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THE

RIFTS®

Your Guide to the Megaverse®

Inside this 96 page sourcebook...

Rifts® Black Market Part Two

Space Pirates – Phase World®

Splicers® Bestiary – monsters and more

Bite of the Snake Men adventure – Heroes Unlimited™

Rifts® short story

Coming attractions, news, & more.

The Heroes Unlimited™ RPG – Celebrating 30 Years of Heroic Wonder

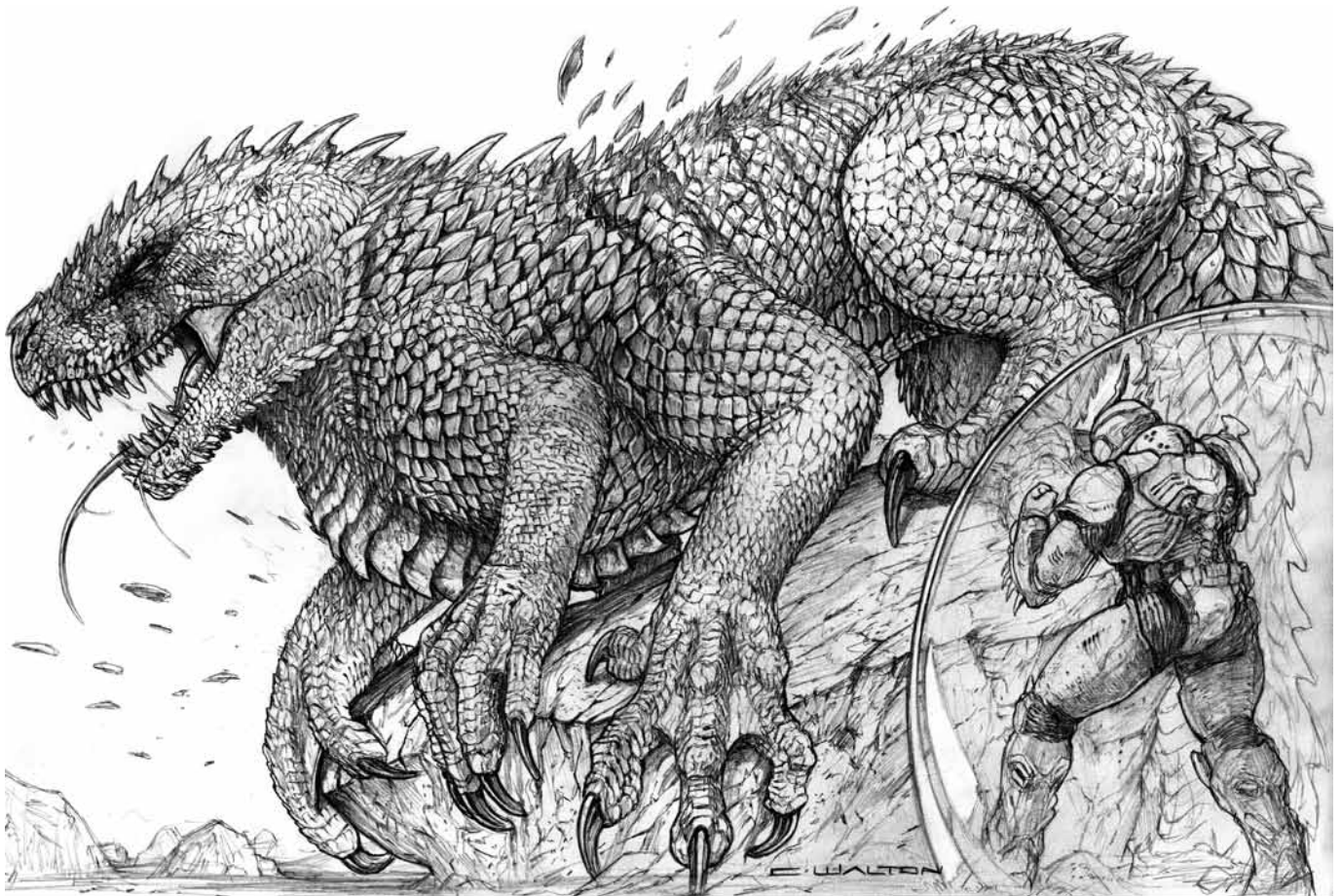
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Some parents may find the violence, magic and supernatural elements of the games inappropriate for young readers/players. We suggest parental discretion.

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The Rifter® Number 66

Your Guide to the Palladium Megaverse®!

