogs petitioned the Town Council for an explanation. Orin and Tessa agreed that the issue was of paramount importance, and ordered an investigation. As far as anyone knows, the results of the investigation are still pending, and Orin and Tessa always seem to change the subject when Mathis or Suzanne ask about it in casual conversation.

The Council's failure to adequately address the issue caused the Kellogs to begin meeting with other concerned Exempt Citizens and others. What started as a series of meetings over lunch has become an actual social movement primarily committed to figuring out what's happening to their Faerie friends.

Gang & Criminal Activity: Frustrated by the inability of the Town Council to effectively resolve the Faeries' discontent, the Faerie League is taking matters into its own hands. In small squads, its members venture into the Horror Forest, beyond the Thickening, in hopes of witnessing the alleged atrocities, or at least ascertaining the veracity of the IDF's tales of valorous conflict with Slavers and inevitable Faerie casualties. They are also known to sabotage commercial vessels and harass merchants from cities such as Queenstown and the Pirate Kingdom of Montreal that do not explicitly outlaw Splugorth. One of the more subtly subversive acts attributed to the organization is the publication of the *Representative*, a pamphlet of irregular distribu-

tion in Singer advocating for a more inclusive political process where candidates do not have to be approved by the Hand. In the form of missives attributed to obvious pseudonyms, it outlines the weaknesses of the Hand's regime and the strengths of a free political process with multiple political parties. These pamphlets have become more prevalent within the last six months, and some of the arguments have less to do with reform and more to do with revolution. If this continues, Rembrandt is likely to step up attempts to flush out and destroy the League.

Notes: Although the overall impact on commerce is minor, Rembrandt is becoming more concerned with the League's ability to dissuade commerce. He has his suspicions about the ring-leaders, but is worried about the political implications of using force against Exempt Citizens. For now, he has ordered Singer Security to simply surveil any suspected Faerie League members. Of course, they are authorized to respond with deadly force if any observed League activity threatens Hand interests.

Law Enforcement

Singer has about 350 active-duty troops total among the three branches of the military: the Interior Defense Force, Singer Security, and the River Watch. Technically, all the forces are mercenary, as the Hand pays each soldier, but about 20% are Singer natives, and almost 75% are Hand operatives who have lived in Singer for years. The combination of steady income and local pride make for effective fighting units. Military service in Singer is quickly becoming a desirable gig among Hand operatives and throughout the mercenary community in general.

Singer Security

This force is essentially a permanent Primary Location Security. All of the 144 soldiers in this division are Immaterial Hand agents, an even mix of Enforcers, muscle-oriented City Rats, and savvy Black Marketeers. These agents are Singer citizens, and are the Hand's first line of defense. Their duties include law enforcement, investigation, and operating the city's checkpoints. Although their alignments range from Anarchist to Diabolic, Singer Security operating procedures are, for the most part, tightly regimented, and result in violence only when necessary. The exceptions are if they are combating known gang members, operators of businesses unsanctioned by the Hand, or a homeowner or business owner who has not freely surrendered their property in foreclosure.

The standard issue for Singer Security is Plastic Man style armor (35-40 M.D.C.) with built-in radio, an AA-101 Waylaser, and an AA-600 Befuddlemace. The result is a uniform appearance designed to instantly convey authority. A pulse or heavy TW rifle, usually not of Artesian Arms make, is often kept in the patrol vehicle, which is often a hovercycle or other small, fast mode of transportation. Average level of experience: 10% first level, 15% second, 25% third, 30% fourth, and the rest are 1D4+4 level.

Interior Defense Force

Many of the 160 soldiers Rembrandt hired when he reorganized the city's defenses and established the IDF were from small, independent mercenary groups made up mostly of ex-military mercenaries, lured by the promise of steady pay and an opportunity to settle down in a secure city state. Consisting of mostly Wilderness

Scouts and Headhunters, the soldiers patrol the surrounding woodlands, monitoring invaders, and alerting a larger force if the city itself is threatened. The IDF is also responsible for patrolling the wall that separates Singer's southern flank from the Horror Forest.

From its inception, Singer's citizens have placed IDF members on a pedestal above the other military branches. The IDF is heralded for keeping the surrounding region safe for Singer and the Faerie population. In fact, the IDF's mission statement includes the text of the Faerie Edict itself. Even late in the summer of 109 P.A., with Faeries leaving the city in record numbers and rumors of Splugorth and Shemarrian incursion flying, the citizens still perceive the IDF as the elite military branch because they have been so safe for so long.

"What, you're just going to let them go?! They just saw everything!" Ashton Strythorn was livid.

"At least the Splugorth did not see them; that would have truly put us in an awkward position," Ashlyn Strythorn noted, turning a narrowed eye on her younger brother. "And besides, what would you have me do, assassinate the progeny of Exempt Citizens?" She turned her horse away from the ridge top where the two of them had last seen the boys. "Brother, you should not doubt me so. There will be no record of any IDF patrol in this region; there was none scheduled, and as far as anyone knows, none ever occurred."

"Yeah, and this is war, and sometimes there are casualties, and blah, blah, blah. Some day, that line isn't going to work anymore, and the folks in Signer are going to start to wonder why their house Faeries have left, why the crops are suffering like never before." Ashton glared at his sister. "Singer has existed because the Faeries allow it. These kinds of disruptions to their environment will have consequences."

"That may have been true years ago, brother, but now the tables are turned." Ashlyn turned away, both sickened and impressed with how efficiently the Splugorth trapped their prey. "The Faeries exist because Rembrandt allows it. Were it not for his protection, the Splugorth would have overrun the peninsula long ago."

He eyed her skeptically. "You still have not explained why you let witnesses to what could be construed as treason get away! So they die on their little curfew-break. That's not believable?"

"I will not condone the murder of children, Ashton, and that is the end of it." She glared at him, steely-eyed. He met her gaze, but said nothing. "They are children, they are in shock, no one will believe them. Now, let us be gone." Calling the rest of her squad telepathically, the five IDF agents formed up their horses and cantered from the clearing.

While the IDF remains a respected institution in town, in reality it is a means to Rembrandt's most sinister end. He carefully screened all applicants for the high-paying mercenary job, and selected about half to become his rogue agents known as Rembrandt's Hunters. In addition to the standard employment contract, the Hunters agree to stalk Faeries and other creatures of magic in the Horror Forest in exchange for additional under-the-table pay. While most of the mercs he chose have no qualms about the deal, and carry out their work with cold efficiency, the most important Hunters can truly act the part of traditional heroes, effortlessly mingling with uncompromised IDF agents.

Hunter activity began almost a decade ago. While the loyal agents are on the lookout to protect Faeries from Splugorth incursions, the rogue agents have two distinct modes of attack.

First, when an IDF squad happens to consist only of Hunters, that squad traps Faeries like a woodsman traps a rabbit, leaving the victims helpless until Slavers arrive for the bounty. While certain Faerie elements are beginning to get wise to these tactics, the IDF's ability to effectively isolate each squad has so far allowed rogue agents to proceed with impunity.

The other mode of attack is more along the lines of psychological warfare, and involves a mixed squad of agents. A Hunter, tipped off by Rembrandt or because of his or her own experience and connections, might intentionally lead the squad into a Splugorth encounter, while keeping the Ranger members of the squad in the dark. The Slaver will attack or otherwise make itself known to the squad. A firefight ensues, the Splugorth are driven back, and the rogue agents are heroes. So far, this two-pronged approach has kept the loyal agents unaware and the Splugorth satisfied, but for how much longer?

The leader of the IDF is **Infernax**, a 7th level Phoenixi (*Rifts® Africa*, page 60, I.Q. 17, M.E. 20, M.A. 22, Aberrant), one of Rembrandt's companions on a foray into Africa decades ago. Rembrandt selected him because of his proven loyalty, commanding presence, and inscrutable leadership style. A smooth talker, excellent listener, and master politician, Infernax loves the duplicitous nature of the IDF, and is revered by Rangers and Hunters alike. In fact, his personality is a big reason why the illusion of the IDF is such a success, as he effortlessly commands the loyalty of both Rangers and Hunters alike. Infernax's most trusted Hunters include 6th level former CS Military Specialist and Minor Psionic, **Ashlyn Strythorn**, and to a lesser extent, her 4th level Fallen Cyber-Knight brother, **Ashton**.

The standard issue for Singer Security is camo-colored Gladiator style armor (50-60 M.D.C.) with built-in radio, a handgun, rifle or crossbow/bow with M.D. explosive (*Rifts® Sourcebook One*, page 58) and magic arrows (*Coalition Wars® One: Sedition*, page 63) and wilderness gear of choice. Other weapons typically include an AA-811 Dragonfire Rifle or other long-range TW or pulse rifle. Like Singer Security, each soldier's outward appearance is remarkably uniform, but designed more to convey solidarity than authority. Average level of experience: 5% first level, 15% second, 25% third, 35% fourth, and the rest are level 1D6+4.

River Watch

The River Watch, with 64 troops, is the smallest arm of the Singer military, and is responsible for ensuring the safety of Eel Bay and Singer's harbor. Its troops deploy in eight-hour shifts, ensuring a military presence in Eel Bay at all times. The Watch is also responsible for checking any disembarking visitor for weapons and forcing owners of offending items to return them to their vessels. Refusal results in harsh words, a potential ban, and possibly a firefight, with Singer Security available for backup.

Many Watch troops are members of the St. Lawrence Piranhas, a mercenary company which used to make as much money looting as it did on its contracts. But as with the IDF, a secure home base and steady paychecks have quelled most of the group's appetite for freelance work. The Piranhas still maintain a hideout on an island off the coast of Eel Bay.

The Watch consists mostly of Pirate, Privateer, and Black Marketeer O.C.C.s. Vessels and gear are much less uniform than Singer Security's or the IDF's, and this branch of the military is allowed to be the most freewheeling because of its relatively few

encounters with Singer's actual citizens in the line of duty. Thus, most of the vessels were in service during the Piranhas' piracy days, and range from TW-reconfigured galleons to cigarette-style speedboats. Average level of experience: 15% first level, 20% second, 25% third, 25% fourth, and the rest are level 1D4+3.

Foreign Relations

Singer's sudden regional footprint has attracted the notice of all the nearby regional powers. Like most Market Towns, Singer is exceedingly receptive to trade and visitors. Visitors come to Singer for TW weapons and gear, recreation, and to blow off some steam. The Hand loves to see transients, and their money, spend a few days in Singer.

The following is a print ad published by the Singer Media Corporation that has begun regularly appearing in Warhawk Journal and other periodicals published in the eastern half of North America. This is the sort of propaganda responsible for the Dwarves formerly of Kingsdale and others to flock to Singer over the last half-decade.

Singer, New York: A Safe Haven for YOU!

In the spirit of Kingsdale, MercTown, and other free North American city states, Singer welcomes you to a place where you are safe to be yourself. No Splugorth, no Coalition States, no gang violence. A booming community built on the ruins of virgin parkland, founded on the science of Techno-Wizardry, where magic devices beyond your wildest dreams await. The Techno-Wizards at Artesian Arms and other fine establishments never dabble in Bio-Wizardry, so you can be sure the products you buy here are ones you can feel good about. Just be yourself, and visit Singer, a Safe Haven for YOU!

People of the Eastern Wilds

The inhabitants of the Eastern Wilds are either simple farmers, trappers, hunters and settlers, or bold adventurers, often of nomadic, tribal descent. Although Singer has become something of a regional commercial hub, the surrounding Horror Forest is often too daunting for all but the lost or foolish to reach overland. In any event, the Interior Defense Force is usually well-aware of any visitors long before they sight the Southern Wall. On the other hand, it is common knowledge that the best way to get from the Eastern Wilds to Singer is to make for the St. Lawrence and hire a boat.

The Iroquois League and the Longhouse Preserve (Albany, NY)

Arguably the closest regional power, the five tribes have sent envoys and trade caravans to Singer over the last 15 years, and are on favorable terms with Rembrandt, who the Preserve considers the de facto ruler of Singer. The Preserve is impressed with Rembrandt's adherence to the Faerie Edict, respect for the Faerie Folk, and refusal (so far, at least) to attempt to build beyond the Thicketing. However, recent reports about increased Splugorth activity and the declining Faerie population have the Preserve worried. It has sent covert operatives posing as farmhands to try to gather more information about Singer and its policies. See the description of the *Circle K Ranch* next issue for more details.

The Pirate Kingdom of Montreal

Another nearby neighbor, Singer residents tend to view it as a disorganized slum, never able to unify for the greater good. However, traders, merchants and other travelers from the Pirate Kingdom can often be found passing through Singer. Most have learned to keep their head on a swivel, as Singer's gangs are known to attack Pirate Kingdom vessels without apparent provocation.

Coalition States

At this time, Singer is not even on the CS's radar, as concerns with Lazlo, Xiticix, and the Tolkeen Resistance are higher priorities than an isolated smugglers' depot.

Free Quebec

The human supremacist and technology-obsessed leaders of Free Quebec have little interest in a magic-centric city state beyond their borders.

Le Marche Noir & the Five Factions

On the other hand, the Immaterial Hand's presence on the border of the Le Marche Noir's domain has become an increasing cause for concern for that organization, as outlined elsewhere. While the Free Quebec underworld, along with the Chicago Network and Bandito Arms, takes advantage of the shipping and commercial opportunities the Hand has extended its counterparts, it alone has taken subversive action against the Hand's holdings in Singer. Le Marche Noir would mobilize its forces and seize Singer if it had the opportunity, but so far the city state has enjoyed too much prosperity and stability to usurp. Besides, Le Marche Noir operatives like to joke that Singer is almost like having a local department store for thieves. For the time being, Le Marche Noir is relatively content with the status quo as long as Singer never tries to expand north across the St. Lawrence and into Canada.

The Federation of Magic

The Federation, and Stormspire in particular, sees Artesian Arms as a threat to market share. Even so, perhaps because Rembrandt is a Stormspire native, K'zaa and Rembrandt have forged a respectful relationship over the years. Singer welcomes any and all citizens of the Federation of Magic, provided they obey the laws of the land once they arrive. The city states also have favorable trade relations, and Stormspire weapons are the second most common behind Artesian Arms' in Singer.

Shemarrian Nation

It has been only a couple of weeks since the Shemarrian Declaration of Sovereignty (**Shemarrian Nation™**, page 7). Accounts of and reactions to the video have dominated local gossip as questions about whether Singer has anything to fear given that it is a kingdom, albeit a small one, and is situated within the northern boundary of the Shemarrian Nation. However, with no reports of any pending Shemarrian incursion, the consensus is becoming that Singer is too small and has "coexisted" in the Shemarrian Nation for long enough to avoid being perceived as a threat.

The fascination with the Shemarrians can partly be attributed to the fact that so few of Singer's residents, including the IDF, have

ever interacted with them, despite rumors and anecdotes dating back nearly twenty years. As far as anyone knows, no Shemarrian has ever set foot in Singer. Were that to happen, there is no doubt Exempt Citizens and others who respect the Edict would treat them with the same reverence they show Faerie Folk. However, and unbeknownst even among the higher-ups in Singer, the Longhouse Preserve acts as a buffer between the Shemarrians and the city state. For details on the Iroquois League's sentiments toward the Shemarrians, check out **Shemarrian Nation™**, pages 85 and 86.

Lazlo and New Lazlo

These havens of enlightenment are cautiously optimistic about Singer, despite its Black Market origins. The town has been a viable trade partner over the last decade, and although the Hand's control is a given, the Lazlo and New Lazlo governments have concluded that Singer is not a threat. In addition to trade, some wealthy Lazlo and New Lazlo citizens have begun to send their children to the Artesian Academy due to its more intimate class sizes and impressive faculty.

Queenston Harbor

Over the last five years, commerce between Singer and the city near pre-Rifts Cleveland (see **Coalition Navy™**, page 123) has boomed, and Lilia Starbreeze and Rembrandt have become good friends (some say lovers). The prevalence of magic in that community has made it a ready sales outlet for Artesian Arms. Over the years, Queenston's connection to the Splugorth has become common knowledge, and the basis for outrage among members of the Faerie League. As a result, Queenston merchants tend to be victimized by graffiti, vandalism, and sometimes, outright sabotage. This violence is beginning to become a focal point for Singer Security forces, and clashes between them and the League are becoming

more common. Eventually, the merchants' claims will reach Lilia's ears, and then Rembrandt's. When that happens, he will further step up Singer Security efforts to flush out the covert gang.

Madhaven/Nexus Knights

Although the Hand has heard rumors over the last decade or so about the Order of the White Rose, and is well aware of Madhaven, the location of the Nexus Knights' sanctuary in the Garden has remained secret. Moreover, the Hand has no idea that Professor Rockwell Westin, resident Ley Line Walker at the Artesian Academy for the last five years, is a longtime member of the Order. Getting on in years, Professor Westin took the position at the school primarily to step away from adventuring, and hoped to find relative peace in the thriving town committed to education and magic and seemingly devoid of the influence of Mystic Knights. However, he has noticed the declining Faerie population and the shift in the town's values toward commercialism, and is considering communicating his concern for the Faerie population to the Knights at the Garden.

Horune Pirates

These allies of the Splugorth are one of the few races categorically denied entry to Singer. The Horune are well-aware of the prejudice, and only the extremely arrogant or extremely desperate might be found slumming somewhere in Dockside. Generally, any Singer citizen sighting a Horune will call Singer Security immediately.

To Be Continued...

Tune in next issue for new TW weapons, the Rogue's Mall and Carnival, notable places & NPCs, and Hook, Line & Sinker adventures!

Once More unto the Breach

Optional Source Material for Heroes Unlimited™

By Alex Tulloch

Introduction

In the world of Heroes Unlimited, there are few countries that do not have a super-powered team that is in some way answerable to the government. In military dictatorships, they can be used to suppress the people and combat any super-powered rebels and rivals. In more democratic countries they are more often used as deterrents and crime-fighting organizations. Britain currently has several such organizations. The role of military deterrent is taken by S.C.R.E.T. U.K. They are a relatively large unit of highly trained individuals, most of them wielding the best technology the British army can afford. However, their use is strictly in terms of national defense, and they are not deployed for anything less than a state of emergency or an invasion by enemies, foreign or extraterrestrial. The role of general crime-fighting is taken up by Team Shakespeare, the British government's public super team.

Like their American counterparts, the Sentinels of Liberty and Justice, they are a well-trained team of heroes, a mix of super-tech, experiments and loyal aliens. As well as performing missions for the

government, they will sometimes be called in to aid C.A.M.E.L.O.T., the London posthuman crime unit, or help other police forces. They have operated abroad, though disapproval of foreign policy amongst some people tends to keep them out of military expeditions, except for one rescue operation in Afghanistan to free captured civilians. They have worked with the SLJ on two occasions, both in costumes and on a covert mission that both governments will always deny they were involved in. The two teams have worked well together, except for a few clashes (Hotspur and Minuteman loathe each other, and Stars is terrified of Prospero). They are also media celebrities, with P.R. men and spin doctors working around the clock to help portray them all the time as Britain's finest heroes.

While S.C.R.E.T. has been continuously active for several decades, the current Team Shakespeare is a more recent creation. Still, it has its antecedents in Operation Stratford, a group of super-powered operatives who were used on the front line during the First World War. Late Victorian/early Edwardian Britain saw a flourishing in exceptional beings that included an English lord who had been raised by wild beasts



in Africa and the greatest super-sleuth the world of Heroes Unlimited has ever seen. Since they were often making raids into and behind enemy lines, it was decided to protect them and their families by giving them codenames taken from Shakespeare plays (such as Captain Romeo, Lieutenant Macbeth, and so on). They were not costumed heroes in the modern sense of the word, since they wore the same uniform as any other officer on the Western Front. When the decision was made to create a new super team though, it was shortly after a major TV documentary on the use of these super-powered operatives on all sides in World War One and it was decided to resurrect the idea as Team Shakespeare. While there is some griping among English professors at the use of the Bard's works in this way, Shakespeare is still one of the few things most people in Britain feel some kind of national pride in (even if few have read his work outside school).

The decision to create the team was made in 2010, and the team made its first appearance early in 2011. It was argued that the country didn't need another posthuman crimefighting team, but the government pressed ahead because they were frustrated by the problems with C.A.M.E.L.O.T. and S.C.R.E.T. C.A.M.E.L.O.T.'s predecessors were compromised by political interference, and its current head is determined to stay independent of any party politics. He is aided by his director of intelligence, who can play the game of politics and media spin better than most with one arm tied behind his back. S.C.R.E.T. are more than willing to follow orders, but are a military unit and all manner of legal problems mount up when looking at using them in civilian matters. The founding of Team Shakespeare would give the government the heroes they wanted; controllable, able to go into action alongside the police and, best of all, they were for the most part, media friendly and publicly acceptable.

Like the SLJ, their uniforms use patriotic elements, especially heraldic symbols of the countries in the Union. The public has taken to these elements well, especially since some of the more populist red-top newspapers have remained very friendly to the team. So far,

the team has had few defeats, and even these have been spun into less humiliating stories. Eventually, there will be some kind of public backlash, but for the time being, they are a genuine success story. The public treat them as celebrities, mobbing them when they make public appearances and eagerly buying magazines with articles on them. Cordelia is the most popular, followed by Hotspur, Rosalind, Romeo, Othello, and Hermia, in that order. Prospero is the only one who stays clear of the media and remains a mysterious enigma to most people, and a little scary to many. Despite that, he is still considered a hero by most, thanks to the PR support.

Cordelia

Cordelia was born Emma Cochrane, only daughter of a senior civil servant, and enjoyed all the benefits of a privileged upbringing. Unfortunately, like so many others, she began to take all those privileges as a right instead of a blessing and became the worst kind of spoiled brat. While she could be outwardly charming and gracious, she had a meanness and arrogance that she would unleash on those who annoyed her. In those days, she would not be regarded as a nice person.