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Palladium Books® Presents:

THE RIFTER® #66



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® #66 – Spring, 2014

Page 6 – From the Desk of Kevin Siembieda

Publisher Kevin Siembieda talks about the challenges of creativity versus business, how **Rifts® Northern Gun™ Two** went from 160 pages to 256 pages, how he's already fast at work on **Megaverse® in Flames** (a June release), and that **Robotech® RPG Tactics™** is moving ever closer to manufacturing (Summer release). He also talks about Palladium Books turning 33 years old this year and how we could not have done it without you.

Page 7 – Palladium News

All kinds of books are going into final production, and at least five new titles (starting with NG-2) should be coming your way before the end of summer. There is also news about Penguicon, where many fans were excited to see the prototype game pieces for **Robotech® RPG Tactics™** as well as the rule book, and Kevin and the Palladium crew had an enjoyable time. In other news, the price of **The Rifter®** has gone up (but remains a steal), interest in **Palladium Fantasy®** increases, Gen Con Indy is coming up fast, and you can already reserve rooms for the **2015 Palladium Open House**. Read all about it.

Page 8 – Coming Attractions

New books are coming your way. You are holding the latest issue of **The Rifter®**, and by the time you see this, **Rifts® Northern Gun™ Two** will have shipped and be hitting store shelves (it ships May 19), **Rifts® Megaverse® in Flames™** should be almost finished and heading to the printer, and **Graveyard Earth™**, **Chaos Earth® Sourcebook: Rise of Magic™**, **Robotech®: Expeditionary Force Marines™ Sourcebook One**, and **Robotech® RPG Tactics™** will all follow in the summer months of June, July and August (plus a couple of surprises). We are also working hard to keep all our titles in print. Speaking of which, **The Mechanoid Invasion® Trilogy** is back in print and the **Special Anniversary Edition Hardcover** for **Heroes Unlimited™** (released in February) and **The Palladium Fantasy RPG®** (released in April) are selling at a rapid pace; both have sold around half their print run, so if you want one, you had better order in the next few months before they are gone.

Page 15 – Splicers®: The Bestiary – Optional Source Material for Splicers®

Edward Sauerland has provided us with an array of 11 new M.D.C. creatures, plus *tables and rules for the random creation* of gene-spliced monstrosities and the *Splicers® Ranger O.C.C.* Be prepared to up the ante of your **Splicers®** campaign with this fun selection of new material.

- Page 16 – Maxi Animals
- Page 16 – Super Animals
- Page 17 – Giant Chickens
- Page 17 – Glutton
- Page 18 – Grave Robber
- Page 19 – Gut Ripper
- Page 20 – Janus Eel

- Page 22 – Jonah, the Sea Dragon
 - Page 24 – Knifeskin, King of the Wasteland
 - Page 25 – Nocturne
 - Page 26 – Packrabbit
 - Page 27 – Stinger Moth
 - Page 28 – Stonebacks
 - Page 29 – Quick Roll Monsters
 - Page 32 – Behaviors Table
 - Page 33 – Skill & Instincts Tables
 - Page 34 – Weapons & Defenses Tables
 - Page 36 – Ranger O.C.C.
 - Page 38 – Vine Launcher
 - Page 39 – New Bio-Enhancement: Scent Glands
- Artwork by *Charles Walton*.

Page 39 – Bite of the Snake Men – *An adventure and villains for Heroes Unlimited™*

Glen Evans gives us a *Heroes Unlimited™* adventure with twists and turns, plus a new group of super-baddies with unique powers and abilities.

- Page 39 – Eagle Knight Security (EKS)
 - Page 40 – EKS Player Characters
 - Page 41 – Part One: The Interview
 - Page 42 – Part Two: The Snake in a Jar
 - Page 43 – Part Three: The Girl in the Ugly Car
 - Page 44 – Part Four: The Snake Hits the Fan
 - Page 45 – Conclusion
 - Page 46 – The Snake Men
 - Page 46 – Coils
 - Page 47 – Scales
 - Page 48 – Madam Venom
 - Page 49 – Taipan
 - Page 50 – Fangs
 - Page 51 – Spit
 - Page 52 – Nagraj (the Snake Man)
- Artwork by *Tanya J. Ramsey*.

Page 54 – Space Pirates – *Optional source material for the Rifts® Phase World® setting*

Braden Campbell serves up a wealth of information about the space pirates of the Three Galaxies, their methods, their targets and even some of their spacecraft.

- Page 56 – Raiding, Some Basic Considerations
 - Page 58 – Private Navies
 - Page 60 – Pirate Ships and Modifications
 - Page 60 – Overdrive Failure Chart
 - Page 61 – Skiff
 - Page 61 – Corister-Class Frigate
 - Page 63 – Auntin Patrol Ship
 - Page 64 – Stonewall Cruiser
 - Page 66 – Other Weapons and Equipment
- Artwork by *Mike Mumah*.

Page 67 – Skipping Stones

– A Rifts® short story

Brett Caron returns with a story of intrigue and travel, as the lead characters go from Lazlo to the Splynn Dimensional Market on Atlantis. Can you smell them? The Minions of Splugorth? Enjoy.

Artwork by *Benjamin Rodriguez*.

Page 80 – Rifts® Black Market Part 2: Rise to Power

– Optional source material for Rifts®

Maxwell Kautsch is back with part two of his look at the rise to power within the cutthroat arena of the criminal Black Market. This time, he also gives us a Black Market Town with notable shops, places and people, plus a handful of Techno-Wizard contraband. All of it setting the stage for adventure and intrigue.

Page 81 – Artesian Arms Co. (TW Weapons)

Page 82 – Rogue’s Mall and Carnival

Page 82 – Notable Places

Page 83 – Wellesley Park

Page 85 – Eel Bay Market District

Page 88 – Artesian Arms Industrial Park

Page 89 – Dockside

Page 91 – Gametown

Page 92 – St. Lawrence River

Page 92 – Singer Notables

Page 93 – Isabella Valkyrie

Page 94 – Rembrandt

Page 95 – Rockwell Westin

Page 95 – Hook, Line and Sinkers™ Adventures

Artwork by *Allen and Brian Manning*.

The Theme for Issue 66

The theme of **The Rifter #66** is exotic people, places and the things they seek. In some cases, they are villains seeking wealth, power or revenge. In others, it is adventurers and heroes protecting the innocent and battling evil. We hope you enjoy following (or playing) their journeys. 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 welcome.

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 cover depicts an unlikely band of intrepid heroes off on an adventure that seems to be about to take an unexpected and dangerous turn. The artist is the imaginative **Amy L. Ashbaugh**, who injected a nice touch of humor and the exotic to this wonderful cover.

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® #67

The Rifter® #67 Summer issue will present a nice variety of new source material for *Heroes Unlimited* and other Palladium RPG settings.

- Cover by Michael Wilson.
- 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

Welcome to the spring issue of **The Rifter**®. I think you will continue to find a wealth of fun, new, source material to drop into your games. This is another issue that is being released later than is usual, but you won't be disappointed.

Creativity vs. Business

It can be tricky juggling the creative against the financial and business aspects of any entertainment venture: books, games, film, etc. **Rifts**® **Northern Gun**™ **Two** is one of those titles where creativity overruled business. It has been super-sized – having gone from the original plan of 160 pages to a final product that is 256 pages – and is jam-packed with a lot of great artwork and ideas galore. This expanding page count was entirely my fault. As the publisher, I have the luxury of expanding and changing and delaying any book to make it everything it can (or should) be.

Honestly, I probably should have capped it off and sent it to the printer a month or two earlier as a smaller book. However, I wanted **Rifts**® **Northern Gun**™ **Two** to be truly special for our **Rifts**® fans who had been waiting a long time already for this book. One could argue that there was too much creative energy. You see, there were soooooo many ideas floating in my head and inspirational artwork being turned in by *Chuck Walton, the Manning brothers*, and others, that I just couldn't bring myself to stop. Meanwhile, there were ideas being offered by lead writer *Matthew Clements* and freelance writers *Carl Gleba* and *Carmen Bel-laire*, plus input from the guys at the office. All of which pushed my already overactive imagination into overdrive. Add to that my desire to make **Rifts**® **Northern Gun**™ **Two** extra special precisely because it had been delayed, and I just couldn't stop.

That's okay in the sense that sometimes a writer/creator needs to give vent to his creative urges. Sometimes a product deserves to be delayed and expanded and made truly epic. NG-1 and NG-2 were two such books. And I think fans are going to love **Rifts**® **Northern Gun**™ **Two**.

On the down side, a delay of one book often delays other books. The delay of NG-2 does not impact **Robotech**® **RPG Tactics**™ because Wayne and Jeff are handling most things **Robotech**® at this stage, and our design/manufacturing partners at *Ninja Division* are handling most aspects of mold making and manufacturing.