While her attitude left much to be desired, it could not be denied that she was a talented girl, both athletically and academically. Her greatest gift was at riding, representing her country at junior levels in show-jumping trials. After boarding school, she was accepted into Oxford University and formed her own little clique there. On the fringes of this group of friends was a shy engineering student called Rhiannon Post. The two had wildly different backgrounds and personalities, but managed to form a friendship based on their mutual love of motorbikes. Despite being the younger of the two, Rhiannon was the first to graduate and was recruited by the secret Government engineering project known as the Foundry.

In her last year at university, Emma's perfect life was finally shattered. While driving home to her parent's for Christmas, her bike skidded and she went careening into the crash barrier at the side of the road. When she awoke, she found the crash had paralyzed her, and it was doubtful she would ever walk again. The sudden reversal of fortune shocked her and led her to completely re-evaluate her life. She finished her course, a year late, and then began to devote her time to charitable causes, especially those helping road accident victims like herself.

Many of her fair-weather friends deserted her during these years, finding other social sets to attach themselves to. One of the ones who stuck with her was Rhiannon Post, and it was she who approached Emma with a possibility. In her position at the Foundry, Rhiannon had been leading a team examining a set of high-tech gauntlets that had once belonged to a mysterious hero called Tintagel. After his death, his gauntlets were recovered by the Foundry, which soon came to the conclusion that they (and possibly Tintagel) were either from another planet, another dimension or (as Rhiannon suspected) another time. The technology was light years ahead of anything in production on Earth. However, from examining the post-mortem on Tintagel, Rhiannon began to suspect that he had been paralyzed himself but that the gauntlets had somehow used incredibly complex micro-force fields to enable him to walk. Once she was as sure as she could be about her findings, she approached Emma with the possibility of being a test subject for the experiment. Nervously, Emma agreed.

The effect was extraordinary. Within days, Emma had regained all the mobility she had before, and more. The damage was still there, but the gauntlets provided a field that acted as a kind of supporting exoskeleton. Beyond that, they were capable of creating other field-objects, including a sword, a shield, and even armor. It was even capable of creating electromagnetic fields in her brain that heightened her knowledge and awareness. It was able to create all this while

drawing upon some unknown power source. Even Rhiannon was stunned by the sheer power of the gauntlets.

At the same time as Emma was regaining her ability to walk, the decision to create Team Shakespeare was being made. As the daughter of a trusted government employee, Emma was considered a politically safe choice for the team. She underwent a period of training for the team and emerged as one of the best candidates for team leader, alongside Othello. While Othello was considered more experienced and, as an ex-soldier, more reliable by the military advisors, the final decision was the Prime Minister's. Since Team Shakespeare was also a public relations exercise, he opted for the more photogenic of the two and Emma, under the new codename Cordelia, was given the job.

Since being placed in command, she has proven to be a good choice. Clear thinking, able to make the right decisions quickly, and able to get the best out of her team, she has become a hero to the public. There was some grumbling from the left-wing press at the choice of a member of the upper classes being placed in charge, but even that died away as she proved herself time and again. She is happy with her new role in life, seeing her crash and paralysis as important steps in making her who she needed to be to become the woman and hero she is now.

Real Name: Emma Louise Cochrane.

Aliases: Joanne Corey (used when she wishes to get away from the spotlight for a few days, and comes complete with credit cards, documents, passport, etc., in that name).

Alignment: Scrupulous.

Attributes: I.Q. 15, M.E. 14, M.A. 14, P.S. 10, P.P. 17, P.E. 13, P.B. 21, Spd 11.

Hit Points: 40. **S.D.C.:** 62.

Height: 5 feet, 7 inches (1.7 m). **Weight:** 130 lbs (59 kg). **Age:** 28.

Disposition: Cordelia is usually a brave, caring, thoughtful young woman. In action, she is quick-thinking and decisive. She does have a tendency to be a little headstrong, pushing aside other people's ideas unless she knows and respects them (she will always take on ideas from the rest of the team, especially Othello and Prospero). She cares deeply for the rest of the team and would fight to the death for any of them. She sometimes gets frustrated with Hotspur, coming from the opposite end of the political spectrum to him, but she still likes him as a person (and secretly fancies him a little). She is closest with Hermia and Othello.

As a result of her education and her family's background in government, she is one of the most media savvy of the team and always manages to present the positive sides of her personality to the public. On occasion she does slip into her old, bitchy side, especially when frustrated, but these lapses are rare and short-lived.

Experience Level: Eighth.

Combat Skills: Hand to Hand: Expert.

Attacks per Melee: Five.

Bonuses: +2 to initiative, +5 to parry (+8 with sword), +5 to dodge, +3 to strike (+6 with sword), +3 to roll with punch/fall, +2 to pull punch, +2 to disarm, critical hit on 18, 19, or 20. 55% chance to charm/impress, paired weapons, karate kick, tripping/leg hook, backward sweep, body throw/flip.

Super Power Category: Magic: Enchanted Weapon. (Although the gauntlets and sword are technological in nature, their abilities are far beyond known technology. Indeed, they follow Clarke's Third Law, that any sufficiently advanced technology will be indistinguishable from magic. The fact that the force fields were once dispelled by a Negate Magic spell has led Hermia to theorize that the mysterious energy used to power the gauntlets may actually be the same energy used by wizards to cast spells. It may be best to look on the gauntlets as Techno-Wizard artifacts, but about a thousand years more advanced than those on Rifts Earth.)

Major Super Ability: Bio-Armor. (Technically, the armor plates are actually extensions of the force fields that keep Cordelia walking. However, they refract light in such a way, they appear to be copper with red edging.)

Education Level: Bachelor's Degree.

Skills of Note: Basic Math 80%, Business & Finance 90%, Computer Operation 95%, Impersonation 84%/64%, Law (General) 80%, Language: Chinese 98%, Language: English 98%, Language: French 98%, Language: German 98%, Language: Italian 98%, Language: Russian 98%, Language: Spanish 98%, Photography 90%, Pilot Automobile 74%, Prowl 80%, Research 98%, Writing (Journalistic) 80%, Writing (Poetry) 80%, Writing (Prose) 80%.

Secondary Skills: Athletics (General), Basic Mechanics 65%, Dance 65%, Horsemanship 98%, Pilot Boats: Sail-type 70%, Pilot Motorbike 88%, Pilot Race Car 76%, Pilot Truck 60%, Play Piano 70%, Sing 45%, W.P. Sword, W.P. Archery.

Appearance: Cordelia has a pretty face with short, blond hair and soft, green eyes. She wears a red Team Shakespeare uniform with a white lion motif.

Occupation: Full-time, government sponsored and controlled international crime-fighter and super agent.

Weapons: The gauntlets are able to summon, at will, a sword composed of shaped force fields, which refract light to give the effect of a copper blade with red edging. The blade is completely indestructible. The blade offers a further +1 to strike and parry in addition to the bonuses above. It deals 4D6+6 damage and can unleash an electrical discharge that does 5D6+6 damage with a range of 1,000 feet (305 m).

The gauntlets reduce fire and cold damage by half, grant night-vision and the ability to see the invisible (a force field in front of the eyes alters the light entering her eyes to give her these powers), and give a +3 to save against all magic spells and enhancements (further fuelling speculation that the technology runs on mystic energy). On voice command from Cordelia, they can summon up a suit of bio-armor (see above), cloak her from sight (equal to an Invisibility: Superior spell), translate for her (equal to the Tongues spell), and create an array of force field effects (equal to the Mystic Shield ability; **Heroes Unlimited™, 2nd Edition**, page 147).

The voice-activated commands and the sword-summoning ability require her to be wearing the gauntlets. The others are in continuous effect. Should she be separated from the gauntlets for more than 72 hours, the powers of the gauntlets will vanish, as will the fields that enable her to walk. All her physical and piloting skills will be halved and she will be forced to use a wheelchair. All the benefits of her hand to hand training and sword proficiency will vanish. Her speed will drop to a crawling speed of 5. The other members of the team have witnessed this effect once before and will do all that is in their power to prevent it ever happening again. Should she lose only one gauntlet, she will keep all the continuous effect powers, but will be unable to activate any of the voice-command abilities.

Vehicles: Cordelia's favorite means of transport is a Ducati 1098 motorcycle, which has been tuned by Hermia to give it top performance. She also has a collection of other motorbikes, including an MV Augusta F4 which she will sometimes use. She also has access to a number of government vehicles.

Body Armor: With the force fields and bio-armor provided by the gauntlets, Cordelia rarely wears conventional armor.

Money: She's paid £50,000 a year, but with her family's money, is independently wealthy anyway. As a result, she would be willing to work for less, but accepts the money in order to keep the rest of the team paid equally (well, almost equally).

Othello

Jack McGregor was born on the poor side of Edinburgh, the son of an aggressive father and an over-proud mother. He hated his home life, hated the racist abuse from his neighbors, and had no desire to follow his father into a series of poorly-paid, hard physical jobs. He ran away from home several times and did poorly at school. He somehow managed to avoid drifting into crime though, and as soon as he was able to, he joined the army and moved out. He has never seen his parents since.

Army life agreed with him and he developed into a good soldier. He showed little inclination to advance to the officer class though, and preferred to put his ambition and drive into joining the SAS. After three years service, he felt he was ready and put in his application. He was rejected.

Bitterly disappointed, he lost some of the drive that had served him so well before. His commanding officer noted this and, in an attempt to save a promising soldier, pointed him in the direction of another project. This was Dead Moon, a super-soldier project run in association with a commercial genetics lab called Genewerx. McGregor was accepted and reported to the labs for a series of gene therapies and chemical treatments designed to make him stronger, faster and more deadly than ever.

Nobody was ever sure about what went wrong. The first warning the authorities had was a call from McGregor saying the subjects had gone crazy and were running wild. The army moved in, only to discover the facility was a disaster area. The civilian scientists were all dead, as were about half the test subjects. Parts of the lab were burning down, and only McGregor was still in a rational state of mind. The other test subjects had become incredibly vicious predators in human form, cannibalistic monsters that tore and clawed at anything that breathed in that facility. All of them, McGregor included, were marked by a strange, black smoke that drifted from their eyes.

The other subjects were captured or killed, though all those who were caught would later die in captivity as their bodies rejected the enhancements. Only McGregor would prove to be a success, and the whole mess was buried. None of the test subjects had been allowed to mention the project to anyone and they were all listed as being killed in action, with their families being awarded their full military pension. Two bodies were never recovered though, and it is an ever-present worry for some that there are super-soldiers out there that can be traced back to Dead Moon.

Following the debacle, McGregor was set to join S.C.R.E.T. when it was announced that Team Shakespeare was in the works. The military wanted McGregor on the team and preferably, in charge. It was decided though that the black smoking eyes would not play positively in the media, and the more photogenic Cordelia was put in charge instead. McGregor, under the name Othello, was made second-in-command, a position he prefers. He gets on well with Cordelia, and with most of the team, although he gets irritated by Hermia (her intelligence reminds him of his poor education) and by Hotspur (his continual carping about the military annoys him). Surprisingly, he is one of the few beings Prospero will talk to at length. The two discuss philosophical matters and some see Othello becoming a more spiritual warrior as a result.

Real Name: Jack McGregor.

Alignment: Scrupulous.

Attributes: I.Q. 9, M.E. 18, M.A. 13, P.S. 28, P.P. 28, P.E. 23, P.B. 14, Spd 44.

Hit Points: 50. **S.D.C.:** 92.

Height: 6 feet, 2 inches (1.8 m). **Weight:** 205 lbs (92 kg). **Age:** 25.

Disposition: Othello has come through some traumatic events, including his poor childhood, a tour of duty in Afghanistan and the horrors

of the Dead Moon project. Despite this, he has come through remarkably intact. He does have his mental scars, particularly the gaps in his memory on the night everything went wrong at Genewerx and the nagging thought that he may have briefly become one of the cannibal monsters during those gaps. Under Prospero's guidance though, he has learned to accept his past for what it is and live in the here and now. He has become a much calmer, more balanced individual and many people see a kind of samurai quality about him now.

Experience Level: Sixth.

Combat Skills: Hand to Hand: Basic.

Attacks per Melee: Eight.

Bonuses: +5 to initiative, +8 to strike, +12 to parry, +15 to dodge, +13 to damage, +6 to roll with punch/fall/impact, +2 to pull punch, +4 to save vs Horror Factor, +2 to save vs possession, +2 to save vs psionic attack, +2 to save vs insanity, +4 to save vs magic, +4 to save vs poison, +16% to save vs coma/death. Ambidextrous, Paired Weapons, Automatic Dodge, Critical Strike on a 19 or 20.

Super Power Category: Experiment (Super Soldier).

Super Soldier Abilities: Increased Physical Agility and Dexterity, Physical Transformation, Mind (Strength counts as Extraordinary) and Body Attuned.

Minor Super Ability: Extraordinary Physical Prowess.

Unusual Physical Characteristics: Othello's eyes continually produce black smoke, obscuring his eyes from view, although his vision is not affected. His canine teeth are also unusually pointed, though not inhumanly so.

Education Level: Military.

Skills of Note: Basic Math 70%, Boxing, Climbing 95%/85%, Language: English 98%, Gymnastics (sense of balance 85%), Military Etiquette 70%, Navigation 85%, Pilot Automobile 80%, Pilot Hovercraft 85%, Pilot Motorcycle 98%, Pilot Tank 66%, Prowl 75%, Radio: Basic 80%, Read Sensory Equipment 65%, Running, Swimming 95%, Weapon Systems 75%, W.P. Automatic Rifle.

Secondary Skills: Athletics (general), Basic Electronics 45%, Basic Mechanics 45%, Body Building and Weight Lifting, Carpentry 50%, Computer Operation 65%, Fishing 65%, Pilot Water Scooter 50%, S.C.U.B.A./Advanced Swimming 90%, Sing 60%, Streetwise 40%, Writing (poetry) 50%.

Appearance: Othello is a tall, well-built black man, though his build is more that of a gymnast than a bodybuilder. He keeps his hair short, a holdover from his army days, and keeps himself clean-shaven. The most striking thing about his appearance is the continually smoking black eyes. He wears a blue Team Shakespeare uniform with a white unicorn emblem.

Occupation: Full-time, government sponsored and controlled international crime-fighter and super agent.

Weapons: Othello typically uses a pair of police batons (1D6 damage).

Vehicles: He has access to a number of government vehicles.

Body Armor: Othello has Kevlar woven into his uniform (A.R. 10, S.D.C. 50) to help protect him.

Money: He's paid £45,000 a year, which seems like a fortune to him. He is careful to put as much of it away as he can, knowing that he is in a dangerous line of work that could leave him permanently injured without warning.

Romeo

During the final days of World War II, as British and American tanks drove into Germany from the west and Russian troops swarmed in from the east, a team of British commandos made a raid on a mysterious hidden facility on the coast of the North Sea. They were expecting to find Nazi scientists, possibly experimental super weapons,

or maybe even some of the high command trying to escape. The one thing they didn't expect to find was the Nazis' alien museum.

There were almost a dozen alien corpses in the base, some just bones, others pickled bodies. Broken pieces of technology, a few non-humanoid uniforms, and even some alien art and holograms; all of it was there. The commandos were stunned and amazed by what they found, but nothing prepared them for what was in the lowest level. Two giant, dark red-skinned monsters with the strength of dozens of men were kept in the bottom of a pit, the only entrance on a gantry far above them. Strong enough to hold a human but too flimsy to take the weight of a Drux. At first, it was the aliens weren't sure what to make of the humans who took them out of the prison, but still kept their guns aimed at them at all times. When a translator was found though, and they were able to explain their story in the stumbling German they had learned from their captors, the attitude changed.

The Drux had been a simple agricultural people when the Atorian Empire had attacked, seeking slave warriors. The Drux had resisted as much as possible, before their world fell. But as the Drux were being transported to new worlds where they were to be 're-educated,' the slave-ships were attacked by a band of Maeus who each took a batch of Drux to hide on safe planets. One batch included a mated pair called L-Hod-K and L-Ban-T. The Maeus who was transporting them was still being chased by the Atorians when he got within range of Earth. He put L-Hod-K and L-Ban-T in an escape capsule and launched them to Earth, flying off on his own in a successful bid to distract the pursuers. The Drux landed safely, only to be captured by the Third Reich. They spent eight months as prisoners before being rescued.

The British chose to accept them as refugees and hurriedly transported them to a quiet part of Northumberland. They were eager to gain all manner of technological secrets from the pair but were dismayed when they proved to be only monks and farmers, with a grasp of technology lower than those studying them. Writing them off as a waste of time and resources, they were given a small farm on War Office property, and allowed to live a quiet life on their own.

The few scientists who were still interested in the Drux were fascinated as the years passed and the aliens showed little sign of aging. Although it took a while to get the Drux to understand the concept of years, it soon emerged that their average life span is roughly two hundred and twenty years. The biggest surprise for the researchers though was when L-Ban-T announced she was pregnant.

When L-Brian-X, named after the commando colonel who rescued them, was born, he was raised by his parents and the researchers equally. Although he took to the training his father gave him in Drux martial arts, he showed little interest in the life of the farmer. Instead he showed an interest in human life that his parents had never displayed. Although he was unable to mix with normal humans, he lived vicariously through television, and grew to love his parent's adopted home. When he reached his twentieth year and was released from his parents, he immediately requested the researchers to find him a way to travel in the open. Fortunately, one of them had heard about the formation of Team Shakespeare and recommended he apply. His request was approved, and he became the third member of the team.

The only problem came when it was time to choose a name. The PR people had decided upon Caliban, the monstrous servant from 'The Tempest.' There was no way that L-Brian-X would agree to that. In his eyes he was no monster. Indeed he thought of himself as a dashing hero, and insisted upon Romeo. With the giant alien giving them little choice in the matter, the Caliban name was dropped, and it was as Romeo that he was first introduced to the public.

Real Name: L-Brian-X.

Aliases: None needed, he is instantly recognizable.

Alignment: Principled.

Attributes: I.Q. 11, M.E. 12, M.A. 19, P.S. 60, P.P. 13, P.E. 23, P.B. 7, Spd 48.

Hit Points: 53. **S.D.C.:** 145.

Height: 9 feet, 2 inches (2.7 m). **Weight:** 2,000 lbs (900 kg). **Age:** 25.

Disposition: Romeo is a big kid at heart. He always looks at the world as if it is a big, fascinating toy, and one he loves to play with. He can become fascinated with the most peculiar everyday things, just because he was never exposed to them as a child. His entire experience of the outside world as he was growing up was through television. He is also the team's joker, constantly making the worst puns and gags. He seems to have the script of every Monty Python routine memorized.

Experience Level: Sixth.

Combat Skills: Special; Physical Training.

Attacks per Melee: Six.

Bonuses: +3 to strike, +5 to parry, +1 to dodge, +45 to damage, +4 to roll with punch, fall or impact, +36% to save vs. coma and death, +2 to save vs. disease, +6 to save vs. toxins and poisons, +4 to save vs. magic, 4 to pull punch, +5 on initiative, +2 to disarm, +2 to body flip/throw. Paired weapons, entangle, critical body flip/throw, body block/tackle, punch (2D4 damage), kick (2D6 damage), snap kick, wheel kick, axe kick, crescent kick, body hold, neck hold, Critical Strike on an 18, 19 or 20, automatic knockout on a 20, 55% to trust/intimidate.

Super Power Category: Alien Physical Training.

Minor Super Abilities: Superhuman Strength.

Education Level: Raised by Drux parents (unique).

Skills of Note: Athletics (general), Basic Math 70%, Body Building & Weight Lifting, Carpentry 55%, Climbing 75%/65%, Detect Ambush 60%, Identify Plants and Fruits 55%, Impersonation 61%/41%, Land Navigation 66%, Language: English 98%, Preserve Food 55%, Prowl 65%, Running, Swimming 85%, Tracking 55%, Wilderness Survival 55%.

Secondary Skills: Art (sculpture) 60%, Astronomy 50%, Automotive Mechanics 50%, Computer Operation 65%, Cook (professional level) 70%, First Aid 70%, Pilot Tractor & Farm Machinery 60%, Sing 60%, Language: Arabic 50%, Language: Chinese 65%, Language: German 75%, Language: Polish 50%, Language: Welsh 65% (Drux appear to have a natural talent for learning languages).

Appearance: Romeo is a huge, powerfully built, humanoid rhinoceros. Though he is often seen baring his teeth, this is most frequently one of his smiles of pleasure. His body is covered with calloused, deep red skin that improves the toughness while also offering grooves through which run the odorless high pH sweat that allows the Drux to survive their planet's terrible, acidic winter storms, and help give the impression he is wearing a suit of armour. All in all, a terrifying sight with a cheerful spirit behind the fearsome exterior. He wears a red Team Shakespeare uniform with a lion emblem.

Environment: Abrasive atmosphere.

Familiarity with Earth: Native, as good a knowledge as any human.

Occupation: Full-time, government sponsored and controlled international crime-fighter and super agent.

Weapons: None. With his phenomenal strength he chooses not to rely on them.

Vehicles: None. He is too big for most human-sized vehicles. He does have access to a number of other government vehicles if he wishes them.

Body Armor: Romeo has large amounts of Kevlar woven into his uniform (A.R. 17, S.D.C. 90) to help protect him. This armor is attacked before his Natural Armor and S.D.C. kick in.

Money: He's paid £40,000 a year, and spends most of it on gadgets which he loves. He is a master of internet shopping.