As you read this, I should be deep in **Rifts**® **Megaverse**® in **Flames**, maybe even close to done with it. Definitely a June release. **Graveyard Earth**™, a sourcebook for our zombie game, **Dead Reign**™, follows it. Then the next issue of **The Rifter**® and **Robotech**®: **Expeditionary Force Marines Sourcebook**. We have a few other products and ideas rattling around, but let's wait to talk about them until they are further along.

Of course, the big release is **Robotech**® **RPG Tactics**™ **Wave One** and we can hardly wait until product ships. This new product line has not gone as quickly or smoothly as we had anticipated, but this is another product that is going to look fantastic and be a blast to play. As I write this, we have just returned from **Penguicon**, where the prototype pieces and **Robotech**® **RPG Tactics**™ rule book met with rave reviews. People loved the game pieces, applauded the quality and detail, and liked what they saw as they skimmed through the rule book. Likewise, people who didn't know about the **Robotech**® **RPG Tactics**™ game, and in a few cases had never heard of **Robotech**®, were also impressed saying that they would have to look into the game after it was released. The gent at the booth right next to us told me that based on the traffic we saw and the number of positive comments, we had a hit on our hands. It was all very nice to hear. Our thanks to the **Penguicon** organizers for having us at their event and the people in attendance who made us feel so welcomed.

Palladium Books Turns Thirty-Three

It doesn't seem possible that so much time has passed, but **Palladium** turns 33 years old this year. It has been quite a journey, and we could not have done it without *you*.

"Thank you" are two words that are not said often enough. On behalf of all of us at **Palladium Books**, from the staff to our freelancers, I would like to *thank you* – our fellow gamers and Megaversal travelers.

To our long time fans, *thank you* for your years of support. To the new fans just discovering **Palladium Books** for the very first time, thank you for your support and welcome to the **Palladium Megaverse**.

You will all be glad to know that we have ideas for an infinite number of new worlds and adventures yet to come. In fact, not only are there dozens of ideas for new sourcebooks for old and new settings, but ideas for exciting new games. So buckle up and enjoy the ride. I think you are going to enjoy what we have planned for you over the next several years.

I would also like to thank all of **Palladium's** unsung heroes: artists, writers, editors, proofreaders, order processors and helpers. The people behind the scenes all help us get product out and keep us on our toes.

As I said in the last issue of **The Rifter**®, 2014 is a year full of promise and potential, fun and excitement. Not just for the **Palladium** staff, but for our role-playing family of gamers. A wealth of new products that are going to delight and surprise a lot of gamers are coming your way. Thank you for believing in us and sharing our dreams. With any luck, there are several more decades of fun and adventure yet to come.

– Kevin Siembieda, Publisher & Game Designer

Palladium News

By Kevin Siembieda, the guy who should know

New products starting to be released

At last, the logjam is breaking loose and books are coming your way.

Rifts® Northern Gun™ Two is at the printer and ships around May 22nd (the same time as this issue of **The Rifter®**). As you read this, **Rifts® Megaverse® in Flames™** is being completed and will ship in June. **Graveyard Earth™**, a new sourcebook for the popular **Dead Reign™** series, should also see release in June. They should be followed by **The Rifter® #67** and **Robotech®: Expeditionary Force Marines™**, not to mention **Robotech® RPG Tactics™**, **Wave One**. We hope to slip a few other goodies in the summer mix as well, including a **Chuck Walton art book**, **Chaos Earth® Rise of Magic™** sourcebook and a few new **Chaos Earth®** sourcebooks.

My goal is to release a number of long-awaited book titles. In the fall, I want to see two **Beyond the Supernatural™** sourcebooks (**Tome Grotesque™** and **Beyond Arcanum™**), and maybe even one or two **Palladium Fantasy RPG®** titles (not sure what yet). As for the **Palladium Fantasy RPG®** — if only you could be a fly on the wall to hear the discussions and brainstorming for that game line. I'm not going to announce titles or release dates, for fear of raising expectations, but we have big, big plans for all our game lines over the next few years.

Penguicon was fun

As I write this, Penguicon is only a two day old memory. It is a unique event as it started out as a Linux/computer oriented convention that has grown to include science fiction, gaming and other elements. It's a pretty nice event, and I was honored to be a featured guest. (I was a Guest of Honor 10 or 12 years ago.) *Jeff Burke*, *Chuck Walton* and *I* were at Penguicon all three days. *Alex* helped out Saturday afternoon and evening. All four of my panel talks went well and people seemed to enjoy themselves.