Hotspur

Hotspur is Russell Collins, the powerful mutant son of two university professors. This young man can transform into a powerful, flame-sheathed, metal powerhouse. He has an almost unique ability, able to combine a super-strong metal frame with the projection of high temperature flames and high-speed flight. The first time he discovered his transformation was when he was on holiday in the coastal town of Filey. He was swimming in the sea when his powers erupted and in an instant, his fiery sheath created a plume of steam almost twenty feet high. The beach was evacuated in a panic and the police called in a C.A.M.E.L.O.T. unit from London. Russell was questioned by the Intelligence team for several hours.

His parents were both liberal academics who had met while protesting against the nuclear missiles at Greenham Common (and which led to his mother's family disowning her and the mixed-race marriage). Unsurprisingly, they were aggressively against the authorities interviewing him, and were even more vehemently against their suggestion that he join S.C.R.E.T. when he was old enough. His parents considered his powers a gift and he did too, especially when he discovered his flight power. While some of the children at his school considered him a freak, all his friends and those that mattered, soon learned he was the same as he'd ever been.

A few years later, when C.A.M.E.L.O.T. were informed about the creation of Team Shakespeare, they were asked to recommend anyone they thought would be appropriate. One of the Intelligence team remembered the powerful young mutant and recommended he be contacted again. Russell was just applying to university, but was intrigued by the idea of a non-military way of using his powers to help. His parents were less keen, but Russell reckoned it would be a great way of getting his opinions out into the world. He was accepted into University College London and arranged to work with the team while working towards his archaeology degree.

Since joining, he has proved to be the most controversial member of the team to his superiors. He has spoken out repeatedly against any excesses in the banking community, government cuts in public services, and controversial foreign policy. While these comments have inflamed his political masters, they have caught the mood of many people and it has been impossible to drop him without creating a backlash of negative public opinion. In action, though, he has proved to be every bit as heroic as his comrades, and is renowned for placing himself between any threat and innocent civilians.

Real Name: Russell Collins.

Alignment: Principled.

Attributes: I.Q. 18, M.E. 15, M.A. 15, P.S. 13, P.P. 11, P.E. 12, P.B. 23, Spd 14.

Hit Points: 31. **S.D.C.:** 35.

Height: 5 feet, 11 inches (1.8 m). **Weight:** 180 lbs (81 kg). **Age:** 20.

Disposition: Hotspur is smart, fast-thinking and witty. He has become an articulate speaker and a forthright critic of any perceived injustices. This has not endeared him to his bosses who regard him as a political troublemaker. In a fight though, he is constantly making sure ordinary people are safe and looking out for his teammates, which means that he has become a hero to the public and respected by his colleagues.

Experience Level: Sixth.

Combat Skills: Hand to Hand: Basic.

Attacks per Melee: Six.

Bonuses: +1 to parry, +1 to dodge (+3 when in flight), +1 to roll with punch/fall/impact.

Super Power Category: Mutant.

Major Super Ability: Unique combination of Alter Physical Structure: Metal and Alter Physical Structure: Fire. When Hotspur transforms himself, he assumes a metal form surrounded by a fiery corona. He is unable to assume one form without the other. He goes up to a superhuman P.S. of 38, and drops his speed down to 7. His A.R. is 16, S.D.C. is 700, and he has the defensive benefits of both the fire and metal transformations. He can also fly at 45 mph (72.4 km). He suffers from the limitations of both forms as well, so he is unable to function underwater or in a vacuum. Aside from that, he uses the rules from both Alter Physical Structure: Metal and Alter Physical Structure: Fire.

Unusual Physical Characteristics: Angelic, beautiful face.

Education Level: Bachelor's Degree.

Skills of Note: Advanced Math 94%, Anthropology 69%, Archaeology 69%, Astronomy 74%, Basic Math 74%, Chemistry 79%, Computer Operation 89%, Languages: Classical Greek 98%, English 98%, French 98%, German 98%, Italian 98%, Latin 98%, Norman French 98%, Old English 98%, Spanish 98%, History: 20th Century 98%, History: Ancient Civilizations 79%, History: Medieval 89%, History: Roman 89%, Pilot Automobile 74%.

Secondary Skills: Athletics (general), Cook 64%, Dance 49%, First Aid 64%, Photography 64%, Pilot Motorbike 84%, Play Bass Guitar 64%, Play Drums 39%, Play Guitar 64%, Prowl 54%, Sing 64%, Swimming 79%, W.P. Blunt (Othello has recently decided to teach him how to use batons).

Appearance: Hotspur is a very attractive young man, with short, black hair and a neat mustache. His skin is a light brown and he has a slim build. When he transforms, his metallic face remains recognizable, though his features are sometimes distorted by the heat haze. He wears a heat resistant, red Team Shakespeare uniform with a lion emblem.

Occupation: Full-time, government sponsored and controlled international crime-fighter and super agent. He is also training to be an archaeologist.

Weapons: None. With his fire powers he chooses not to rely on them.
Vehicles: He has access to a number of government vehicles if he wishes them. He also likes to borrow motorbikes from Cordelia.
Money: He's paid £40,000 a year, and uses it to pay off his student debts. He also donates a fair chunk of his pay to charities like Amnesty International.

Prospero

On the day the team were supposed to make their first public appearance, they were each woken by a security alert, informing them their brand new headquarters, codenamed the Globe, had been penetrated. By the time they arrived there they found the intruder, a giant floating torso, seemingly carved from a dark black wood, in the kitchen surrounded by a squad of Paras, all with their weapons trained on the thing. The soldiers informed the team that the thing had spent all its time cooking. The result was breakfast for each of them, every one their favorite.

When it spoke, it sounded like a deep, yet quiet, warm, paternal voice on the wind. No mouth and no speaker could be seen on the wooden torso, which the voice explained was an exo-suit to enable it to live in Earth's atmosphere. The team found it hard to agree on how the voice sounded, with the only description they agreed on being that it was like hearing someone shout from far away, so it could only just be heard. The being explained it was here to help the team fight a series of paranormal opponents, the first of which would arrive that day. And it said its name was Prospero.

By the end of the day the team had fought an enormous flaming giant that erupted from the earth in Trafalgar Square, and their public unveiling included a display of what they did. Despite the fact it was not officially included in the team by the spin doctors, most newspapers included Prospero as a member in their reports. After a few weeks, so did the rest of the team. Prospero was never officially invited to join. It just acted as if it was from day one.

It has never revealed much of its history or background to anyone, except maybe Othello, and many people in the press and military have speculated on whether it is extraterrestrial, extradimensional or possibly elemental in nature. It is not even known if it needs the exo-suit or not, or whether it is just an elaborate disguise. It appears to know much about the team that it shouldn't, including such things as taste in food (such as their favorite breakfasts without meeting them), choices in music and some deepest secrets they have never told anyone. It has never revealed what gender it is, or even if it has one.

One speculation is that it is psychic, or uses its magic to read people's minds. Another is that it has some kind of precognition, and that its information is gleaned from the future. It has also been suggested that it comes from a parallel world where it was a member of a parallel Team Shakespeare and is trying to prevent this Team Shakespeare from being killed the way its original was. Perhaps the most bizarre theory is that at some point in the future, Prospero will travel back in time to the beginning of the team, and therefore is travelling in some kind of endlessly repeating loop. This means it would have no beginning and no end. Which of these theories, if any, are true, Prospero isn't saying.

Real Name: Unknown, possibly Prospero.

Alignment: Principled.

Attributes: I.Q. 23, M.E. 21, M.A. 15, P.S. 9 (special, see Armour below), P.P. 5, P.E. 18, P.B. (exo-suit) 15, Spd 4.

Hit Points: 59. **S.D.C.:** 45.

Height: (exo-suit) 5 feet, 9 inches (1.75 m). **Weight:** (exo-suit) 162 lbs (73 kg). **Age:** Unknown.

Disposition: Prospero says little, explains even less and seems to enjoy being mysterious and enigmatic. Most of what it says ap-

pears to be epigrams, poetical or oracular phrases or parables. Hermia once said in frustration they needed a translation device to translate what Prospero's translation device came out with. It sometimes seems Prospero is trying to say what it knows without giving too much away.

Its actions though show it does care deeply about the rest of the team, having saved their lives on many occasions, even at risk to itself. It acts as a mentor and confidant to the others, giving them comfort in their darkest moments. It does appear to be wise and courageous, and is perhaps the most formidable being on the team.

Experience Level: Fifteenth.

Combat Skills: None.

Attacks per Melee: Five.

Bonuses: +3 to save vs psionics, +4 to save vs insanity, +7 to save vs magic, +6 vs possession, +7 to save vs Horror Factor, Spell Strength of 16, +6% to save vs coma/death, +2 to save vs poison.

Other Bonuses: Immune to psychic powers that are not physical in nature, never tires, rarely sleeps, no fear of heights.

Super Power Category: Mega-Hero Alien Wizard.

P.P.E.: 208

Spell Knowledge: Prospero knows all spells from levels one to eleven, as well as the following spells; Calm Storm, Sanctum, Summon & Control Storm, Impenetrable Wall of Force, Restoration, Dimensional Portal, Sanctuary, and Teleport: Superior. Several of these more powerful spells are beyond Prospero's abilities, unless he is able to access a Nexus point during a celestial event. He is capable of far more dangerous effects in a magic-rich environment. Should Prospero get to Rifts Earth, he would be a magical powerhouse.

Mystic Knowledge: Astral Projection, 75 minutes duration. Sense Enchantment 75%, Spell Translation 38%, Demon and Monster Knowledge 98%, Geomancy 98%, Religion 98%, Archaeology 98%, Chemistry 98%, Holistic Medicine 98%.

Mega-Hero Abilities: Supernatural P.S. (see Armour below), heals 4 times as fast, increased range on magical detection by 50%, doesn't need to eat and drink, slow & ponderous.

Unusual Physical Characteristics: Unknown.

Education Level: Mystic Studies.

Skills of Note: Astronomy 98%, Botany 98%, Cryptography 98%.

Secondary Skills: Advanced Math 98%, Art 98%, Basic Math 98%, Business & Finance 98%, Carpentry 98%, Cook 98%, Holistic Medicine 98%, Identify Plants & Fruits 98%, Research 98%, Writing 98%, and all Ancient Weapon Proficiencies (except Archery and Paired Weapons).

Appearance: Prospero has never been seen outside its exo-suit. This outer casing appears to be made out of hard, black wood, carved with swirling Celtic designs. This floats above the ground, with occasional winds of purple energy that gust around rune-marked cloth pieces hanging from the body. It has no arms or legs, or even a distinct head. Instead it resembles a giant, if oddly formed, torso. What Prospero looks like inside, nobody knows.

Environment: Unknown, but possibly unlike Earth's, unless he is lying about the need for the suit.

Familiarity with Earth: Seems to have a phenomenal knowledge of Earth, suggesting he may have been here for some time.

Occupation: Full-time, government sponsored and (they hope) controlled international crime-fighter and super agent.

Weapons: None. Prospero relies upon its magic.

Vehicles: None. It is too oddly shaped for most-human sized vehicles (though it can fit on board Ganymede II). It does have access to a number of other government vehicles if it wishes them.

Body Armor: Prospero's exo-suit is unusual, affording it great protection in a fight, as well as allowing it to float and perform some telekinetic activity. For many years, it was not known whether it

was Prospero or its suit that created it. However, recently Hermia was able to get some more detailed scans of it and came to the rather unusual conclusion that the exo-suit was in some way, alive.

The exo-suit is to all intents, Prospero's Familiar. This bizarre creature is capable of continuous use of the Float psychic power (without any I.S.P. cost). It can also use the Telekinesis power at will (again, without spending I.S.P.) but the range is reduced to 5 feet (1.5 m) and the strength it can lift is equal to the P.S. attribute listed above. It is also reasonably sturdy (Natural A.R. 10, S.D.C. 80) and once it is aware of an attack, Prospero normally calls up an Armor of Ithan. It follows all the rules for Familiars on page 152 of **Heroes Unlimited™ RPG, 2nd Edition**.

Where Prospero found this creature is unknown, or how it managed to coax it into being its Familiar. Since Familiars cannot usually be as big as the exo-suit, there is some x-factor in its relationship with Prospero that allows them to make that mystical connection. It is not even known how intelligent the exo-suit is or if it is plant, animal or something stranger. Any questions the team ask about the suit are given the usual enigmatic answers (such as when Hermia asked about its perception and was told, "a soul can know infinity in the expanse of its own breath"). Whatever its story is, Prospero isn't telling.

Money: Prospero is paid £45,000 a year, and gives it all to charity. It lives in the Globe, and has a room there which it has turned into a perfectly white meditation room.

Rosalind

When Rhiannon Post transferred to Team Shakespeare from the Foundry, she brought with her one of her closest friends, a fellow tech-head and pilot, Tameena Singh. The two had bonded quickly, being a similar age and female in an organization that had a high proportion of old, white-haired male scientists. While Rhiannon was studying the Tintagel gauntlets though, Tameena was experimenting with an elaborate alien mind probe. Her experiments led her to believe it was possible to use it, not as a torture/interrogation device as it was intended, but as a way of linking thoughts with machinery. While she was looking at creating a teaching device, she was also attracted by the idea of the remote use of machinery. She was thinking it may be useful in dangerous situations like bomb disposal, but her boss, George Campbell, advised her to think bigger.

She was shown several prototypes for C.A.M.E.L.O.T. vehicles that were never put into production for one reason or another, and given the chance to perfect the system. When the system was finally ready, the hunt for recruits for Team Shakespeare was in high gear. Campbell had already lost one of his best scientists to the project and was reluctant to lose another, but when Rhiannon asked Tameena to bring the remote vehicles onto the team, he wasn't going to deny her the opportunity. The PR team opted for the character Rosalind for her, who in the play, pretended to be another character, Ganymede, which the PR team thought was a good metaphor for the remote ops system.

Although she rarely gets involved in person she is always one of the more prominent members of the team in combat, with the giant robot of Ganymede I and the heavy transport plane of Ganymede II being the most common sights. She is also one of the more public figures on the chat show circuit, being beautiful, articulate, intelligent and witty (as well as being the only Asian on the team). Because of this she is loved by the PR team.

Real Name: Tameena Singh.

Alignment: Scrupulous.

Attributes: I.Q. 22, M.E. 14, M.A. 16, P.S. 11, P.P. 16, P.E. 9, P.B. 19, Spd 14.

Hit Points: 27. **S.D.C.:** 42.

Height: 5 feet, 11 inches (1.8 m). **Weight:** 145 lbs (62.25 kg). **Age:** 27.

Disposition: Tameena is an intelligent woman with a love of adventure who sees the whole crime-fighting job as a way to live out her fantasies. When she began, she was a lot more timid, and a little afraid of the power at her command. Over the last few years, she has become a lot more confident, perhaps even over-confident. Although she spends most of her time in action piloting one of the robots, she has recently begun volunteering for more dangerous duties outside the suits. Hermia is becoming worried that she is getting cocky and blind to the danger she puts herself in.

Experience Level: Sixth.

Combat Skills: Hand to Hand: Expert.

Attacks per Melee: 5

Bonuses: +3 to roll with punch/fall/impact, +2 to punch, +4 to parry, +4 to dodge, +2 to strike, +2 to initiative, Critical Strike on 18+. 45% chance to charm/impress.

Super Power Category: Robot Pilot.

Skills of Note: Basic Electronics 78%, Basic Math 78%, Basic Mechanics 78%, Computer Operations 88%, Computer Programming 78%, Computer Repairs 73%, Electrical Engineer 78%, Language: English 98%, Navigation (Air, Land, Water) 98%, Pilot Automobile 80%, Pilot Hovercraft 98%, Pilot Jet Fighter 87%, Pilot Motorbike 98%, Pilot Race Car 96%, Pilot Robot Vehicles 92%, Read Sensory Equipment 78%, Robot Electronics 78%, Weapon Systems 88%.

Secondary Skills: Advanced Math 78%, Art (crochet) 68%, Athletics (general), Climbing 73%/63%, Dance 63%, Photography 68%, Pilot Airplane 80%, Pilot Truck 70%, Prowl 33%, Research 83%, Swimming 83%, S.C.U.B.A./Advanced Swimming 58%.

Appearance: Tameena comes from a Sikh family from the Punjab. She is tall, dark-skinned and athletic, with a dancer's grace. She has large, dark eyes that draw everyone's gaze and which have bewitched many of her fans. She wears a red Team Shakespeare uniform with a white lion motif.

Occupation: Full-time, government sponsored and controlled international crime-fighter and super agent.

Weapons: When not using one of the robot vehicles, Rosalind opts to carry an ion rod (a farewell gift from Campbell). It has a range of 200 feet (61 m), does 5D6 damage and has a 20 shot clip.

Vehicles: She has access to a number of government vehicles if she wishes them. She also has a thing for classic vehicles and has her own restored Triumph motorbike and Mini Cooper.

Body Armor: Rosalind has Kevlar woven into her uniform (A.R. 10, S.D.C. 50) to help protect her.

Money: She's paid £40,000 a year, and uses it to buy classic vehicles. She also helps out her parents whenever they need it.

Ganymede I

Model Type: Ganymede FSPR-I.

Class: Heavy-Duty Combat Robot.

Crew: None. Piloted by remote transferred intelligence.

A.R. 16

S.D.C. by Location:

Head – 125

Arms (2) – 125

Legs (2) – 312

Main Body – 1,250

Speed:

Running: 60 mph (96 km).

Leaping: Jump jets allow Ganymede I to jump 100 feet (30.5 m) straight up or 200 feet (61 m) across.

Flying: Cannot fly.

Statistical Data:

Height: 18 feet, 7 inches (5.8 m).

Width: 7 feet, 2 inches (2.1 m).

Weight: 2,000 lbs (900 kg).

Physical Strength: Equal to a P.S. 22.

Cargo: None.

Power System: Superior Energy Storage Batteries. Operates like a super-solar engine, but recharges from a special facility at the Globe rather than by solar power. Britain is not famous for its glorious sunshine.

Market Price: Not for sale.

Weapon Systems:

1. Shoulder-Mounted 40mm Grenade Launcher.

Primary Purpose: Subdual.

Although it can be equipped with other types of grenades it normally only uses stun/flash grenades or CS/tear gas grenades which are deemed acceptable for use when there are civilians around. The stun/flash grenades cover a 20 foot (6 m) blast area. All the victims suffer a -8 to strike, parry and dodge, -1 to initiative and lose one attack for the next 1D4 rounds. The gas grenades cover a 25 foot (7.6 m) radius, although if used outside, the gas will disperse quickly (halve the following penalties if used outside with a strong wind blowing). Victims of the gas are -10 to strike, parry and dodge, -3 to initiative, and lose one attack for the next 1D6+1 melee rounds.

Damage: None.

Range: 6,000 feet (1,890 m).

Rate of Fire: Aimed, burst or wild.

Payload: 40

2. Shoulder-Mounted Gravity Bomb Launcher.

Primary Purpose: Incapacitation.

Utilizing alien technology, C.A.M.E.L.O.T. uses modified grenade launchers which can fire what were originally an accident from one of the Foundry's first experiments with alien anti-gravity technology. Rather than achieving anti-gravity however, they were able to flood an area with an increased gravity field. A person caught in a gravity field feels as if he weighs many times more than he does. Speed is reduced to three, half of all melee actions/attacks per round are lost, as are all combat bonuses and a -3 penalty is made to all combat actions. All skills are -60% to perform. Those with superhuman strength may move at half Speed, have half the attacks, but merely halve their bonuses. They get a -30% on all skills. Those with supernatural strength get a -3 to Speed and a -30% to skills but are otherwise unaffected. The area of effect is 15 feet (4.6 m) wide.

Damage: None.

Range: 6,000 feet (1,829 m).

Rate of Fire: Aimed, burst or wild.

Payload: 20

3. Forearm-Mounted Gatling Cannon.

Primary Purpose: Assault.

Damage: 1D4+2

Rate of Fire: Equal to the combined number of hand to hand attacks of the operator (usually Tameena).

Maximum Effective Range: 300 feet (91.4 m).

Payload: 1000 round drum feed.

4. Hand to Hand Combat: Rather than use a weapon; the pilot can engage in hand to hand combat.

Damage:

Restrained Punch: 2D4

Normal Punch: 3D6+7

Power Punch: 6D6+7 (counts as two attacks)

Kick: 5D6+7 (not more than once per round)

Head Butt: 3D4

5. Sensor Systems of Note: Basic Listening System, Radio Signal Scrambler System, Loudspeaker, Single Voice Synthesizer, Basic Robot Optics.

Ganymede II

Model Type: Ganymede FSPR-II.

Class: Heavy-Duty Lifting Robot Vehicle.

Crew: Can either be piloted by remote transferred intelligence, or by one pilot and one co-pilot. Flying without a co-pilot (or without using the remote transfer system) is possible but any complicated maneuvering gives a -30% penalty to any piloting rolls. Has space for four passengers (including the oddly-shaped Romeo and Prospero).

A.R. 14

S.D.C. by Location:

Pilot/Crew Compartment - 400

Engine - 300

Wings (2) - 500

Main Body - 1,400

Speed:

Flying: 100 mph (160 km).

Statistical Data:

Length: 34 feet, 2 inches (10.4 m).

Width: 14 feet, 11 inches (4.5 m).

Weight: 12 tons.

Cargo: None.

Power System: Liquid Fuel System.

Market Price: Not for sale.

Weapon Systems:

1. Heavy Duty Laser Cannons (2).

Primary Purpose: Defensive.

Damage: 5D6

Rate of Fire: Equal to the combined number of hand to hand attacks of the operator (usually Rosalind, occasionally Hermia).

Maximum Effective Range: 3,000 feet (914 m).

Payload: Effectively unlimited.

Special Weapon Features: +1 to strike.

2. Underslung Net and Towline (6).

Primary Purpose: Capture.