EVERYONE loved the **Robotech® RPG Tactics™** prototype game pieces and painted game pieces on display. Jeff ran several demos and seemed to be enjoying himself doing so. The next day he mentioned to me that he forgot how much fun people have playing the game. We all forgot to take photographs, because we were too busy talking with fans. I think it was a nice change of pace for all of us, and especially fun to see so much enthusiasm and appreciation for the **Robotech®** game pieces. "Amazing," was the most common refrain, along with many comments about the detail and quality. My personal favorite comment was, "Perfect. They are absolutely perfect." I don't know if I'd go that far, but the Ninja Division sculptors and now the manufacturer have done a great job holding detail and making these **Robotech®** game pieces gorgeous.

Robotech® RPG Tactics™

Speaking of **Robotech® RPG Tactics™**, we are as frustrated as some of you are with the unexpected delays in getting the Kickstarter and mass market sets into manufacture. We have put our hearts and souls into this product line and are dying to get them into your hands.

As you know, Palladium is completely new to the wargame business. That's why we joined forces with the talented gents at **Ninja Division** — the combined talents of *Soda Pop Miniatures* and *Cipher Studios*. Palladium is trusting *their* knowledge and expertise in all aspects of sculpting, mold making, sprue breakdowns and manufacturing. Like you, we assume ND is doing everything in their power to make this the best product possible and to get **Robotech® RPG Tactics™** to market as quickly as possible. For those of you familiar with *Ninja Division/Soda Pop/Cipher Studios'* reputation for quality, you KNOW what you can expect from them with regard to **Robotech® RPG Tactics™**. And the weekend at Penguicon was a pleasant reminder of how good these game pieces really are. And our goal from the start has been to make **Robotech® RPG Tactics™** a fun, quality game that wargamers and Robotech® fans will go wild over. I am convinced that's exactly what we have succeeded at doing.

We are anticipating the Wave One of Kickstarter and retail product releases to go into manufacturing in a few weeks and be in Palladium's hands before Gen Con Indy. As soon as we get them, we start shipping the game and expansions out to you. With any luck, that will be July sometime.

Palladium Fantasy® RPG is in demand

The new hardcover limited edition of **Palladium Fantasy RPG®** is flying out of our warehouse, indicating there is considerable demand for it. That's excellent, because I have all kinds of plans for the **Palladium Fantasy** game line. Stuff that made Chuck Walton and some visiting fans grin like the Cheshire Cat. I am burning with ideas for the game line and plan to make 2015 a big year for the **Palladium Fantasy** setting. I'll even try to get a sourcebook or two out by this year's end.

Price Increase for The Rifter®

After many years, we found it was time to increase the cover price of **The Rifter®**. We think \$13.95 is still a darn good price for a 96 page sourcebook and hope you do as well. We will continue to make each issue fun and helpful to players and G.M.s alike.

Gen Con Indy – August 14-17, 2014

Gen Con Indy is going to be the premier convention event for Palladium Books this year.

We have a large booth, special display, a ton of product including **Robotech® RPG Tactics™**, and all our role-playing games and sourcebooks, art prints, original art, and all kinds of good stuff. There will also be many Palladium creators available at the booth throughout the convention to chat and sign autographs, including writers *Brandon Aten*, *Matthew Clements*, *Carl Gleba*, *Carmen Bellaire*, *Mark Oberle (tentative)*, *me (Kevin Siembieda)*, Palladium staffers like *Wayne Smith* and *Jeff Burke*, and artists including *Nick Bradshaw*, *Mike Leonard*, *Chuck Walton*, and others. And it looks like there will be **50+ Palladium Books RPG events in the official Gen Con program**. My heartfelt thanks to the Megaversal Ambassadors spearheading this project, as well as the Game Masters volunteering to run so many events for our many game lines. Awesome.