Damage: 1D3 from impact.

Rate of Fire: Equal to the combined number of hand to hand attacks of the operator (usually Rosalind, occasionally Hermia).

Maximum Effective Range: 120 feet (36.6 m).

Payload: 6 (1 for each mounting).

Special Weapon Features: Like a spike and towline weapon, except the system uses nets that open upon impact. The nets are weighted with magnetic balls that snap together when the net strikes. Once that is done, the constrictions are so tight that only a character with superhuman or supernatural strength can move while trapped in the net. Even then a character with superhuman strength will only move at half speed and with a -2 penalty to strike and parry, and a -4 penalty to dodge. To get free requires a combined strength of 42 from both the target and up to three other characters who are trying to help.

3. Sensor Systems of Note: Basic Listening System, Wide-Band Radio Receiver and Transmitter, Radio Signal Scrambler System, Loudspeaker, Single Voice Synthesizer, Advanced Robot Optics System, Laser Targeting System, Telescopic Vision, External Video and Audio Surveillance System, Video Receiver and Transmitter, Searchlights (3), Maxi-Radar, Radar Detector.

Ganymede III

Model Type: Ganymede FSPR-III.

Class: Medium-Duty Aerial Combat Robot Vehicle.

Crew: None. Piloted by remote transferred intelligence.

A.R. 12

S.D.C. by Location:

Engine – 150

Main Body – 700

Speed:

Flying: Ganymede III has two power systems for differing speeds. It has a standard Turbo Engine for speeds up to 200 mph (320 km) and a Turbo-Jet Engine for speeds between 100 mph (160 km) and 750 mph (1,200 km)/Mach one.

Statistical Data:

Length: 7 feet (2.1 m).

Width: 3 feet (0.9 m).

Weight: 900 lbs (405 kg).

Cargo: None.

Power System: Turbo Engine for speeds up to 200 mph (320 km) and a Turbo-Jet Engine for speeds between 100 mph (160 km) and 750 mph (1,200 km)/Mach one.

Market Price: Not for sale.

Weapon Systems:

1. Centrally-Mounted Particle Beam Cannon.

Primary Purpose: Assault.

Damage: 1D6x10+20.

Rate of Fire: Two.

Maximum Effective Range: 1,200 feet (366 m).

Payload: Effectively unlimited.

2. Wing-Mounted Ion Rods.

Primary Purpose: Assault.

Damage: 4D6

Rate of Fire: Equal to the combined number of hand to hand attacks of the operator (Rosalind).

Maximum Effective Range: 660 feet (201 m).

Payload: 72, 36 per wing.

Special Weapon Features: +1 to strike.

3. Sensor Systems of Note: Basic Listening System, Radio Signal Scrambler System, Loudspeaker, Single Voice Synthesizer, Basic Robot Optics.

Ganymede IV

Model Type: Ganymede FSPR-IV.

Class: Light Scout Robot.

Crew: None. Piloted by remote transferred intelligence.

A.R. 12

S.D.C. by Location:

Hover System – 100

Main Body – 700

Speed:

Flying: Has a built-in hover system allowing it to hover on the spot, or fly at speeds up to 100 mph (160 km).

Statistical Data:

Height: 2 feet, 7 inches (0.8 m).

Width: 3 feet, 9 inches (1.14 m).

Length: 6 feet, 4 inches (1.9 m).

Weight: 400 lbs (180 kg).

Cargo: None.

Power System: Superior Energy Storage Batteries. Operates like a super-solar engine, but recharges from the mains rather than by solar power. Britain is not famous for its glorious sunshine.

Market Price: Not for sale.

Sensor Systems of Note: Advanced Audio System, Bug Detector, Radar Signal Detector, Wide-Band Radio Receiver and Transmitter, Radio Signal Scrambler System, External Audio Pick-Up, Loudspeaker, Single Voice Synthesizer, Sound Analysis Computer, Advanced Robot Optics System, Video Receiver and Transmitter, Chemical Analysis System, Micro-Radar, Radiation Detector.

Hermia

Rhiannon Post was always smart, already reading ahead of all her classmates at the age of five. It was no surprise when she started missing years and taking exams with children several years older than her. Unfortunately, her brains also isolated her from her classmates and so she decided to hold back before heading to Oxford. Following a gap year, she entered university only a year younger than her fellow students, but still feeling like a bit of an outsider amongst them. The only real friendship she made was with Emma Cochrane, who though she was very unlike the shy, kindly Rhiannon, shared her passion for motorbikes, and the two became close while tinkering with Emma's expensive collection.

In just two and a half years, Rhiannon had finished her course and written her Doctorate thesis. Word was spreading about this wonder child and she was inundated with offers, but a trip to the Foundry, the alien technology storage/R&D facility that supported C.A.M.E.L.O.T., swung it and she chose to join them. She quickly found herself at home at the Foundry, finally finding a place that operated at her level. After two successful projects, she was given the piece of technology that would change her life; the Tintagel gauntlets.

When the gauntlets were able to help Emma Cochrane, who had since been paralyzed in a motorbike accident, Emma was recruited into Team Shakespeare. When Emma joined them, she asked if Rhiannon's brains could be put to use on the team as well. The Foundry was loath to lose one of its brightest talents, and Rhiannon was unsure about leaving her dream job, but Emma was finally able to convince her friend that she would be able to do more to help the world in Team Shakespeare. Since then, she has worked as the team's technological specialist/information gatherer. She is almost as poor in combat as she was when she began, but in her specialist areas, there are few to match her.

Real Name: Rhiannon Post.

Aliases: Sian Jones (used when she wants some time to herself, and comes complete with credit cards, documents, passport, etc. in that name).

Alignment: Principled.

Attributes: I.Q. 29, M.E. 7, M.A. 9, P.S. 7, P.P. 11, P.E. 14, P.B. 14, Spd 12.

Hit Points: 38. **S.D.C.:** 35.

Height: 5 feet, 3 inches (1.6 m). **Weight:** 110 lbs (49.5 kg). **Age:** 27. **Disposition:** Rhiannon is a quiet and shy girl from the Welsh valleys. Despite everything she has done in her career as a super hero (including achieving her lifelong dream to travel into space), she still seems timid and not quite sure she should be there. When it comes to the crunch, she always comes through for her friends, but of all the team, she is probably the one most lacking in confidence. She is most comfortable working as a strategist for the others, often remaining aboard Ganymede II and piloting it when Rosalind switches her mind into one of the more combat-oriented Ganymede robots. She has a hard time making friends and feels closest to Cordelia, Rosalind and Romeo (unknown to her, the

others care deeply for her and would do anything to keep her safe, knowing she is perhaps the least capable fighter in the group).

Experience Level: Sixth.

Combat Skills: Hand to Hand: Basic.

Attacks per Melee: Five.

Bonuses: +2 to roll with punch fall or impact, +2 to pull punch, +2 to parry, +2 to dodge, +1 to strike, +1 to strike and parry with blunt weapons, +1 to initiative, Critical Strike on a 19+. +15% to skills (included below).

Super Power Category: Hardware (Electronic & Mechanical).

Education Level: Doctorate.

Special Hardware Skills: Building Super Vehicles 111%, Computer Hacking 103%, Electronics Construction 109%, Evaluate & Diagnose Electrical Systems 95%, Hot Wiring 111%, Recognize Vehicle Quality 95%/115%.

Skills of Note: Aircraft Mechanics 80%, Automotive Mechanics 78%, Basic Electronics 75%, Basic Mechanics 75%, Biology 85%, Chemistry 85%, Computer Operation 95%, Computer Programming 80%, Electrical Engineer 85%, Language: English 98%, Locksmith 80%, Mathematics: Basic 85%, Medical Doctor 98%/98%, Mechanical Engineer 80%, Navigation 98%, Optic Systems 80%, Pathology 95%, Pilot Airplane 98%, Pilot Automobile 85%, Pilot Hovercraft 98%, Pilot Jet Aircraft 90%, Pilot Motorcycles 98%, Pilot Race Cars 95%, Pilot Water Scooters 98%, Radio: Basic 95%, Read Sensory Instruments 85%, Robot Electronics 90%, Robot Mechanics 90%, Surveillance Systems 85%, Weapons Engineer 80%, Weapon Systems 95%.

Secondary Skills: Art (sketching) 75%, Astronomy 40%, Card Sharp 59%, Dance 70%, First Aid 75%, Language: Japanese 65%, Mathematics: Advanced 85%, Play Keyboard 65%, Photography 75%, Prowl 45%, Research 90%, Sewing 80%, SCUBA/Advanced Swimming 90%, Swimming 90%, TV/Video 60%, Writing (journalistic) 65%, W.P. Blunt, W.P. Energy Pistol.

Appearance: A petite, dark-haired girl with short, bobbed hair, Rhiannon would be described as cute rather than stunning. When not on duty she dresses in a bohemian style, with a tendency to deep reds and purples. She wears a white Team Shakespeare uniform with a red dragon motif.

Occupation: Full-time, government sponsored and controlled international crime-fighter and super agent.

Weapons: When in combat situations, she uses a sonic disruptor she was allowed to take from the Foundry. It is identical to the one described on page 98 of the **Heroes Unlimited™ RPG**. The safety on her weapon can only be deactivated by a thought-order from her neural computer (see below).

Vehicles: She has access to a number of government vehicles if she wishes them. She shares her friend Emma's love of motorbikes and owns a number of customized bikes designed to go fast, as well as one designed for combat (see below).

Body Armor: Hermia has Kevlar woven into her uniform (A.R. 10, S.D.C. 50) to help protect her.

Other Advanced Technology: Hermia has implanted within her brain a nanotech neural computer. This computer is a web of nanotech implants spread throughout her brain and which enhances her mental functions and operates in many of the same ways as a normal computer. The neural computer can store images and sounds that Hermia sees and hears as files, greatly increasing her memory recall. She can also use the calculating power of the neural computer to increase her basic and advanced mathematics skills to 98%. In terms of computing power, the neural computer is as powerful as a top of the line laptop computer and can perform any function that such a computer could manage. This includes connecting to other computers through a built-in wireless

connection. She can connect to the computers aboard Ganymede II, and it is from here that Hermia often monitors the team while on missions. Ganymede II can also link to the computers at the Globe and Hermia will often use these to inform her teammates of weaknesses and vulnerabilities of their foes.

As well as this, most of her equipment can be accessed through her neural computer. She can switch on her ear mike radio receiver and transmitter with a thought, as well as two recording devices built into her belt. She regularly carries a bug detector which issues the warning directly into her mind when it spots anything. The same goes for her radar detector, dosimeter, heat sensor, explosives detector, motion detector and the microphone section of her built-in psychological stress evaluator. She can also patch into her bike's engine readout package.

The neural computer also allows for control over some of her biological systems. She can switch her senses on and off at will and a software package can inform her of any biological problems as soon as her body gives even the slightest sign. Other software can give her language translation (though she needs to download the more obscure languages when she needs them). Hermia even has her favorite hacking software set up inside her head, so she can try to infiltrate any computer with an active modem connection with only her neural computer. Her own head is protected by software of her own design that also alerts her to any attempt to access her systems. To access many of the more complicated or time-consuming systems, Hermia needs to be stationary and switch off some of her senses (usually her sight) so she can concentrate on the virtual screen within her head. She can be quite vulnerable when concentrating on her neural computer, but it remains an invaluable tool to her.

Money: She's paid £40,000 a year, and uses it to upgrade and improve her motorbikes. She also has a collection of old maps which she spends time and money seeking out.

Hermia's Bike

Model Type: Triumph Daytona 675.

Class: Light Combat Vehicle.

Crew: One.

A.R. 14

S.D.C.: Main Body: 425.

Speed:

Driving: 210 mph (336 km) with a cruising speed of 100 mph (160 km).

Statistical Data:

Length: 6 feet, 7 inches (2.01 m).

Width: 2 feet, 4 inches (0.7 m).

Weight: 417 lbs (188 kg).

Cargo: None.

Market Price: Not for sale.

Weapon Systems:

1. Forward-facing Mini-Missile Launcher Pod.

Primary Purpose: Assault.

Damage: 5D6, 1D6x10, or none.

Rate of Fire: One at a time or in volleys of 2, 4 or 8.

Maximum Effective Range: 1 mile (1.6 km) or ½ mile (0.8 km).

Payload: 8 (usually 4 high explosive, 2 plasma, and 2 smoke missiles).

2. Rear-mounted Oil Slick Spray.

Primary Purpose: Defense.

Damage: None.

Rate of Fire: Equal to the combined number of hand to hand attacks of the driver.

Maximum Effective Range: 6 feet (1.8 m).

Payload: 3

Special Weapon Features: Forces a Piloting roll for any vehicle that passes over and makes contact with the road surface.

3. Special Systems of Note: Self-Seal/Inflating Tires, Engine Read-out Package, Super Fuel Efficiency.

The Globe – Team Shakespeare’s HQ

The Globe is Team Shakespeare’s home and base of operations, sitting on the northern bank of the Thames opposite its namesake and predecessor. A ring-shaped building, with an outer shell of glass and steel, it looks like a cross between the original Globe theater and the Gherkin. The glass has a greenish tinge and its position next to the river means it has an ever shifting pattern of light and reflections playing over its face. While it appears decorative though, the glass coating has been magically tempered by mages from the Queen’s Own Warlock Guard (a secret British Army unit specializing in magic since the 17th century) to be virtually impenetrable. There are several hidden weapons systems located around the perimeter of the building, including a massive gravity generator that can pin an enemy to the ground, a gas ventilation outlet that can flood the area with knockout gas and a swarm of nanotech machines that can infiltrate a person’s blood system and wreak havoc on their body from the inside.

The Globe is only three stories high and the ground floor is made up of office space, used mainly by the team’s managers, the PR team and all the other support and household staff who attend to the team’s every need. While they are protected by the same defenses that run throughout the Globe, there is little to distinguish these from everyday work offices. The first floor is the team’s operational level, as well as a communications room that allows the team to stay in secure contact with each other at all time. There is a records room (most often maintained and upgraded by Cordelia and Hermia), and three laboratories (one DNA/forensic analysis lab, and one chemical analysis/production lab, one ballistics/firearms analysis lab).

The central hole is used as a launch pad for the Ganymede machines, and it is an awesome sight to see the massive Ganymede II lifting out from the Globe on its VTOL rockets.

Hook, Line & Sinkers

Most of these hook, lines and sinkers are designed with American heroes in mind as a way of getting them into contact with these British heroes, either as allies, rivals or antagonists.

Ties of Empire

Hook: During their patrols the heroes start discovering an unusual number of gang members displaying super-powered abilities.

Line: When they investigate this upsurge in powers, they discover that the gang members are all using a super-power bestowing drug that is being peddled by a large criminal organization. As their investigation continues, they will uncover the location of the drug-making facility on a Caribbean island.

Sinker: As they arrive on the island and attempt to find where on the island the drugs are being manufactured their arrival is noticed. One of the masterminds behind the scheme has bought his way into

the government of the island and he exploits the island’s Commonwealth connections to get Team Shakespeare to fly out and deal with this ‘foreign super-powered disruption’.

G.M. Note: Provide a clue that allows the heroes to realize they were led astray.

The Restless Dead

Hook: During a fight, one of the heroes, preferably a mystically inclined one, sees the ghostly figure of a dead friend. The friend quoted a line of Shakespeare and disappears.

Line: The ghostly figure appears a few more times, each time coming out with a different line. When they track down where the lines come from, they will realize that each line refers to a different member of Team Shakespeare. The friend’s ghost seems to be pointing them to a meeting with Team Shakespeare. (This will work best if they have met before.) Meanwhile, mystical research will find that reaching the friend’s spirit is impossible (except at the moments you let it) as something unusual is occurring with the spirits of the dead.

Sinker: When they get in touch with Team Shakespeare, Prospero will (in his own vague way) reveal a creature has begun attacking and eating souls from its home on the astral plane. In order to combat it, it will be necessary to physically travel to the astral plane. This is normally beyond even Prospero’s abilities but in a few days’ time, the summer solstice will, at Stonehenge, provide enough power to reach there. The heroes will be invited to join in the attack on this unusual and dangerous supernatural monster.

Too Close To Home

Hook: A new mystery villain attacks the family of one of the heroes. If the heroes are present or nearby, they may be able to intervene, otherwise one or more relatives of the hero may end up in hospital or worse.

Line: Although the villain is new, there are elements in his costume that suggest he is related to another, more familiar villain; a suave English criminal, famous for his sense of honor in battle. Attacking family is contrary to his M.O., but he is the only clue available. Unfortunately, a deal has just been struck between the British Home Office and the U.S. State Department to let Team Shakespeare come over, capture and deport the villain.

Sinker: The heroes have to get to the villain before Team Shakespeare do, maybe holding them off while they get the bad guy to talk, while also fending off more attacks against their loved ones. When they find him they discover the mystery bad guy is the son of the honorable villain from the future. Thrown back in time by an accident in the future, he has decided to save his father from his enemies by abandoning the sense of honor he felt doomed his father. Though the heroes probably haven’t faced the father before, the son knows they will clash in the future which is why he targeted them using information revealed about them after their retirement/deaths. With this information, they, maybe Team Shakespeare and possibly the father (who hates the lack of honor in his son’s tactics), can track down the son.

Splashdown

(Note: This adventure requires an alien character.)

Hook: The news reports an alien spacecraft has come plummeting down from orbit and splashed down in the mid-Atlantic. Many groups, both heroes and villains, are heading out there to investigate.

Line: The alien player will have a special reason to join the race for the ship as it has some special significance to him. Either it is one of his race’s craft, or belongs to an enemy of his people. The

team will be among the first to arrive but will see Ganymede II will already be on the scene and will be deploying the rarely seen Ganymede VI (a submersible design). They will have to work together to fend off the villains as they arrive, whilst also trying to discover what happened to the ship.

Sinker: The ship is sinking, slowly, so there is a time limit on their investigations. It is also a trap, set up by an enemy of the alien player's species, to lure out any of the hated species that might be living amongst the humans. If overwhelmed, the alien bad guy will retreat to his ship in orbit, but depending upon how far the crashed ship has sunk, the only way out may be to follow him there.

Secrets of the Past (with Dinosaurs!)

Hook: The heroes find themselves attacked by dinosaurs.

Line: Once they have defeated the prehistoric beasts, the heroes will presumably try to uncover where they came from. Some detec-

tive work will reveal that the creatures arrived in a packing crate sent over from England and they will eventually be able to pin the transport on a fake company operating out of a large country house in the heart of the English countryside.

Sinker: The country house used to belong to an eccentric professor, who was also a member of Operation Stratford during WWI. The dinosaurs the heroes have been fighting were ones he found in South America and shipped back to be used as terror weapons during the First World War. Since his death, the house has been sold several times, most recently by a super-villain who wishes revenge upon the heroes. He has discovered the cryogenically frozen dinosaurs and is using them as weapons against his enemies. Whenever the players use a modem-connected computer to track down the country house, there is a 65% chance a sleeper program designed by Hermia will flag up their interest in the place (or anything to do with Operation Stratford) and set Team Shakespeare on a parallel investigation.

Contemporary High-Tech Robotics (and Other Gadgets)

Optional Material for Heroes Unlimited™ and Other Settings

By David F. Smith

I've been playing Palladium games since 1987. Occasionally, I like to go back to some of those first books I owned and compare them to what we have today and laugh. Heck, looking at what constituted 'advanced' technology with regards to computers in the early Rifts books are woefully antiquated in today's world, much less decades or centuries hence. Now (2013), science and technology is threatening to catch up to and perhaps eventually surpass what was imagined in the nineties with regards to cybernetics, bionics and robotics.

Here's a projected timeline of bionic, robotic and computer progress that will be outdated by the time it is published.

2013: Human trachea can be grown on demand.

2014: Agricultural robots.

2015: Robots start becoming common in South Korean and European households.

One third of the U.S. fighting force will be robots (drones).

Light exoskeletons become available to infantry troops. Somewhat heavier tethered units become available to logistics personnel.

2017: Robots that care for the elderly.

Robots performing low-invasive surgery.

2018: Robots routinely carrying out surgery.

First bio-engineered organs become available.

Human kidneys can now be grown on demand.

Super computers routinely process 1 exaflop or more of data.

2019: Household robots with full use.

2020: Most South Korean and European households have robots.

Heavy untethered exoskeletons become available to the infantry.

2021: Nano-robots.

2022: Intelligent robots that sense their environment, make decisions and learn, used in 30% of households and businesses.

2030: Robots capable of performing at human level in most jobs.

Supercomputers capable of processing 1 zettaflop or more of data.

2034: Robots performing most household chores.

2035: First completely autonomous robot soldiers.

2038: Even the most complex organs can now be grown on demand.

2050: Robot brains that execute 100 trillion instructions per second will start rivaling human brains.

What I present here is based on bleeding-edge research and technologies that are either just becoming available or will be available in the next 5 to 25 years. I have used the fictional company called ICS to deliver these advancements for use in your contemporary games. These items are all suitable for use in Heroes Unlimited (low-end technology that is commercially available), Ninjas & Superspies (the most experimental and speculative stuff would be available to agents right now) and even Beyond the Supernatural (maybe only available to those with government connections or as creations of the Genius or even Psi-Mechanic classes).

Special BtS2 Note: Characters from the Genius P.C.C. with an I.Q. of 14 or higher are revolutionary thinkers capable of imagining, designing and then building technology that is more advanced than the currently available cutting-edge technology. However, even for these advanced and creative individuals it can be difficult to make the future a reality now. Designing technology that is 5 years more advanced has a -10% to design and -15% to build. Technology that is ten years more advanced has a -20% penalty to design and a -30% penalty to build. Technology that is twenty years more advanced is -40% to design and -60% to build. The most that they can push the envelope is by 25 years which has a -50% penalty to design and a -75% penalty to build. Needless to say, it can take many tries and hundreds if not thousands of hours in order to advance new technology.