Palladium Books Gen Con Highlights:

- **50+ RPG gaming events in a dedicated area.** The most games ever at a Gen Con. Sign up when you can and make us look good.
- **Large exhibitor booth and special display.**
- **Robotech® RPG Tactics™ products and demos.**
- **Role-playing game products galore: Rifts®, Robotech®, Splicers®, Palladium Fantasy®, Heroes Unlimited™, Nightbane®, Dead Reign™, Beyond the Supernatural™, Ninjas and Superspies™, After the Bomb® and all the rest.**
- **Special edition books, prints and original artwork.**
- **Get autographs, chat and have a blast.**
- **Palladium creators already committed to appear:** Kevin Siembieda, Wayne Smith (editor), Jeff Burke (artist & staffer), Chuck Walton (artist), Nick Bradshaw (artist), Mike Leonard (artist), Brandon Aten (writer), Matthew Clements (writer), Carl Gleba (writer), NMI (online admin and MA), Gary Miller (MA Coordinator and the Palladium Onsite Gaming Event Coordinator at Gen Con), and others are likely to be added; subject to changes and addition.

2015 Palladium Open House

– May 14-17, 2015

The 2015 Palladium Open House is officially on! This is an event unlike any you have ever experienced. We hope to see many of you next May! More on it in the next Rifter® and on the Palladium website (www.palladiumbooks.com) in a few weeks, but start planning for it now.

\$109.00 (plus tax) per room at the Comfort Inn, aka “Plymouth Clock Tower Hotel.” This is the hotel everyone knows and wants. You can start placing hotel reservations for the **2015 Palladium Open House** right now, but make sure you tell them the Group Code “Palladium Books.” This is a must to get the superior group rate.

That’s **\$109** (plus tax) for a room with *two queen beds* or *one king with a sofa that has a pull-out sleeper*. ALL rooms have a *micro-fridge*, *FREE high-speed wired/wireless Internet* and there is a *FREE hot breakfast from 6 A.M. to 10 A.M.* near the lobby. The hotel also offers a *heated indoor swimming pool*, a *fitness center* (24 hours), and a *coin operated laundry*. And the *large conference room* is ours to use, around the clock for open gaming.

Comfort Inn

40455 Ann Arbor Road
Plymouth, MI 48170
Phone: 734-455-8100

Group Code: Palladium Books – you MUST request the Group Code “Palladium Books” *at the time of booking* to ensure the correct rate will be quoted and billed to you.

Dates of the 2015 Palladium Open House (POH): May 15-17 (May 14 is VIP Thursday), 2015.

If you *know* you are coming to the 2015 Palladium Open House, we recommend you reserve your room as soon as possible to get this superior rate. Call 734-455-8100 to make your reservation. The hotel does NOT charge your credit card until a few days before the event (next year!) and you can cancel up until May 10, 2015. So there is no reason to wait. Get your room(s) reserved right away. Game on!

Coming Attractions

Palladium’s 2014 Release Checklist

Recent Releases

- **Rifts® World Book 34: Northern Gun™ Two** – Available now!
- **The Rifter® #65**
- **The Rifter® #66**
- **Palladium Fantasy RPG®** – Back in Print
- **Palladium Fantasy RPG® 30th Anniversary Hardcover** – Available only from Palladium Books.
- **Heroes Unlimited™ RPG 30th Anniversary Hardcover** – Available only from Palladium Books.
- **Heroes Unlimited™ RPG** – Back in Print

June 2014 Releases

- **Rifts®: Megaverse® in Flames™** – New and in final production.
- **Rifts® Chaos Earth®: Rise of Magic™** – Back in Print
- **Dead Reign™ Sourcebook 5: Graveyard Earth™**

July 2014 Release

- **Robotech®: Expeditionary Force Marines Sourcebook One** – New
- **The Rifter® #67**
- **Robotech® RPG Tactics™ Boxed Game** – New (tentative)
- **First 6 Robotech® RPG Tactics™ Expansion Kits** – New (tentative)

Also Coming in 2014

- **Charles Walton Art Book**
- **Rifts® Chaos Earth® Sourcebook: First Responders**
- **Rifts® Chaos Earth® Sourcebook: Resurrection**
- **Rifts® Coalition States: Heroes of Humanity™ Sourcebook**
- **Rifts® Secrets of Atlantis™ Sourcebook** (tentative)
- **Beyond the Supernatural™ Sourcebook: Beyond Arcanum™**
- **Beyond the Supernatural™ Sourcebook: Tomes Grotesque™**
- **Rifts® sourcebooks**
- **Robotech® Expeditionary Force Marines™ Sourcebook Two** (tentative)
- **Splicers® sourcebooks** (tentative)
- **Heroes Unlimited™ sourcebook** (tentative)
- **Palladium Fantasy® sourcebooks** (tentative)