Of course, such research and development will take millions of dollars, a support staff and appropriate facilities in order to succeed. Unless the character is independently wealthy, this will require large corporate or government support. This also means that the end result will belong to someone else and that the character will not be able to

do whatever they want with it. A character might retain more control by soliciting private investors or by getting a “Kickstarter” program going.

I would also encourage G.M.s of BtS2 to explore the possibilities that various technological items can provide to the horror and supernatural genres. While many of the things presented in this article will be great assets to player characters, there is potential for mischief from Gremlins or possession by Tectonic Entities. There is also the possibility that this technology could be used by antagonistic shadow government agencies, rival Geniuses and Psi-Mechanics, as well as smarter supernatural beings using items provided to them by human dupes.

Looking at these fledgling technologies, it is very easy to see how a world like that of Beyond the Supernatural became the world of Chaos Earth and Rifts.

The costs for the below items are based on research I conducted but I intentionally erred on the expensive side. It is very likely that the prices will come down with time. Feel free to adjust them down as the times change. I also tended to provide more capability to the experimental technologies available today to account for future developments and to postpone the obsolescence of this article.

Integrated Cyber Systems (ICS)

Integrated Cyber Systems (ICS) is a high-tech research and development company that was started by the prodigal genius Matthew Knight when he was 15 years old as a way to manage his high-tech patents and royalties. He started by designing software but soon moved onto hardware as well. Eventually, his focus shifted over to robotics and artificial intelligences where it has remained for over twenty years now.

In addition to robotics and artificial intelligences, ICS conducts bleeding-edge research into electronics, computers, cybernetics and genetics. Their research has medical, commercial, industrial and military applications.

The company is headquartered in Toronto, Ontario, Canada but has expanded its operations across Canada and the United States (especially New York, Detroit, Chicago and California). It also has a presence in England, Germany, Japan, Hong Kong and Australia. It is looking into expanding into other markets as well.

Traditionally, the company has focused on research and developing proof of concept prototypes before selling the rights to produce the new technology to other companies. Recently, ICS has started getting into manufacturing and distributing its goods directly, although a lot of products are still being licensed to other manufacturers. Some of the biggest customers for ICS products have been the militaries of various NATO and allied nations.

ICS is just one company pioneering these new technologies. Others are already competing and many more will rise in the coming years. Competition will lead to better and more diverse products at lower prices.

Commercial Electronics & Computers

Laser pen: A pen with a laser pointer that doubles as a rangefinder (range is 500 feet/152 m). It also includes an LED light. Of course, it also functions as a high quality pen. Cost: \$100.

Helix Watch: This advanced watch comes with a digital face that keeps track of the time and date, and even shows the current temperature and can indicate compass direction. It is charged by the everyday motions and actions of the wearer. It includes a hidden USB, a high tensile string that acts as a digital measuring tape (also works as a garrote) and an emergency tracking beacon that can be activated by pressing a panic button. The watch includes LED lights around

the face that can work as a mini-flashlight. The watch is also good underwater up to 656 feet (200 m) Cost: \$250.

Avatar 1.5 ‘Super’ Phone: Basically equal to the most advanced phones available on the market. It is completely compatible with most commercial systems and all other ICS systems. One of the phone’s most compelling features is the advanced, interactive, voice controlled OS that is highly customizable. Advances in technology allow for a new model every two years. Usage fees vary depending on the service provider. Comes standard with an enhanced camera add-on (twice the megapixels as the built-in camera), nightvision camera add-on, a smart card reader, a laser projection keyboard and a video screen projector. Cost: \$500. Each add-on costs an additional \$100.

Matrix Tablet: The Matrix is a cutting-edge tablet that gives laptops a run for their money in terms of performance. Cost: \$400. Comes with all the same add-on features as the Avatar phone for an additional \$100 each.

Oracle Glasses: These glasses can include sunglasses or prescription lenses or even prescription sunglass lenses. They include an HD video camera, nightvision camera, stereo microphones, ear buds, and data projection nodes (data is displayed on the lenses). A wireless system allows the glasses to view e-mails, texts and other data. They can also transmit data they see and hear to be stored or processed. The glasses respond to voice commands. They are ideally used in conjunction with either the Avatar phone or Matrix tablet. Cost: \$1,000.

Cyber-Net Quantum Super Computer: This super computer uses quantum qubits instead of traditional binary bits to make calculations. It is a massive system that fills an entire gymnasium. It also processes information at about 12 exaflops (by 2018, this figure will be out of date, by 2030 it will be laughable). The cost of this computer system is \$500 million. While they can be built on demand for that cost, it is more common to rent processing time on one of these for a cost of \$500,000 an hour. It costs about \$3.5 million a year to operate in electrical costs.

Medical Systems

The largest and most profitable branch of ICS is its medical research department. This department makes a wide variety of medical implants and prosthetics. Most of them follow the traditional model of mechanical appearing devices but recent breakthroughs have produced carefully bio-engineered organs. Research into regenerative technology may eventually create the possibility of bio-engineered limbs as well.

Therapeutic Exo-Systems

All exo-systems are extremely lightweight, with artificial muscles with computerized controls that automatically respond to the motions of the user. All of them are designed to prevent over-extension of limbs.

Power grip gloves: Gloves like these were originally developed for use in space. They are also useful for mechanics who want to avoid getting carpal tunnel syndrome. These gloves effectively double the wearer’s grip strength. They look like ordinary gloves plus a battery pack that wraps around the lower half of the lower arm. Battery life is good for eight hours. Weight: 2 lbs(0.9 kg). Cost: \$2,000 for a pair (half for single glove).

Exo-arm: Worn as a harness around the injured arm, the exo-system supports the weight of the arm and allows the wearer to lift and carry normal loads. It has a base strength of 8. Battery power is good for eight hours. Weight: 12 lbs (5.4 kg). Cost: \$4,200.

Upper Body Exo-system: Includes both arms and back support. Has a strength of 10 and battery power is good for eight hours.

Weight: 23 lbs (12 kg) total (the wearer doesn't feel the weight unless battery power dies). Cost is \$14,000.

Exo-Leg: A brace designed to support a single leg for walking. It provides a basic P.S. and Spd of 8. Battery power is good for eight hours. Weight: 14 lbs (6.3 kg) Cost: \$19,000.

Lower Body Exo-system: This system include both legs, hips and back support. A backpack can easily be attached, transferring its weight to the exo-suit instead of the wearer. Provides a base P.S. and Spd of 10. Battery power is good for eight hours. Weight: 27 lbs (12 kg) total (the wearer doesn't feel the weight unless battery power dies). Cost: \$30,000.

Full Exo-system: This system provides full support for the wearer from the neck right down to the soles of the feet. The system can support the weight of a backpack without the wearer feeling the weight. Base P.S. is 15 and base SPD is 10. Battery power is good for eight hours. Weighs: 50 lbs (22.5 kg) total (the wearer doesn't feel the weight unless battery power dies). Cost: \$50,000.

Augmentation Options: All stats can be increased to a maximum of 20 at a cost of \$2,000 per point.

Power Enhancement: Double the battery power duration for \$10,000 and triple it for an additional \$20,000 (\$30,000 total).



Artificial Implants

Bionic Ear: This is essentially a hearing aid that is implanted inside the patient's ear. It can restore hearing to one ear per implant. To an adult who has been deaf their whole life, this implant will only provide a sense of sound. The implants are best for deaf children or adults who have recently lost their hearing. They can even be used while swimming and recreational diving. These implants are found entirely inside of the patient's ear and can only be detected by looking into the ear. Cost is \$45,000 per implant, which includes medical costs. Two implants provide stereo hearing and better quality of sound.

Retinal Implant and Goggle Prosthetic: A dual system that requires a special retinal implant that receives information from an external camera, usually built into some sort of glasses or goggles. They provide full color vision. It can restore sight to either one or both eyes (requires two implants). Cost: \$30,000 per implant.

Retinal Nerve Implant: Actually a group of retinal and visual nerve implants designed to restore vision to a blind eye (or eyes). Does not require any external systems such as glasses but does require an intact eyeball. Restores full color vision to the damaged eye. Cost: \$55,000 per implant.

Bionic Eye: A complete replacement eye and nerve implant. Completely replaces lost vision and can provide vision to those who have been blind their whole lives. This is the only option for someone whose eyeball has been destroyed by whatever means. This implant can only be detected by a doctor conducting an eye exam. Cost: \$100,000 per implant.

Artificial Heart: Full artificial hearts were originally intended as a stop-gap measure for terminal patients awaiting a donor for transplant. These new artificial organs can now provide an alternative to transplant organs and allow patients to function indefinitely. Imposes a permanent -2 to a character's P.E. attribute. Cost: \$100,000.

Artificial Lung: A newer and still experimental implant that oxygenates the blood in the same way that a real lung does. It is implanted in the patient's chest where the old lung used to be. Imposes a permanent -2 penalty to the characters P.E. attribute. Cost: \$100,000 per implant.

Artificial Pancreas: Essentially an implanted insulin pump and blood sugar monitoring system. It doesn't actually produce insulin. Instead it releases insulin into the system as required. The pump needs new insulin to be supplied every six months. Cost: \$35,000.

Artificial Bone: A material that can be injected or molded onto existing bone or created in a lab before being implanted. These artificial bones are as strong or stronger than human bone. Cost: A simple graft can cost as little as \$1,000. Complete replacement of a bone can cost \$20,000 to \$120,000. The smaller bones are the more expensive ones to make.

Artificial Teeth: Ceramic teeth that are every bit as effective and cosmetic as human teeth. \$4,000 each.

Artificial Hip: A traditional but high quality hip replacement. Uses the most advanced materials and with the right physical therapy, can lead to a fairly active life. Permanently reduce the characters Spd by 1 per implant. Cost: \$45,000.

Artificial Knee: A traditional but high quality knee replacement. Uses the most advanced materials available and with the right physical therapy, can lead to a fairly active life. Permanently reduce the character's Spd by 1 per implant. Cost: \$70,000.

Artificial Limb Prosthetics

Bionic Hand: This is the most basic hand available from ICS. It has four fingers and a thumb that are capable of basic gripping tasks, and even single finger pointing. The fingers are sensitive enough to pick up an egg without crushing it but strong enough to perform most everyday functions. The hand is somewhat difficult to control, is not very dextrous and looks like a robot hand. Skills requiring a lot of manual dexterity are all but impossible (-60%) and take twice as long. S.D.C.: 10. And it's not very cheap either at \$11,000.

Neural Interface Hand: This hand is controlled by implants in the patient's nervous system. It has nearly full range of motion and dexterity. In addition to being able to hold and pick up objects, the hand can hold and shoot a gun or type on a keyboard as well as most other tasks. Its strength is equal or slightly greater than most human hands. Still looks like an artificial hand. Penalty for skills requiring manual dexterity is -40%. S.D.C.: 15. Cost: \$20,000.

Neural feedback upgrade: Only available for the neural interface hand. It provides a better sense of touch to the hand. Penalty for skills requiring manual dexterity is reduced to -15%. Cost: \$10,000.

Synthetic rubber skin cosmetic upgrade: Available for both kinds of hands for \$1,000 each.

Neural Interface Arm: Much like the hand above (and in fact, including the hand above), this arm is controlled by impulses from the brain through the body's nerves. The patient controls it the same way he would a natural arm. The arm is rugged and strong as well as

allowing a full range of motion and dexterity. P.S. and P.P. both start at 8. S.D.C.: 25. Cost: 60,000.

Augmented Upgrades: P.S. and P.P. can both be increased to a maximum of 20 for a cost of 2,000 per point. Only available for the Neural Interface Arm.

Synthetic rubber skin cosmetic upgrade for an arm is \$2,000.

Artificial Foot: A basic foot that allows for walking and even limited running. Imposes a permanent -1 to SPD per foot. S.D.C.: 10. Cost: \$5,000. Cosmetic synthetic rubber skin upgrade costs \$1,000.

Artificial Leg: A basic leg designed for day to day walking and even limited running. It's no good at leaping or jumping however. P.S. and SPD both start at 8. S.D.C.: 40. Cost: 50,000.

Bionic Leg: A more robust leg capable of not only fast running but also of leaping and jumping. The muscles of this leg are a combination of air muscles and electroactive polymers. Starts with the same P.S. and SPD as the artificial leg but can be upgraded at a cost of \$2,000 per point to a maximum of 20. Base S.D.C. is 50. Cost: \$90,000.

Synthetic Rubber Cosmetic Skin: \$1,000 for a foot and \$2,000 for an entire leg.

Bio-Engineered Organs

These organs start with a bio-rubber and bio-plastic scaffold on which tissue is grown using stem cells harvested from the patient's spine. There is no chance of rejection because of this. It takes about a week to grow an organ from scratch. The total process costs \$300,000 per organ but each organ works just as well as the real thing. Organs that can be grown include hearts, livers, lungs, pancreas, bladders, spleen and the trachea. These organs don't have the same attribute penalties that artificial organs do.

Other parts such as skin, nose and an outer ear can also all be grown from scratch for a cost of about \$12,000 each. A full face can be grown from scratch for \$120,000. Blood vessels can also be grown as needed.

These prices are because the technology is still very new and will probably drop to 10% of their current cost after a decade or so.

The next step

Work on elastic nanotube muscles, artificial bones, bio-engineered blood vessels and skin will allow for the creation of fully realistic bio-system artificial limbs. These limbs will have a complete range of touch and senses and will start with 10s for their base attributes. They will be ungradable up to 30 each at twice the usual cost. Base cost for these limbs will probably be close to \$300,000-\$500,000 each. The price will eventually drop down to 10% of that once the technology matures. At this point, people may start buying limbs as a form of enhancement, not just for medical replacements. Also note that these types of limbs would have no penalties when used.

Gene Therapies

Life Extension

It is possible to increase the expected life span and quality of life for aging individuals using a remarkable, new gene therapy. When the therapy is successful, it has a strong likelihood of increasing a human's life expectancy past a century. For individuals who eat right and exercise regularly, they can feel like a hardy fifty when they reach ninety.

The therapy isn't always successful however. It takes a minimum of four months, after which a character rolls percentile and must roll under 8% for the therapy to work. If it doesn't take then the therapy continues for up to a total of sixteen months. After each month,

the chance of the therapy working increases. The chance of success is equal to twice how many months the therapy has been going on for. So after five months the chance of success is 10% and after six months the chance is 12% until after 16 months the chance is 32%. If it hasn't been successful after 16 months, it will never work, though even this failure will result in adding 1D10 years to the individual's expected life span. Any interruption in the therapy of longer than a month will result in a failure of the procedure. The therapy is most effective when it is begun in vitro. Starting one month after conception, the therapy provides a 2% chance of success, going up for the entire nine months before birth. Then after birth, the therapy can be continued for an additional sixteen months, with the last roll having a 50% chance of success.

If the therapy is a success then it will increase the expected life span of the individual to 90+5D10 years (for an average of 115-116 years). If the individual eats right, then add one D10. If they exercise regularly, add another D10. If they've never smoked and never drank alcohol (or drank very rarely) then add yet another 1D10. If someone does all these things and their body is properly maintained with the most advanced available medical technologies then the expected life span could be as high 180 years with a high quality life right up until the last ten years.

Cost: This therapy is new and highly experimental. It costs one million dollars (and no refunds for failed procedures). The price is likely to drop to as low as 10% of that after a few decades of development.

Commercial Systems

Helios Quad-Copter

This remote control device is basically shaped like an X with four helicopter blades at the end of each point of the X. The quad-copter is only about a foot across and less than six inches (15 cm) tall. It easily fits inside of a backpack. It has a standard remote control. The remote has a range of three miles (5 km) and the endurance of the battery is four hours. They can optionally be controlled by a smart phone. Maximum altitude is 2,000 feet (610 m). It carries a digital video camera which can be viewed on a screen on the remote. A.R.: 6. S.D.C.: 25. Weight: 1 pound (0.45 kg). Cost: \$500 each.

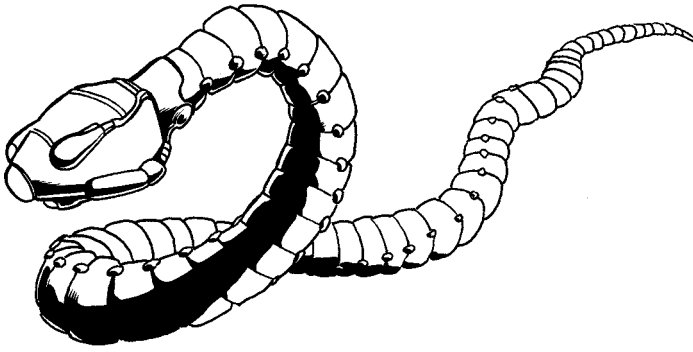
Hyperion Surveillance Blimp

An inflatable, remote control blimp that when deflated, can fit in the trunk of a car, tank and all. It grows to be 30 feet (9.1 m) long once inflated. The body of the blimp itself comes in a variety of colors, including white, blue, black and others. Electric propellers move and steer the blimp. Underneath the body is a couple of HD digital cameras good for surveillance. The cameras can take clear pictures or video from up to two miles (3.2 km) away. The remote control system has a range of 50 miles (80 km). The maximum altitude of the blimp is 2,500 feet (762 m) and the duration of the batteries is 2 hours. Total payload capacity is 35 lbs (15.7 kg). Cost: \$6,000.

Sidewinder Snake Drone

The snake drone is designed to assist search and rescue personnel. It is three feet (0.9m) long and only about an inch (2.5 cm) wide. It's also fairly light, weighing only 5 lbs (2.2 kg).

Much like a real snake, it can slither across the ground, through tight areas, climb trees and swim through (and under) the water. Its head includes a microphone, speaker, HD camera, HD passive night vision camera, heat sensor, laser rangefinder and LED lights.



Snake robots have been in development for decades, making the technology fairly mature in comparison to other robotic systems. That is why they only cost \$1,000 each.

Tarantula Spider Drone

Spider drones are primarily toys although they can fill surveillance functions. While they can't go into all the same places as a snake drone, they can climb vertical surfaces, such as walls, in a way that the snake drone never could.

These tiny drones are only six inches (15 cm) across and can vary their height from one to six inches (2.5 to 15 cm). They only weigh about five pounds (2.2 kg) total. This makes them very portable.

The spider drones have the same array of optics and sensors as the snake drone which drives its price up to \$1,000.

Avatar Remote Humanoid Drone

These drones are intended to go into hazardous situations and perform work in place of humans. They can be controlled with either a remote computer system or with a virtual reality suit. They have a full range of human motion, being able to do anything from climbing stairs and ladders to typing commands into a computer.

A.R.: 10

S.D.C.: 100

Height: 6 feet (1.8 m).

Weight: 200 lbs (90 kg).

Attributes of Note: P.S. 10, P.P. 10, Spd 10.

Power System: Advanced high-density batteries are good for 12 hours.

Cost: \$500,000 each but worth it to save human lives.

Fodder Humanoid Simulator

These drones are essentially a more advanced form of the crash test dummy in that they can realistically simulate human flailing. They can also go through a range of routine human motions to test things such as clothing. They don't really do much otherwise. They are the same size and weight as a person. They have an A.R. of 10 and 50 S.D.C. total. They cost \$50,000 each but can be reused and abused for years.

Virtual Reality Suit

This suit allows a wearer to remotely control a humanoid drone robot. Generally speaking, the transmission range is about 10 miles (16 km). Cost: \$5,000.

Talos Domestic Humanoid Drone

The Talos is the result of over a decade of development in designing a humanoid robot with full human articulation coupled with an

artificial intelligence to allow it to function in a typical household. It is programmed to perform domestic chores, perform caretaker duties, be a companion and perform some emergency functions. It is designed with a custom anthropomorphic face that seems to show human emotion. Still, it only appears to be a human from a distance. Anatomical correctness can be made available on demand.

A.R.: 10

S.D.C.: 100

Height: 6 feet (1.8 m).

Weight: 200 lbs (90 kg).

Attributes of Note: I.Q. 6, P.S. 10, P.P. 10, Spd 10.

Skills of Note: Speak English 50% (limited vocabulary and commands), Literacy 40%, Cook 90%, Dance 50%, Gardening 50%, Housekeeping 70%, First Aid 50%, Basic and Advanced Math 98%.
Combat: Impossible.

Power System: Advanced high-density batteries are good for 12 hours. Plugs into household outlets and takes 8 hours to fully recharge.

Cost: \$1,000,000 each. The price will drop to 10% of that once mass production begins.

Marathon Hiking Exo-System

A simple set of legs designed to help a hiker carry a heavy pack and supplies through the wilderness. The entire rig weighs 77 pounds (35 kg) and straps to the legs and waist of the hiker. The system supports its own weight when in use. When not in use, the exo-legs can be unstrapped from the legs and stowed upright on either side of the rucksack they normally help support. The system can carry 200 lbs (90 kg) without effort from the user. Maximum speed is 6.2 mph (10 km). The battery supply is good for eight hours of constant use. Additional batteries can be carried. Solar panels can be placed on the rucksack to recharge spare batteries as the hiker walks. A.R.: 10, S.D.C.: 50. Cost: \$75,000.

Hercules Light Loader Exoskeleton

An untethered exo-suit that allows the user to load freight. Someone wearing this suit can easily lift and carry 200 lbs (90 kg), even over their heads. Weighs about 100 lbs (45 kg). Power is provided by high-density batteries with 8 hours of power before needing recharging. A.R.: 10, S.D.C.: 100. Cost: \$90,000.

Atlas Heavy Loader Exoskeleton

This is a heavier exoskeleton much like the light loader but it is tethered to provide more power and lifting capability. The weight limit is 400 lbs (180 kg). Weighs about 150 lbs (67.5 kg). Power is provided by the tether so it is effectively limitless while plugged in. A.R.: 10, S.D.C.: 200. Cost: \$150,000.

Chariot Robotic Vehicle Control System

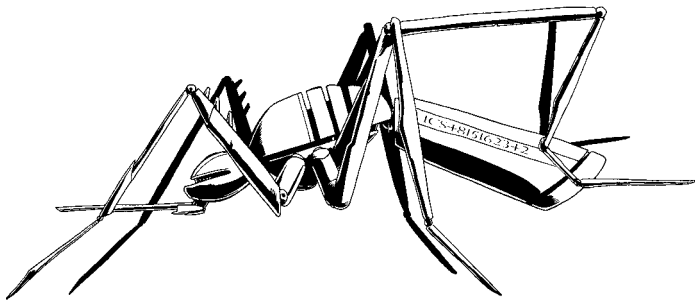
This is an artificial intelligence system and robotic control system that can be built into nearly any car or most any other vehicle, for that matter. The system can pilot the vehicle it is installed in at 90% proficiency. It can also navigate at 90% proficiency. It can follow a pre-programmed course or follow verbal directions. It is not suitable for combat operations and will pull over to the side of the road when faced with a situation it wasn't programmed for. Cost: \$25,000 for most cars. Twice that for other vehicles.

Military Systems

The military systems branch is the fastest growing part of the ICS Company. In the next five years it should pass the medical branch in size and profitability. In fact, military customers have shown interest in products from the commercial and medical branches of the company as well as products exclusively marketed towards the military.

Cybug 1 (Beetle)

This is a combination of organic and electronic technology. Essentially, the hardware is inserted into a beetle larvae and then allowed to grow over it. Additional attachments are added during growth and when the beetle is done growing. The hardware allows a remote to override the bug's motor functions. Thus it can be remotely made to fly or crawl whenever the user wishes. In addition, the bug is equipped with fiber optic cameras and microphones. They live as long as normal beetles (a variety of species are available depending on mission requirements). The range of the remote and surveillance transmitters is about 0.6 miles (1 km). Cost: \$5,000 each, including the remote. Note that while the insect is alive and could be controlled by spells such as summon and control insects, the hardware overrides the motor control and the influence of such magic.



Cybug 2 (Mosquito)

This is a nano-construction that is the size and shape of a mosquito but is actually a tiny robot. It has only the most basic optics and communications capabilities. Its role isn't to spy but to deliver a small payload through its stinger. That payload is most often a tiny tracking implant. The remote control is good for up to 0.6 miles (1 km) away. The tracking implant can be tracked up to 1.8 miles (3 km) away. S.D.C.: Negligible. A single swat destroys it utterly. Looks like a killed insect unless inspected under a microscope. Cost: \$25,000 each.

Sentinel EOD Robot

EOD robots have been in service with police forces and militaries for some time. It was the very first type of robot that ICS mass produced. The Sentinel is the latest in their line of EOD robots. It is basically a square frame that is propelled by four sets of tracks. The track units themselves can be rotated like four mini legs. This helps the Sentinel climb stairs and maneuver over obstacles. Mounted on the frame are a main arm and two manipulator arms. Each arm has its own optics and sensors. In addition, there is a main camera and sensor system as well as three antennas for control and transmission of data. Range of transmission is ten miles (16 km). Optics include passive night vision, infrared and thermal imaging. Sensors include a portable explosives detector.

A.R.: 10

S.D.C.: 200

Speed: 15 mph (24 km). 5 mph (8 km) over rough or broken terrain. Power System: Battery pack with 4 hour active live (good for 20 hours on standby).

Cost: \$45,000.

Mini-Mole Spy Bot

This tiny 'bot is basically a spy camera with tracks. It's about the size of a hand grenade but only weighs a few ounces (5.7 grams). It is made to be tossed over walls and through windows so that the soldier can see what's on the other side without being exposed. It can be controlled from a remote or from a smart phone. The transmission range is only about one mile (1.6 km) and the battery endurance is only 1 hour. They are cheap and disposable. Cost: \$200 for the 'Bot and \$100 for the remote.

Mule Pack Robot

The Mule is a squad and section logistics support system. Its primary role is to carry weight into the field. Initially, this was aimed at carrying the heavy rucksacks of the soldiers but can also carry other necessities such as ammo, heavy weapons, food, water, medicine and other supplies. This particular robot has found a non-military market for those going far off the beaten trail and need a sure-footed way to carry a lot of supplies.

This robot can be controlled by a remote or basic voice commands to its simple artificial intelligence. Generally commands are extremely simple such as 'follow me', 'follow them', 'stop,' 'stay here,' 'go to grid XXXXXXXX,' 'RV here' and 'go to RV.'

The robot can navigate using GPS, homing in on a tracking beacon or other transmission or by following bearings and distances. Or it can simply follow a designated individual or be manually controlled. It has both wireless and manual control systems. It can be controlled remotely from a range of ten miles.

Up to eight fully loaded rucksacks and a pair of 5 gallon (19 liters) water or fuel jerry cans can easily be carried by the mule. In fact, it can carry up to 1,000 lbs (450 kg) of gear without being significantly impaired.

The Mule is a very rugged robot and lightly armored to protect it against fragmentation and small arms fire. This protection does not extend to its cargo however, as it is all carried externally. The mule can carry its complete load over the most rugged terrain, able to go anywhere a real mule could. Coincidentally it's about the same size as a mule. It can walk over ice with little difficulty. If by mischance it should fall over, it is capable of automatically getting back up again.

A.R.: 12

S.D.C.: 200

Speed: 10 mph (16 km). Half that over very rough terrain.

Range: Its internal combustion engine and battery pack (for silent running) can function for 24 hours before needing to be refueled.

Cargo: Can carry 1,000 lbs (450 kg) of supplies.

Special systems: Only basic optical and audio systems. It can be controlled remotely from up to ten miles (16 km) away.

Cost: \$75,000.

Hoplite Infantry Support Drones

The Hoplite is an infantry support weapon that can position a lot of firepower with no threat to human life. Currently the Hoplite is controlled manually or remotely and has no artificial intelligence of its own. Work on developing an autonomous or semi-autonomous artificial intelligence for the Hoplite has been ongoing for some time now.

The design of the Hoplite is fairly simple. It is essentially a small weapons turret mounted on a chassis. The chassis has four track propulsion units that can change their orientation and position. This allows the Hoplite's height to be altered and for the track units to

function as tiny 'legs.' As with the EOD drone, the Hoplite is able to climb stairs and maneuver around difficult terrain.

The turret of the Hoplite is able to rotate 360 degrees and elevate 45 degrees. It mounts a single 7.62mm medium machine-gun and four rocket-propelled grenades. It also includes the Hoplite's optical, sensor and communications array, although there are secondary systems in the chassis. The range of the remote is 10 miles (16 km).

A.R.: 10

S.D.C.: 200

Speed: 15 mph (24 km). 5 mph (8 km) over rough or broken terrain.
Power System: Battery pack with 4 hour active live (good for 20 hours on standby).

Damage: 7.62mm machine-gun: 5D6 per round or 2D4x10 for a 20 round burst. RPG: 3D4x10 to a 30 foot (9.1 m) area.

Range: 7.62mm machine-gun: 3,000 feet (914 m). RPG: 1,000 feet 304.8 m).

Payload: 7.62mm machine-gun: 200 rounds. RPG: 4. Must be reloaded by a human.

Cost: \$60,000 complete with weapons.

Gryphon Reconnaissance Drones

These are unarmed aerial reconnaissance drones. They have a single jet engine built into the tail section and a battery of optics, sensors and recording devices. It is capable of flying and conducting detailed surveillance from as high as 50,000 feet (15,240 m).

While its primary role is reconnaissance, the drone can mount some weapons. This includes three short-range missiles under each wing and one medium range missile on either side of the fuselage.

These drones are remotely operated but have a semi-autonomous artificial intelligence that can carry out surveillance missions without human intervention. The artificial intelligence has no control over the drone's weapon systems however.

A.R.: 12

S.D.C.: 400

Speed: 500 mph (800 km).

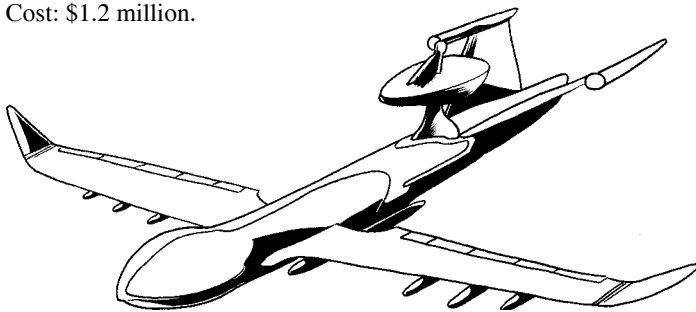
Range: 1,500 miles 2,400 km).

Optics: Includes telescopic with digital enhancement, passive night-vision, infrared, ultraviolet and thermo-imaging. All are capable of high definition still and video recording from 50,000 feet (15,240 m) high. Resolution is good enough to identify individual dimples on a golf ball.

Sensors: Passive and active radar systems.

Communications: Laser-boosted, encrypted digital radio using a frequency hopping burst transmitter. Range is 1,000 miles, even under the worst conditions. Twice that if conditions are ideal.

Cost: \$1.2 million.



Drake Attack Drones

While the Gryphons can carry weapons and launch attacks against targets, the Drakes are optimized for it. They are faster and stealthier than the Gryphons and are capable of VTOL landings. All weapon payloads must be internal in order to avoid compromising the drone's stealth characteristics.

The drones carry four medium and twelve short range missiles as well as four bombs, all in concealed housings on the aircraft's fuselage and wings.

The Drake has the same sensors, optics and communications features as the Gryphon so that it can carry out its attack missions. It also comes equipped with an array of advanced targeting systems and combat computers to enhance its ability to deliver its deadly payload. Unlike the Gryphon, the artificial intelligence has access to the drone's weapon systems and can carry out all mission parameters without human intervention.

Two jet engines are built into the wings of the Drake. Four VTOL thrusters are concealed in the aircraft's undercarriage until needed. The drone very much resembles a larger stealth bomber but with the dimensions and weight of a modern jet fighter.

A.R.: 14

S.D.C.: 600

Speed: 700 mph (1,120 km).

Range: 2,000 miles (3,200 km).

Optics: Same as the Gryphon plus optical targeting systems and laser guidance systems (+4 to strike).

Sensors: Same as the Gryphon plus radar and thermal targeting and combat and targeting computers.

Communications: Same as the Gryphon but boosted to 2,000 miles (3,200 km) even in sub-optimal conditions.

Cost: \$2.1 million.



Legionnaire Light Combat Exo-Suit

An exo-suit, armor and tactical carrying system that appears to be only slightly more bulky than an armored soldier already is. Overall height is increased by only four inches (10 cm) from the boot slippers and helmet. This light suit provides full body augmentation for the infantry soldier. Strength of the suit is equal to an augmented P.S. of 20 and SPD is increased to 20. Fatigue rate is reduced by half. Armor protection provides an A.R. of 18 and 300 S.D.C. (if using the rules from pages 49-53 of *The Rifter*® #51, the A.R. is 24 and the S.D.C. is 450 and the trauma rules still apply). Typically includes a tactical carrying vest and large rucksack. Battery power is good for 24 hours. Total weight of the system, including tactical vest and rucksack, is 100 lbs (45 kg) – does not include anything that might be carried in the vest or rucksack. Cost: \$200,000.

Modular Combat Helmet

Used with both the Legionnaire and Centurion suits or can be used on its own. Includes the following features:

A Radio, wireless modem and satellite relay communications capabilities. The communications suite includes all the functionality of a top of the line smart phone.

Radio systems include a sub-vocal throat mike (built into the body suit). Also includes a mike in the faceplate.

The helmet muffles sudden and loud noises harmful to the human ear while also being able to enhance the wearer's sense of hearing. It is also capable of making audio recordings.

Includes a Shot Detection System that can locate the direction and approximate distance to a shot fired. It can also provide data on the type of caliber and munitions used. This information is fed to the suit computer and visor (the visor will even show a red arrow in the direction of the shot).

GPS with link to the ballistic visor.

Ballistic Face Shield:

This visor slides down over both the ballistic goggles and the ballistic face mask, providing additional protection to the face. This visor is not to see through on its own and instead relies on a series of high definition cameras to provide a picture. The image provided is seamless and it is impossible to tell that it isn't a clear view of the outside despite there being no direct line of sight to the outside when the face shield is down. Slides to the top of the helmet when not in use.

The cameras can take still or motion recordings.

Wireless link to the suit computer. Has USB connections as well. Independent battery good for 24 hours of constant use.

Has a number of optical enhancements (passive night vision, infrared, ultraviolet and thermal imaging).

Laser rangefinder.

Ballistic Goggles:

Virtual HUD Display:

The goggles can receive text information, digital scope data or be set for either split screen or screen within screen display.

Wireless link to the suit computer. Has a USB connection as well. Independent battery good for 24 hours of constant use.

Ballistic Face Mask:

Includes built-in gas mask and plug-in ports for water and air.

Cost: \$11,000 (is included in the price of both the Legionnaire and the Centurion).

Centurion Heavy Combat Power Armor

A more robust system than the Legionnaire exo-suit, the Centurion is a full environmental power armor that provides even more protection and power to the individual soldier. The suit's environmental system has a one hour oxygen supply. Armor Rating is now considered to be 'natural' armor which means a roll must meet or beat the A.R. in order to damage the armor (not the wearer). Also, trauma rules (if used) work a little differently in that the power armor has a x4 multiplier (which means damage from attacks that do less than 60 points of damage do not harm the wearer of the power armor).

The hybrid power system allows the batteries to be used when stealth is desired and the wave turbine recharges the batteries during battle and when stealth isn't essential.

A.R. of 15

400 S.D.C. (500 S.D.C. if The Rifter #51's armor rules are used) total.

Strength: Equal to a Robotic P.S. of 30.

Speed: Equal to a speed of 44 (30 mph/48 km). Reduce fatigue from running to 20% of normal.

Height: Adds 6 inches (15 cm) to the wearer's height.

Weight: 300 lbs (135 kg).

Power System: Hybrid electric and wave turbine internal combustion engine. Power system is good for a total of 24 hours before requiring refueling. The power system fits on the back and looks like a square rucksack (so a regular rucksack can't be worn). There are back mounted options that can still be used however. The batteries are good for 8 hours on their own. The generator can use most types of petroleum fuel.

Cost: \$500,000.

Daedalus Flight Pack

This pack can be mounted on the back of the Centurion power armor, taking the place of the armor's normal power system. Its primary components are a pair of propeller fans, a pair of wings, two mini-jets under each wing, a turbine-electric hybrid engine, a parachute, an emergency parachute and a fuel tank. Because of the Daedalus' bulk, no other back system can be used with it. The propellers, which are in vertical housings behind the pilot's head, provide the main upwards thrust of the pack. The wings appear to be mounted at the shoulders and fold down to the sides when not in flight. The mini-jets provide bursts of speed as required. The pack is controlled by a combination of the power armor's movements, voice controls and a one-handed manual control. Speed is normally 80 mph (128 km) but can be boosted to 160 mph (2,438 km). Maximum altitude is 8,000 feet. The mini-jets have enough fuel (separate from the main system) for 30 minutes of operation, which doesn't have to be consecutive. The flight pack has enough fuel for 2 hours of flight and 8 hours of ground operations. The pack can be dropped off the back of the Centurion and a remaining battery pack will power the suit for an additional 4 hours. The wings and propeller units each have 100 S.D.C., while the pack has 200 S.D.C. Destruction of any of the pack's components eliminates the ability to fly. If it is already airborne, it will crash unless the parachute is deployed.

Cost: \$1,500,000.

Triton Aquatic Pack

A propulsion system for the Centurion to allow it to conduct amphibious operations. It mounts on the back and can be dropped off when no longer needed. It works with the Centurion's existing power supply, supplementing its fuel reserves. It is capable of a surface speed of 50mph (80 km) and a submerged speed of 40 mph (64 km). It has a maximum depth of 1,000 feet (304.8 m). It adds four hours to the Centurion's power supply and two hours to its oxygen supply.

Cost: \$250,000.

Spartan Anti-Armor Missile Launcher

This weapon system is tucked back behind the Centurion power armor when not in use. When activated, the launcher swings out over the power armor's shoulder where it can be fired by the wearer. To reload, it returns to its position on the power armor's back where an automatic reloader loads the next missile. Two spare missiles are carried by the system. When up against main battle tanks, doctrine calls for four Centurions to engage simultaneously to ensure a kill.

Damage: 2D4x100 S.D.C.

Range of 3.8 miles (6 km) with a blast radius of 100 feet (30.5 m). It has a maximum altitude of 14,765 feet (4,500 m), making it capable of taking down low-flying aircraft.

Payload: Three missiles total.

Bonus: Targeting system bonuses provide a +4 total to strike stationary targets or +1 to strike moving targets. Cost: \$750,000 (only sold to the militaries of Western and NATO-aligned democracies).

Phalanx 7.62mm Shoulder Mounted Mini-Gun

This weapon is mounted on the shoulder when in use and swings back to be stowed out of the way when not in use. It is an extremely effective anti-personnel weapon that is also useful against soft-skinned vehicles (including helicopters).

Damage: 5D6 per round but only fires in 20 round bursts that do 1D6x10 to all targets in a 10 foot (3 m) area across or 2D6x10 damage to a single target.

Range: 3,000 feet (914 m).

Payload: Carries a 1,000 round disintegrating belt stored in an ammo drum on the back.

Gladius 25mm Auto-Cannon

This is a 25mm anti-material rifle that has had its barrel shortened in order to be portable by the Centurion power armor. Like the Spartan and Phalanx, it is fired from the shoulder and stored on the back when not in use. Even with a shortened barrel, the weapon is nearly as long as the power armor is tall. It can be set for single shot or a rapid three shot burst. It fires the same sorts of ammo as the 25mm Bushmaster. It is effective against lightly armored vehicles.

Damage: Armor Piercing rounds do 2D4x10 per round and reduce the target's effective A.R. by 3 points. A three round burst does 4D6x10. Effective against helicopters and low-flying fixed wing craft. High Explosive incendiary rounds do 1D4x10 damage to a 10 foot area. A three round burst does 2D6x10 to a 10 foot (3 m) area.

Range: 6,000 feet (1,829 m).

Payload: Carries 30 rounds in an ammo drum on the back.

Javelin Gun Pod

This is the standard issue firearm for the Centurion power armor and is carried like a conventional assault rifle. It is a 7.62mm medium machine-gun with an optional over/under mounted weapon attachment that typically has a multi-shot, 40mm grenade launcher but can also be swapped out for a 25mm grenade launcher (greater payload) or shotgun (much greater payload). It also includes an advanced multi-optic scope and targeting suite.

Damage: 7.62mm machine-gun: 5D6 per round or 2D4x10 for a burst of ten rounds. Or it can spray an area ten feet (3 m) across with 20 rounds doing, 1D6x10 to all targets in that area. The 40mm grenades do 2D4x10 to everything in a 30 foot (9.1 m) area. The 25mm grenade does 1D6x10 to everything in a 20 foot (6.1 m) area. Magnum 12 gauge slugs do 6D6 damage each and magnum buckshot does 5D6 damage.

Range: 3,000 feet (914 m) for the machine-gun. The grenade launchers have a range of 1,000 feet (305 m). The shotgun has a range of 300 feet.

Payload: The machine-gun uses 200 round boxed belts. The 40mm grenade launcher holds four rounds, the 25mm grenade launcher holds 6 rounds and the shotgun holds 10 rounds.

Bonus: +1 to strike from the scope and laser targeting system.

What the future holds

Fully Autonomous Humanoid Soldier Drone (Project Golem)

Already in the works are humanoid robots that can walk, run, crawl, climb and do push-ups. Combined with advances in artificial intelligence and energy-dense battery systems, it is only a matter of time before fully automated humanoid soldiers are armored up, given assault weapons and deployed on the field of battle. The first ones will be controlled remotely or perhaps with virtual reality systems. Eventually however, they will simply receive and carry out orders just like any other soldier. Golems look like robots.

A.R.: 15

S.D.C.: 500

Height: 6 feet (1.8 m).

Weight: 400 lbs (180 kg).

Attributes of Note: I.Q. 6, P.S. 30, P.P. 10, Spd 22.

Power System: Advanced high density batteries are good for 24 hours.

Combat: If remotely controlled then it is equal to the controller's abilities. Otherwise, it has 3 attacks per melee, and +2 to strike with any modern weapon it is programmed for. Also has a +1 to strike, parry and dodge and a +2 to roll with punch.

Skills of Note: Speak and understand English 50%, Literacy 40%, Radio: Basic 70%, Climb 60%/50%, Prowl 45%, Military Sign Language 98%, Military Etiquette 90%, Basic and Advanced Math 98%, and Land Navigation 70%.

Weapon Systems: None built in but probably issued heavy infantry weapons from medium machine-guns on up. Will be programmed to be able to use most modern weapons. Can also use any of the weapon systems of the Centurion as well as the Daedalus and Triton.

Cost: \$2 million each at the prototype stage. That price should drop to 10% of that once mass production begins.

(G.M. Note: Imagine one of these bad boys possessed by a Tectonic Entity or its A.I. rewired by a Gremlin!)

Building Your Own Robot from Scratch

All sorts of people build their own robots, from hobbyists to engineers. There are kits you can order online or the more enterprising may build everything from scratch. The more you want to do, the more tools, materials and space you're going to need. To build advanced cutting-edge systems, you're either going to have to be independently wealthy or have a sponsor in education, industry or the government. Sponsors are very likely going to have a stake and majority ownership of whatever is created as well.