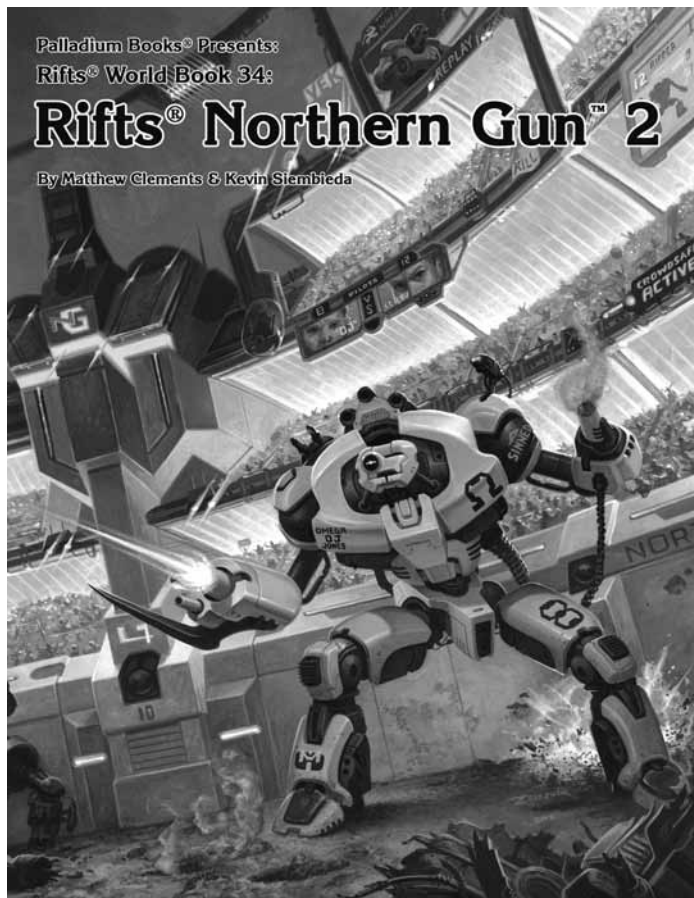
Palladium RPGs are available in many hobby and game stores around the world. We encourage people to support their local stores. Going to a store enables you to see the product before purchasing it, and many stores are happy to place special orders for you, provided you pay in advance, enabling you to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

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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! Rifts® World Book 34:

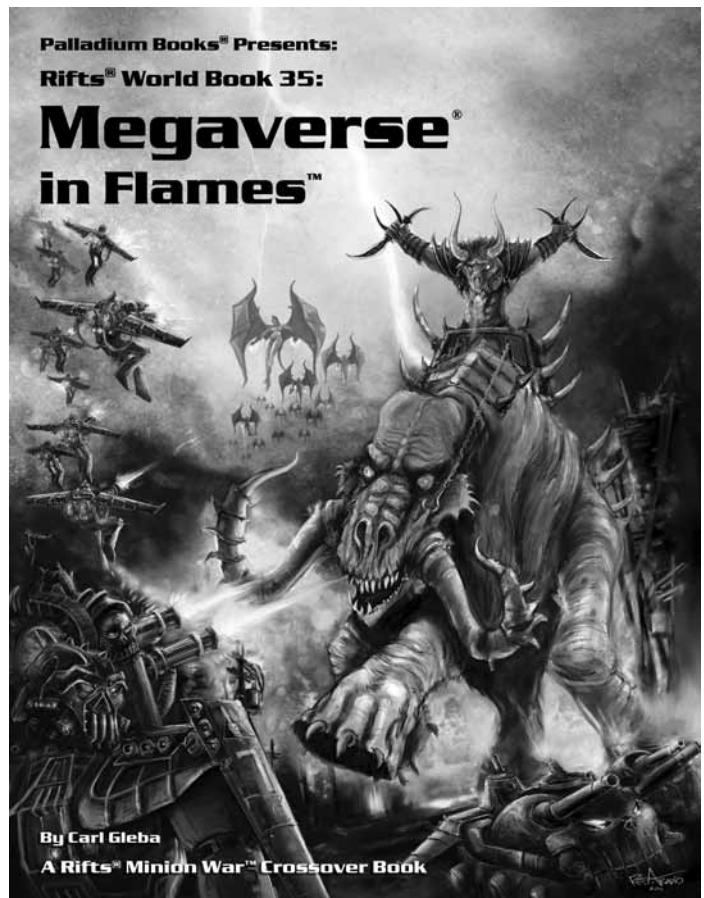
Northern Gun™ Two

The much anticipated companion to **Northern Gun™ One** is done! Not only that it is bigger than ever, expanded to 256 pages.