Detailing rules for how to do that may come later in a future Rifter article.

Chaos Eve

A Rifts® Chaos Earth® Story

By Shawn Merrow

I slumped against the wall devoid of all hope, my helmet laying on the ground next to my dropped rifle. I was not even sure where I was beyond it was some back alley in some small town in Utah, but did that really matter when the world was ending?

I looked up at the mixture of falling snow and ash. "What sick freak thought that was a good combination?" Was I supposed to have my helmet on to protect me from the volcanic ash, or was it radioactive fallout or maybe those funky blue lines that had appeared? It would probably only buy me a few more hours of life at this point anyway.

I guess the best way to explain this would be to go back before the world became even worse than the most horrible nightmares of Dante could imagine.

* * *

NEMA: Northern Eagle Military Alliance – In 2035, Canada, Mexico and the United States formed the North American Alliance (NAA). It was a treaty that united the three countries as never before. Part of the treaty was the creation of NEMA, an elite para-military agency with jurisdiction over all three countries. Their missions ranged from anti-terrorism to helping with disaster relief.

December 21st, 2098

I cursed my luck as I drove onto the base. A few days before Christmas and I got stuck working on an inspection of all the drones on the site. Sure, I watched the news and the talking heads were worried about a repeat of the Gauda Marta incident down in South America but why did it have to ruin my holiday? Even worse, it was a Sunday and I'm missing some quality time with the kid. Well I should be back with the family in Salt Lake City before Christmas.

At least this gave me an excuse to get my brand new Ford Hawk hovercar a proper workout. It's a joy to drive and only five years of debt. It was worth it for these drives to the NEMA Advanced Drone Testing Facility just over 50 kilometers west of Brigham City. I was supposed to be assigned to a field unit but was able to get this cushy assignment as they wanted personnel with field experience to help in the development of the new generation of drones.

With a light tap, the brakes brought the car to a stop at the security checkpoint. It didn't look like much but with the new super alloys it would take a tank to break through the gate. The site was mostly warehouses surrounded by a four meter wall. We did have a couple labs, a few offices and a cafeteria. The full field testing of new drones was done in Nevada. We did mostly software and basic functions tests here.

"Please place palm on the screen and state your identity please." came out of the terminal as usual in a very business-like woman's voice.

"NEMA Staff Sergeant Jonathan Rider, Drone Verbal Response Testing Division."

The gate slowly lowered down into the ground, but I didn't even get a friendly welcome as I pulled into the site. Would it really hurt to program the thing to say "Hi" or "Welcome, have a nice day.?" Even my toaster is more polite with a happy, "Enjoy your toast." every morning.

While complaining to myself about the lack of manners of modern security systems, I pulled the car into an empty parking space and plugged it in for recharging before heading for the A.I. Communications lab where I helped the eggheads make sure the troops in the field could communicate in an effective manner with the drones. It was mostly boring but it was safe and the wife loved that part. Since this would take two days, I would be sleeping on a cot in the lab tonight as it was cheaper than the nearest hotel.

A blast of hot air greeted me as I opened the door to the lab. "Come on Rob, trying to bring back global warming all by yourself?" I yelled as I looked across the benches for him. That man could get hypothermia on a summer day.

"Over here, Staff Sergeant. I'm in the server room, be out in a minute."

A few minutes later, Rob came out wearing a coat he quickly stripped off. He had his usual friendly smile on his face and gave me a pleasant wave. "I see you got dragged into this boring inspection too." Rob Carlos was a tall, lanky man from Mexico with a Ph.D. from Caltech and one of the smartest scientist on the team. "First step is to do a full inventory of all the drones we have and then confirm their status. The inventory part won't take long but the status checks will take about an hour each. A few techs are supposed to be coming in and should be here shortly."

Over the next hour, the techs came in and we started making some progress. I mainly worked on the inventory and related paperwork. Not only did I have to make sure the drone was here and where it belonged, but make sure it was not missing any internal pieces. The top brass was really worried about industrial espionage. A Silver Eagle Power Armor at another facility was missing half its targeting system parts for a week before someone noticed they were stolen. The rumor is a lead developer ran off to Japan with them.

At least I was over half done by the time we broke for dinner. A big bonus to working at a lab was we always got hot food. They say the field rations are vastly improved over the old days but I still find that hard to believe. A nice steak with a baked potato and salad is the perfect way to end the day.

After dinner, we sat around watching the news special talking about Gauda Marta. I had thought it was a bad idea to loan them a bunch of Chromium Guardsman Power Armors. I did not expect them to massacre a bunch of civilians with them. Sure, they were attacked first but that was a major overkill. The experts are worried this could turn into a full scale war. I doubt that will happen but I didn't see the Cubs finally winning the World Series this year, so what do I know?

After an hour of debating the topic with the others, I went to bed for an early start in the morning. A few minutes after laying down on the cot in the corner of the lab, I was out cold.

December 22nd, 2098

I'm not sure what was more of a surprise, being woken up by the biggest earthquake I ever felt or hitting the floor face first a few seconds later. The shaking seemed liked it was never going to end but was only around a minute. After the shaking stopped, I just laid there waiting for my head to stop spinning.

Rob was the first to start moving around and checking on us. When it was my turn, he gave my shoulder a gentle squeeze, "Hey Sarge, you alive?" With a moan, I replied, "Can I get back to you on that?" before pushing myself up to a sitting position. It seems the worse I had was a broken nose and a headache.

I didn't even have time before another earthquake hit and this one most have lasted for a whole two minutes. The floor was rolling too much to make a run for the door, so I just stayed sitting and rode it out.



“Hey Rob, you lived in California. How big was that?” I asked when the quake finally ended.

“I never felt anything like that but would guess at least a 7+ but that is just a guess.” came out from under a workbench where he had managed to crawl to during the shaking.

With a groan, he forced himself to get up. “I think it would be best for all of us to get outside before any aftershocks hit. These labs are tough but I’d rather be outside.”

We must have looked like a bunch of drunks returning from a night out as we stumbled our way to the door. The frame was a little warped, causing the door to stick, but we forced it open.

I was the first out and could only let out a groan of despair as I saw what was left of my car. The light pole had fallen right down the middle, leaving it a complete wreck. An aftershock shook the ground as if to add emphasis to my moan. “I just got it six months ago. It was a treat to celebrate my new assignment.”

“Sorry for your loss Sarge, but rest assured, it’s in a better place now. We need to check on the base to see if anyone is hurt and then try to find out what the hell is going on.” The professor had a good point but still, my poor car.

I looked around and saw the damage to the parking lot was minor, my car had taken the worst of it. The others looked shaken but no visible injuries.

“OK, I have had the standard field training for disaster relief and helped out after Hurricane Tom hit Miami last year. It may not be an earthquake but close enough for government work.” That brought a lite chuckle from them. We were taught the importance of keeping people calm in the face of a disaster.

I looked at the cars in the parking lot and only saw three others beyond the ones that belonged to our group. I think they all belonged to members of the security team. At least it had happened in the middle of the night when the place was mostly empty. A quick check with my watch implant showed it was 01:16.

Looking at group, I said, “Let’s go to the admin building and check on the security guys since they look to be only others here and see if we can contact anyone.” I really meant: contact Salt Lake City and find out if my family was safe.

It was a short walk over to the admin building and by the looks of it, the site had not taken much in the way of damage. I saw a few broken windows, some walls with cracks in them, but nothing major. One of the members of the security team met us before we even got to the door. The guy looked white as a ghost and scared as hell.

“I’m not sure what the hell is going on but every communication channel is going nuts with disaster reports from around the world. I even saw flash traffic about nuclear strikes in South America. It’s real end of the world stuff!”

We all started asking questions at the same time and must have sounded like a pack of madmen.

“Quiet, everyone! I don’t know what the hell is going on either. I suggest we go to the security room where it will be easier to monitor what is going on. Also, it’s reinforced just in case we get anymore of those earthquakes.”

Over the next hour we watched all the reports that we could pick up. Some of it was through official NEMA channels and other commercial news sites. The world did seem to be ending. I saw reports of earthquakes, tsunamis, storms, volcanoes erupting, tornadoes. It was even worse as it seems at least some nukes had been launched with detonations around the world. The death toll was already expected to be in the hundreds of millions, with it only going to go up.

The shock had become more of a numb feeling before I finally found some news on Salt Lake City. It had been hit hard by the earthquake, with a large number of fires around the city, plus large-scale

power outages, but, so far, the number of confirmed dead was low. That gave me at least a little comfort.

We sat there and watched the world ending all the way to morning without saying a single word that I can remember. It was like we were the silent witnesses to the Earth’s execution and did not want to disrupt this solemn occasion with idle chatter.

This first words I remember hearing were from Rob who suggested we get some chow as it was going to be a very long and busy day. In agreement, we went outside to see ash had already started falling. Guess it was from one of the volcanoes in the Cascades that had erupted, but I had no idea which one.

At least we had our own independent power source, so we were able to make a hot breakfast. We ate like kings since at least one part of this day should be good. In a morbid way it was like we were eating our last meal. In the middle of cleaning up, Colonel Richardson surprised us all by walking wearing a in a torn uniform with what appeared to be blood stains in a few places.

I served with him back when he was a Captain during the rebuilding of the Panama Canal after it been severely damaged by terrorists using ships planted with explosives. I had never seen him with such a look of despair on his before, even after the attack on our main supply depot. He was in charge of the live-fire testing of the drones, spending most of his time in Nevada.

“Glad to see you’re still here. I came from Brigham City to get some of the drones to help rescue survivors trapped in the rubble. Also, I need some of the security drones to help the local police. I told the rest of the staff I could contact to meet me at the Police Station. I want this list of drones fully loaded in one hour. I also need you all in full combat gear as there are already outbreaks of violence. I know some of you are worried about your families but we have to let them be taken care of by their local emergency personnel while we help the people here.”

It only took us thirty minutes to get everything loaded and geared up. At least with the full environmental body armor on we didn’t have to breathe the ash anymore. The smell still filled my helmet. I went to grab one of the old conventional assault rifles but the Colonel ordered me to get an LGR-360 energy rifle and a full load of explosive grenades, and got really evasive when I asked him about why I needed an energy rifle. We also took the time to clean out the armory and cafeteria pantry as we had no idea when we would get to come back. I also grabbed all the first-aid kits on site, plus what little we had in the medical locker. It was just for minor injuries, so it was not much.

As we pulled out, I finally got a clear view to the North and my jaw just dropped. It seemed to be some distance but I could see this bright blue glow and what could only be giant, glowing lines coming out of the ground. I saw the reports about these blue lines appearing but it’s another thing to actually see them with my own eyes.

“Colonel, what the hell are those and how many are there?” I asked over the com system as he was in the back trying to establish contact with someone higher up in NEMA.

“I have no idea. Not many, just some to the North and South of us but none where we are going.” came back his distracted reply. I could hear him working on the communications computer, so it sounds like whatever message he got was encrypted.

I was right, as just a few minutes later he said we had a message that all NEMA and US Armed Forces were to go to full alert, we were at DEFCON 1. What the hell? Even during the Cuban Missile Crisis it had not gone that high. It really has hit the fan and what was left of the brass after the destruction of the Pentagon by a tsunami was expecting it to get even worse.

It was rough driving on the road as the quakes had caused a lot of rockslides I had to drive around. It was normally a nice mountain

drive but now it was just an accident waiting to happen. I'm glad there were only four vehicles in our little convoy but it still took over two hours to get to the city with all the snow and ash on the road. I could see the glow of fires out of control a good twenty minutes before that.

As we hit the outskirts I saw the first police roadblock. They were well armed, looking very determined to keep out trouble. A relieved look came to them as we pulled up and they quickly let us through. It was creepy driving through the streets, with buildings collapsed, others on fire. I could see firefighters, with civilians helping, doing their best to deal with the fires. The majority of people I saw though were in obvious shock and had no idea what to do. I asked the Colonel if we should stop but he insisted we head to the main Police Station to set up our command post.

I thought the checkpoint was bad, the area in front of the station looked like it was ready for war and some of the people manning the perimeter looked like they had been in combat. I started to ask what the hell had happened but the Colonel cut me short and said I would find out inside.

The head of our base's security detail, Staff Sergeant Brown, walked up as I got out of the APC.

"Glad to see you guys are OK. I hope you brought us the gear we needed."

I pointed towards the three cargo trucks. "Not sure it's what you needed but we brought just about anything useful that was not nailed down."

Colonel Richardson waved for me to follow him inside along with the professor. "I have something to show you two that you will not believe even after seeing it." I started to remove my helmet but then was quickly ordered to keep it on. I could see that Rob was giving me a puzzled look even with his helmet on, but all I could do was shrug my shoulders back.

He led us to a room with two armed guards outside wearing gas masks. On the inside was the very first monster I ever saw. It was laying on what must have been the table from an interrogation room. It had to be almost three meters tall with dark gray skin with some sort of slime on it plus torn up wings growing out of its upper back. It looked extremely strong with some nasty claws that I quickly noticed were drenched in blood and gore. From the chunks missing out of its torso it looked like it took a lot of hits to kill it. I was glad that I had my helmet on and sealed as just looking at it was enough to make one queasy, and I sure didn't want to smell it.

We got a minute to take this in before the Colonel spoke. "This thing was part of a group that attacked the city last night about an hour after the first quake hit. They killed a lot of people before the police, with some help from the NEMA personnel living in the city, were able to drive them away. The one on the table was the only one we were able to kill. This is why I wanted all the weapons. We don't know if its harmful, so we are following standard HAZMAT protocols. I would have told you about this but did not want you thinking I had gone mad and locking me up for my own good."

I nodded at the logic of that last comment. It was Rob who spoke first. "I can't argue with you on this as even seeing it with my own eyes I'm still having a hard time believing it's real. Is this some sort of alien and does that mean what is going on to the world is part of some attack?"

"It looks like some kind of demon to me or some other monster straight out of hell."

Rob turned towards me. "I didn't take you for the fire and brimstone type Sarge."

"Well, with the reports coming in from around the world it makes as much sense as an alien invasion." It was Rob's turn to just shrug his shoulders.

"I sent pictures of this to Cheyenne Mountain where the President is but have yet to hear anything back. I have contacted a few other commanders that I know well and they also had reports of creatures showing up out of nowhere and attacking anything that moves. The top brass has not responded to any of their reports either. I hate to say it, but we may be on our own. I have the best training that NEMA had to offer, I even went to the US Army War College but they never covered this." Richardson said as he pointed at the thing on the table.

Sergeant Brown broke the gloomy mood with more bad news. "Colonel, I need you out here. We got a group of civies about to start a riot if they don't get some answers, and some of them are armed."

"Come on you two, let's go out and protect the grateful mob. The neat trick will be figuring out what to tell them. Any chance did either of you take a class in creative writing or BS speeches in college?"

"Sorry sir, I took basket weaving instead." was my dry reply.

That got a laugh out of him and made him sound more like his usual self. "Well, I guess we will work with what we got."

There must be at least over a hundred people on the perimeter, and all they were missing was the torches and pitchforks. That would be easier to deal with than the assortment of rifles and shotguns I saw. At least it was old tech that our body armor could stop with no problem.

"QUIET!" The helmet's built-in loudspeaker made sure they all heard him. It worked as they all stopped yelling and turned towards him.

"I know you are all very worried about what is going on. The news is full of horrible events around the world and we have had our own share here." An aftershock struck as if to punctuate the Colonel's statement. "I can't give you answers on everything that is going on but you have my promise we will protect this city with every resource we have. We will need some help from you. I want anyone with emergency services, medical, military or police experience to come forward as we are very shorthanded. The rest of you, please go home and take care of your neighborhoods. If you see any problems, please let us know, so we can come and help you."

It seemed to work as the crowd started dispersing a bit and some looked to be coming forward to volunteer.

I heard the Colonel's voice come in over my com. "Well, how do you rate my BS?"

"Grade A boss, grade A." was my response with a slight laugh.

I spent the next hour getting our people and the police equipped with the supplies we had brought with us. As the day progressed, it was actually getting darker as more ash and who knows what built up in the atmosphere. The falling ash and snow combination damped the noise, creating an eerie silence. It was getting to people as they were getting startled by the smallest noises. I walked up behind a police officer on guard duty who had fallen asleep on watch. The bastard shot me in the head. Good thing it was an old 9mm pistol. I was never so happy to have this advanced ceramic armor but still knocked him on his ass.

Lunch was spent in our APC as that was sealed and gave me a chance to take off my helmet to inspect it. A point-blank shot to my head and all I had was a smudge on the paint job.

As soon as I was done eating it was time for my first assignment. I will be taking two Pup Scouts and four Spider Probe drones to the site of a apartment complex that had collapsed with orders to help out the fire department personal. I was also bringing along three Combat Hounds for security.

I had to hoof it but it was only eight blocks away. It was a three-story building with twenty apartments on each story. The records said it was a sixty year old building. It was a mess. The first floor had a partial collapse which caused the second floor to tip over. It looked

like the weight of the third floor could cause a complete collapse at any moment.

I had no trouble finding Lt. Dalmás who was in charge of the scene. The guy sure looked like a firefighter, he even had the standard issue mustache most of them wore. I tied the scout drones into his fire engine's on-board computers and at his direction, sent them into the first floor to look for survivors. They already got everyone out of the upper floors but could not reach some places on the first due to debris.

The first six searches found nothing, but the next one found the body of a woman that been crushed by a support beam. It wasn't till the last apartment that we found survivors. A closet had protected two kids who must have hidden there during the quake. The firefighters immediately started working on getting them out while I used the Pup Scouts PA to keep the kids calm and let them know help was on the way. They told me their parents were in bed. I sent a Spider Probe to check on them but found the bedroom empty but some blood on the window frame. I got one of the Police Officers to start looking for the parents.

It took over ninety minutes of painfully slow work to reach them. It was a nice feeling to see the kids being pulled out safe and sound. It made me hope my family was OK as I was still unable to get through.

At least I had good news for these kids. Their parents were pulled out earlier by some bystanders and had been transported to the hospital. It was nice to see someone smile again after I gave them the news. I got them a ride with the police, and I headed back to the station for my next job.

The temperature seemed to be dropping even lower than it was this morning. Also seemed to be more ash falling. It sure was a miserable day. It was afternoon but darker than the middle of the night. At least it was keeping most people inside, out of trouble. A few more days of this ash and the hospital is going to be full of patients sick from respiratory problems.

I was two blocks from the station when the monsters struck again. The first sign of trouble was the sight of a large hole being blown out of a building by a missed shot from an energy weapon. "Dam it! I told the idiots to watch their shots as these weapons were more powerful than what they were used to!"

I immediately double-timed it. "Colonel Richardson, looks like we got trouble. I will be there in a minute." I unslung my rifle, making sure the safety was off. I put the Combat Hounds into attack mode with them assuming a triangle formation in front of me.

It was a good thing too as one of them came charging straight out of the darkness at me a few seconds later. I did not even have a chance to raise my rifle before it was hit in the chest by three plasma blasts. It hit the ground with a satisfying thud as smoke rose from the large, gaping hole in it's chest. I was impressed each of the drones had scored a perfect bullseye. The sound of increasing fire told me it was time to get moving.

A block away I saw what looked like eight of the creatures attacking the checkpoint into the police station. They were doing a good job laying down fire but there was already two bodies on the ground that I could see. The radio was pure chaos as calls for help were mixed with screams from those losing it.

I got behind a car, brought my rifle up while ordering the drones to attack at will. I aimed at the head of the nearest and took my first shot, but at the last second its wing got in the way and only blew a hole through it. The look it gave me did show that I had got its attention. A shot from the grenade launcher put an end to its bad mood.

The drones, with the help of reinforcements, put a quick end to the attack. I put down one more with a head shot that didn't miss this time. We still had five dead and twelve injured with three having suf-

fered major injuries. Wish these things would stay in whatever hell they were coming from. If this keeps up I hate to see what it will do for morale. I mean, how do you deal with having to fight monsters that look like they came straight out of hell with it looking like the world had become that?

It got my answer to that last question much sooner than I expected. I was walking to get my next assignment and saw him just standing by himself staring at the sky. He looked to be in his twenties. I'm guessing still just a rookie on the force. The look on his face spooked me but before I could say anything he pulled his service pistol stuck in his mouth and blew the back of his head off. I barely managed to keep from filling my helmet with vomit, and still took a second to keep from choking on it. I'm knew this won't be the last time I see something like this.

The fact I could just walk away after seeing something like that worried me. Even worse, it took me several minutes to realize it was the same guy who shot me in the helmet. I hope that it worried me was a sign that I was not going insane yet. I just have to get through this madness so I can see my wife and daughter again. If Beth loses her dad it won't be by his own hands.

The next assignment was to provide security at the local high school. It was being used as a shelter since it had backup power. It also had facilities to feed a lot of people. The Colonel wanted more people there as they were expecting a large crowd for tonight's dinner. I just hoped we don't get any extra dinner guests.

They gave me a squad of six police officers with NEMA gear and ten Combat Hound drones. The main entrance was the only one I had to worry about securing. The others could be locked, so no one could come in through them.

I had a plan by the time we arrived. The drones would walk the perimeter, while I and the police officers secured the cafeteria. I had two on each entrance to the cafeteria and two more for the kitchen entrance. I would walk the cafeteria itself to make sure things stayed calm.

It was still an hour before they were supposed to start serving food but already plenty of people were here. Some of them visiting with each other and a few just shy of a mental breakdown. I made a note to keep an eye on them. It was surprising how many waved or smiled at me as I walked around. I guess when the world is going to hell, the sight of someone in full combat gear can be comforting. At least they were not asking a thousand and one questions that I had no answer to.

All was normal till the building shook from thunder. The weird thing was it was a bright purple flash that lit up the windows. I told the guys to hold their positions while I went to take a better look. I got outside just in time for another bright flash and loud boom. The bottom of the ash cloud was being lit by purple lighting for as far as I could see. It was actually beautiful to see the arcs of light reflect off the clouds. They didn't seem to be hitting anything, so after a minute of enjoying the view I went back to my patrol and told the others it was just a storm.

The mood of the crowd during dinner made every funeral reception I've been to look like Mardi Gras in comparison. I could see that a lot of them were already suffering from PTSD, and many more had just plain given up hope by the looks on their faces. I had no idea what to do about morale other than some bad standup comedy that would be more likely to start a riot. You bomb at one open mike night and your frat-mates never let you forget it.

I did come up with one idea and went looking for the cook in charge. The good news was he said they were planning a Christmas party at the school, so they had enough pies in the freezer to give everyone a treat. It wasn't a miracle but I did see some smiles when

they started putting the pies out. As it was staying calm, I was able to rotate the security detail, so everyone was able to get a hot meal. At least the rest of the night went well and I was able to get some sleep with some medication from the medic.

December 23rd, 2098

I would like to say I woke up bright and early but that was only half true. The ash had taken a break from falling but the dark storm clouds still kept it very gloomy. The aches in my body were more than a simple cup of coffee could cure.

A quick check of the updates from NEMA showed that most of the world was doing even worse than us. There were large chunks they could not even get solid data on. Also, those freakish blue lines that appeared all over seemed to be causing all sorts of problems, from EM interference to claims they were tearing holes in time and space. Everything has gone insane when official reports start looking more like science fiction.

I was really starting to get worried about the lack of news on Salt Lake City. It wasn't that far from us but we were getting very little information on what was going on there. I hope things calmed down soon, so I could go to my family.

The first job of the day was to take a truck back to our base. The Colonel thought we might be able to move the mini-nuclear reactor into town and at least partially restore power. It should work and was designed to be portable, so it should not be too hard to move.

The drive up to the base turned out to be even worse than the last trip. The truck was able to get around the landslides, plus the cracks in the road from the earthquakes, but it sure was annoying. While they loaded the reactor, I made one more sweep for any useful supplies but we had gotten everything the first time. I took one last sad look at my car before we headed back to town.

After dropping the reactor off with the engineers, I went out on patrol. It was like the day before with everyone staying inside out of the weather and ash. It was afternoon and I still had to use my helmet lights to see any distance. I was really starting to miss daylight. I had a sick feeling it was going to be some time before my next bright and sunny day.

At least the rest of the day was nice and quiet. I pulled guard duty at the high school again for the dinner crowd. It went just like last night minus the purple lightning storm. I was even able to snag myself a piece of pecan pie, my favorite.

They say it's quietest before the storm, but why the hell do they have to be right so often? I was in the APC working on a report of the last few days' events when another quake struck. It seemed to be no big deal so I went back to work. A minute later, a much stronger quake hit and shook the whole vehicle for at least a minute. I just got back yet again to my report when what had to be the largest noise I ever heard came from the North. It was so loud that I put my helmet back on in a hurry to rush outside to see if someone had dropped a nuke nearby.

I saw no sign of a mushroom cloud but with this ash, it wasn't like I could see far anyway. I kept hearing explosions from the North and all these new quakes seemed to be coming from that direction. It wasn't till morning that we found out that the Yellowstone Volcano had erupted with its full fury, like we didn't already have enough ash.

With a heavy sigh I went back into the APC, finished my report and got some sleep.

December 24th, 2098

I woke up from a deep, medicated induced sleep to see the sun would not be making an appearance at all this morning. The ash-fall

was coming down hard and heavy again. Even with the headlights on I could only see about 9 meters in front of the parked APC.

With a sigh I sat down in the driver's seat and pulled out my smartphone. With a few quick taps of my finger I pulled up pictures of my wife and daughter. I was supposed to be spending Christmas Eve with them, not stuck here. I even managed to get my little angel that hot new doll with the advanced artificial intelligence. It walked, it talked and cost me a month's pay. My wife said I spoiled her but she was the only daughter we had or would have. The delivery had gone bad so my wife was unable to have anymore kids. If I wanted to spoil her a bit that was my prerogative.

I was so lost in thought that I did not even hear the Colonel enter the APC, not until he put his hand on my shoulder. "Don't worry Staff Sergeant, I'm sure they are OK. With luck, things will calm down soon and you will be able to go see them in a few days."

The Colonel went back to get the latest reports from what was left of the NEMA command structure. The sound of a deep sigh that arose from him a few minutes later got my attention. He said all contact had been lost with Cheyenne Mountain. A lot of units in the Midwest were no longer reporting in anymore. There was talk of some units on the East Coast under the command of General Sawyer that were still operational but that was a long ways away.

The Colonel just slumped on his chair. "I hate to say it but looks like we may be on our own. I have repeatedly asked for help but have gotten no answer from anyone on when that might happen. I talked to General Wilson of the Utah National Guard in Salt Lake City and he just keeps telling me to secure this location and await further orders."

He turned towards me with a sad look on his face. "I will be honest that what I said earlier about your family was more based on hope than fact. I really don't know what is going on down there but the General seems to be keeping details of the situation from me. There are even rumors on what is left of the net of some sort of sickness spreading through the city. I have no idea what is true but that is what I really know."

After a minute, he pulled himself back fully up in his chair and I could see some of that spark of his old self return. "We are supposed to stay put but if you want, I will give you orders to carry a report to General Wilson under the pretense that we are having radio problems. With the EM interference that is not too far from the truth, so go see how your family is doing. I think we can survive a day or two without you. I will give you permission to take one of the squad cars since itchy trigger fingers are less likely to take a shot at a police car."

"Thank you sir. I will grab my family and bring them back here. I will also try to get you some solid answers on what is really going on down there." I got my gear together plus my report for the General and stepped out in what had to be 30cm of ash/snow mix. I'm glad the house we were renting was a new one as many older buildings are going to start collapsing under all this crap.

It didn't take long to secure the squad car and get on the way. It wasn't far but with the low visibility, it was going to take way longer than normal to get there. The car's thermal imager for the windshield was of no real use under these conditions.

It took me over two hours to get to Ogden, the next major town to the South. The orders came in handy as I was just waved through a checkpoint and sent on my way. It was that way with all the small towns I hit. The one exception being Layton, since I did not see any signs of life as I went through it. The place gave me the creeps, so I did not even think about stopping to see what was going on.

It took four hours to cover just a little over eighty kilometers but I finally hit the outer edge of the urban sprawl around SLC about the same time I hit a well guarded checkpoint. It even had two Chromium Guardsmen assigned to it. I showed them my orders and was

given directions to the Wallace F. Bennett Federal Building where the main HQ was. The funny thing is they were very adamant I was to go straight there and not wander around the city. I tried to find out why but just got an angry glare with an order to get moving. Whatever was going on had them under a lot of stress.

The drive through the city showed it was under lockdown. I saw armed police and troops everywhere. I wondered if they had monster attacks too. I hit six roadblocks on my way to the HQ, and had to show my orders every time before being allowed to move on. They looked ready to start shooting if I did anything they did not like the look of. I was worried that I did not see a single civilian on the way in, but maybe they all had been ordered to stay inside.

This Federal building was a nice open design with lots of windows; it even has some nice artwork in front of the building. I found it in the past to be one of the more nicer looking government buildings. The heavily armed troops around it today sure weren't helping the aesthetics any. I even saw two companies of Mastiff Robots guarding the place.

I was given instructions on where to park and even clearer instructions to leave my weapons in the car. I wasn't happy about that but this was not my unit, so I followed orders I most no matter how stupid.

It was a quick walk back to the building. The General was supposed to be in a conference room on the third floor. The place was awfully busy with most people being in uniforms. Seeing a line for the elevator, I took the stairs.

After wandering around for a little bit on the 3rd floor, I finally found the office I was supposed to report to. I also saw why I had to leave my weapons in the car. The place had been shot up by a guard two days ago after having a nervous breakdown according to someone I asked in the hallway.

The General's adjutant accepted my report and gave me directions to yet another room to wait in for my new orders. I hoped they had some coffee in the waiting room as I really needed a caffeine boost.

On the bright side I saw a friendly face in the waiting room. It was nice to see Staff Sergeant Grayson or Nelly as she insisted her friends call her. She was a tall, attractive woman with roots going back to Germany from what I remember. I was on her SAR team in Miami after Hurricane Tom.

She walked over to greet me with her usual warm smile. "I had no idea you were in Utah. I'm sure glad to see you are OK." We walked over to some empty chairs in the corner after grabbing a cup of coffee. "It's nice to see you too. I had a few close calls in the last few days but otherwise, still in one piece."

I filled her in on my transfer to the test site and what my last few days had been like, but not sure that she would not look at me like I was crazy if I mentioned the monsters. Nelly said she had been on the way to Las Vegas for a NEMA conference on Search and Rescue when the plane had diverted to SLC. The last few days had been helping the locals run the rescue operations.

Sitting my empty cup on the table next to me before staring at the ceiling. "As soon as I'm done here, going to grab my family and head back to my unit." She gave me a puzzled look before replying. "Weren't you told the General has placed the city on lockdown due to some strange illness that has appeared? There has been bizarre bursts of radiation around the city, hundreds are sick, with some already dead and it seems to be only getting worse. We had riots but the General declared Martial Law with everyone ordered to stay inside unless they had good reason to be outside. I doubt you will be allowed to leave the city."

I could only stare at her in shock for at least a minute. Well at least now I knew why so little news was coming out about the city. I

started to ask more about the illness when a Captain of the National Guard walked in looking for me. "Staff Sergeant Rider, we replied to your commander by radio and for the time being, you are ordered to stay in Salt Lake City." Nelly was right about that at least.

"My family is in the city, can I go visit them, sir?"

"Sure, don't see any problem with that, just don't try to leave and give me the address before you go."

I think he was surprised to see a smile on my face but I was finally getting to see my wife and daughter. I don't care what else was going on, that was more than enough to make my day a lot better. I gave him the info he wanted, said my goodbyes to Nelly and got out of there as fast as I could.

On getting into the car, I punched my address into the GPS without even thinking about it, so the error code caught me by surprise. I was only getting a signal from one satellite. "Damn!" Well, I guess I would have to figure out my own route. At least it wasn't very far to my place and it was easy to find. Out of curiosity, I hit scan on the radio, but the only thing on was notices from the Emergency Broadcast System telling people to stay inside plus other messages on what to do in various situations. I noticed nothing yet on monster attacks.

It's a very strange and creepy feeling to drive through a major city with almost no traffic at all. They did have snow plows out trying to keep the major roads clear. Saw a large number of checkpoints, also a few places that looked like they had saw riots. I was relieved to see the lights on at my house when I pulled up.

I actually just sat there in the car for a few minutes. What the hell? I was nervous about what to say or do. "Hey Honey, how is the apocalypse? Is dinner ready?"

I got out of the car and walked up to the door. I decided to ring the bell even though it was my house as I did not want to spook them by just barging in. It seemed to take forever but a few seconds later, the door opened and Juliet just stood there staring at me. Of course what, an idiot, I still had my helmet on. I pulled it off and wrapped her up in the tightest hug I had ever given in my life.

"Jon, I thought I would never see you again." she said in between sobs as she returned my embrace.

I could have stayed like that for hours, but feeling Juliet shivering, I moved us into the house and closed the door. I immediately started looking around for Beth. "Don't worry, she is taking a nap. The poor girl has been worried sick about her dad, she has hardly slept at all the last few days. It's been a few hours, so why don't you go wake her up and I will fix something for us to eat. I say we deserve a little celebration for us all being together at last."

With a light knock, I opened up her door, she gave me a sleepy look before jumping out of bed. "Daddy!" she screamed, while leaping into my arms. I held Beth tightly to my chest as she sobbed on my shoulder. The poor dear must have just been a knot of pent-up emotions. I just stood there holding her till Juliet called us into the dining room.

I must have had a surprised look on my face when I walked into the dining room. "I know it's a lot of food but I really want to celebrate." Juliet said as she finished getting the plates out. It was a full holiday dinner with all the fixings. Of course, the new food preserving system they came up with for the Mars missions sure made cooking a lot easier. It stays fresh for years, heats up fast enough to make my grandparents' microwave look slow and still tastes great. They had a bunch of this type of food at the school so there should be no problem feeding them for a few months.

As I had enough with being serious, I kept the dinner conversation full of dumb jokes and funny stories from my childhood. I didn't know about them but I was in need of a good laugh more than a talk about the future. With a sigh of content, I put my fork down and just

enjoyed this moment we had together. I was sure it would not last too long.

As if summoned by my gloomy thoughts the doorbell rang. I saw through the security monitor that it was Nelly and she looked rather disturbed. She started talking as soon as I opened the door.

“Sorry to bother you at home but it has gotten really messy in the outer parts of the city. We got riots breaking out over people scared about that disease I told you about. They want all the sick people taken out of the city before they can infect anyone else. We have no idea how they will manage to coordinate this but it has the General worried, and he is reinforcing all the checkpoints in the riot area. I’m on my way to one now but just wanted to let you know what was going on since you’re close to one of the disturbances.” I barely got a thanks out before she was running back to the APC, which took off as soon as she was back in.

As I started to go back in, an explosion sounded in the distance. I rushed back in, putting on my helmet so I could hear what was going on. What the hell? The Federal Building is under attack by some of the National Guard troops.

I don’t know if this some sort of breakdown over the decision on how to handle the sick people or some other problem but I’m sure as hell not keeping my family around to find out. I told Juliet to grab anything important that could fit in the car. I’m going to take them to Brigham like I planned and worry about anything else later.

I wrapped a wet towel around Beth’s head as I took her out to the car, sticking her in the back seat. The poor thing was shaking in fear the whole way. On the last trip I grabbed her favorite teddy-bear and stuck it next to her, and should have grabbed one for myself as I could use a little extra moral support.

I pulled up the map in the car and started looking for an area where I might be able to slip out of the city. All the major roads were covered but there had to some open places as this was a large city. It looked like I would have to go through roadblocks to get to any of those area. Say what you want about the General but he sure knew how to close down a city.

I was able to use the com traffic to get an idea where most of the forces were for a few minutes till they changed the access codes on me. I did get one piece of good news before I was locked out. A guard unit assigned to a sub-division just north of me had joined the attack on the HQ and gave me an opening.

I pulled out with no lights on, heading that way on the side streets. I took my time doing everything I could to make sure I drew neither side’s attention. The car still took a few hits from small arms fire, no idea from whom. At least Juliet was keeping Beth calm in the back. They even eventually stopped jumping every time they heard weapons fire.

I passed easily through the abandoned checkpoint, finally slipping out of the city about an hour later. I stuck to small roads, getting into Layton a little after midnight.

December 25th, 2098

Driving through a ghost town was not my idea on how to spend Christmas Eve. This time I found a building with lights on; some sort of civic center by the looks of it. I parked the car and got ready to get out. “I need to check this out as we need a place to rest for the night. Juliet, I need you in the front seat in case this goes bad. I will give you my pistol if you promise not to shoot me.” That got a tired smile. “No promises, you did leave your socks on the floor again when you left for work.”

I closed the door with her in the driver’s seat and walked up to the front doors. I opened the door to one of the circles of hell, just not sure which one. It looked like a large amount of the population

had taken refuge here, but this is also where the monsters had found them, turning the sanctuary into a killing ground.

I was so distracted staring at the carnage that the first clue of trouble was a black blur slamming into me, the force of the blow sent me sailing in the air over my car and into the front window of the shop across the street. By the time I crawled out of the window display, there was already three of them between me and the car and two more of them pounding on the car.

I linked into the car radio. “Get out of here. Get to Brigham and tell them I think I found the nest of those monsters.” She didn’t question me or hesitate but just floored the accelerator. I have never been more proud of her.

As she pulled out of the reach of the two pounding on the car, I opened fire to get their full attention. A quick burst in the face of the one that I think had given me the flying lesson and I started running down the street in the opposite direction my wife was heading.

A block down, I stopped and fired off a grenade before heading down an alley. I was halfway down the block before one slammed me in the back from behind. I must have been some sight bouncing off the dumpster like that.

I rolled over, wincing from the impact, firing the last few shots from the E-Clip into its stomach as it stood over me. I resumed running down the alley, trying to get some distance while loading a new E-Clip. Damn! One was waiting for me at the end of the alley.

It got the first strike, tearing open the right side of my armor with its claws. I dropped the E-Clip in pain but I was able to slam the rifle butt into its face for a quick distraction before flipping it around to fire a grenade point-blank into its chest.

The blast blew me onto my ass, with several pieces of shrapnel tearing through my arms and legs. At least I killed the thing. By my count, there should be at least two more of them plus who knows how many more lurking around the town.

I loaded a new E-Clip while heading for the next alley. The last two had learned from the others by both dropping from the sky on me. The impact drove me to the ground, knocking my rifle out of my hands. In desperation, I pulled my Vibro-Knife, thrusting it into the lower jaw of the one in front of me, taking it out of the fight.

The other slashed my armor wide open from behind, sending a wave of pure agony through me. I pulled the knife out, swinging my arm to the rear hoping I would hit something important. With a grunt, I heard it hit the ground behind me. The knife was imbedded in its right leg where it seemed to have arteries too.

With a sigh, I picked up my rifle and walked over to the nearest wall, leaning against it before sliding to the ground. My helmet is fogging up. Taking it off, I look up into the dark clouds as ash has started falling again. The purple lightning is back again and I must have just sat there for hours watching it.

Is this how my life ends, in some alley bleeding out through the tears in my armor? A growing light at the entrance of the alley gets me to turn my head away from the sky. What was I supposed to do about the light? I can’t remember if it was go towards the light or stay away. As the darkness claims my sight, I figure it doesn’t really matter anyway.



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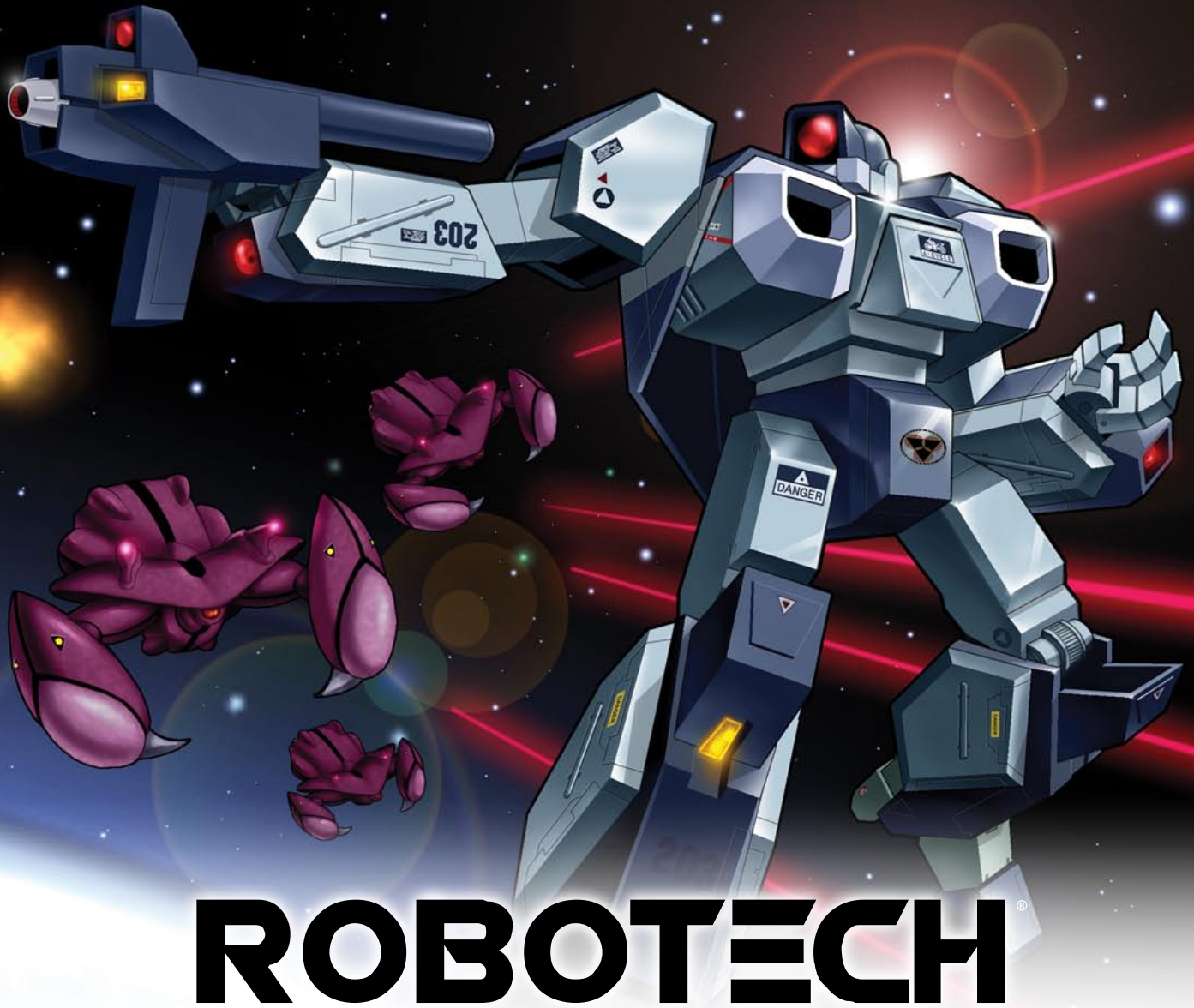
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