Rifts® Northern Gun™ Two is an epic World Book that contains a wealth of information, power armor suits, ride armor, drones, vehicles and gear from the largest arms dealer on the continent: *Northern Gun™*. Plus details about the Robo-Gladiatorial Arena whose battles are being televised throughout Michigan,

Canada and the Chi-Town ‘Burbs. May be used with *Northern Gun™ One* or as a standalone sourcebook.

- 30+ NG power armor suits; an expansive range.
- 30+ suits of M.D.C. body armor and 20+ types of *armored clothing*.
- NG robot haulers and drones.
- NG combat vehicles and amphibious watercraft.
- NG hovercycles, aircraft, jet packs and ground vehicles.
- Robot Gladiator O.C.C. and robot gladiators.
- The Robodome – Robot Gladiatorial Arena.
- Pirates, amphibious gear and more.
- Interior Artwork by Chuck Walton, Nick Bradshaw, and others.
- Wraparound cover by John Zeleznik.
- Written by Matthew Clements and Kevin Siembieda.
- 256 pages – \$26.95 retail – Cat. No. 888. Available now!



NEW! Rifts® World Book 35:

Megaverse® in Flames™

This book is in final production as we write this issue (May 6), so it will be a June release.

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. June, 2014.



NEW! Dead Reign™ Sourcebook 5:

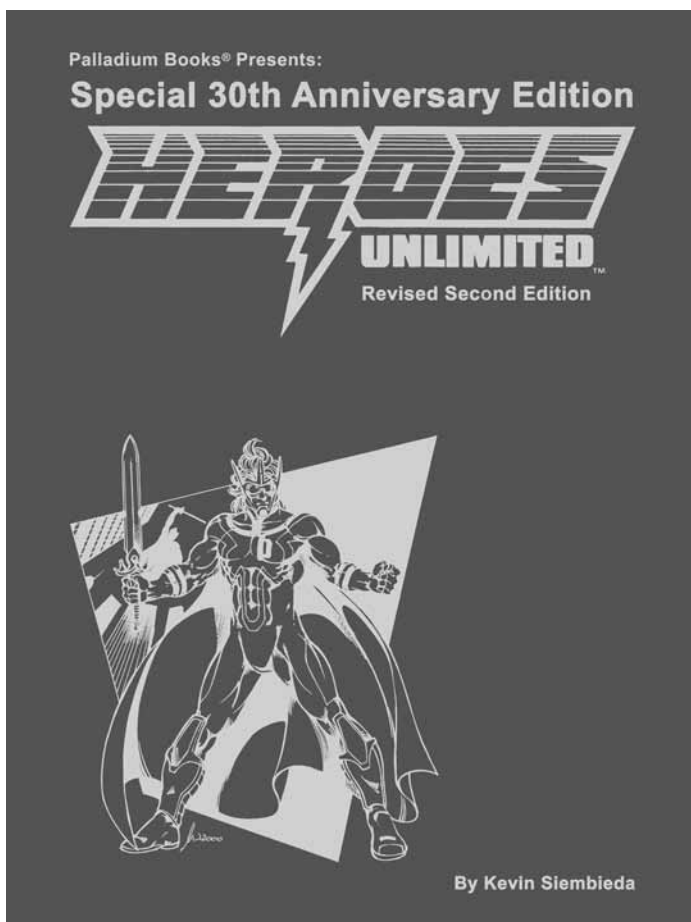
Graveyard Earth™

When the dead rise and communications and power grids collapse, nothing matters except your own survival. But what about the rest of the world? What's happening in other places? Has any government survived? Is anyplace safe?

Dead Reign™ Graveyard Earth™ tries to answer those questions and others. And in doing so, provides gamers and G.M.s with more fuel for adventure.

- **Zombie World Tour – How the Wave and the Zombie Apocalypse have played out across the globe.**
- **A Thousand Miles of Dead – Getting home from abroad in a world of zombies.**
- **American military forces overseas and their journey home.**
- **Alternative campaign settings and Random Campaign Setting tables.**
- **Random Encounters by Region and Random Survivor Leaders.**

- **Level of Zombie Threat table. Zombies and exposure to the elements.**
- **Walled cities and other Alternative Safe Havens.**
- **Car problems, aircraft landing conditions and encounters on the road and by sea.**
- **Written by Matthew Clements. Cover by E.M. Gist.**
- **48-64 pages – \$12.95 retail (tentative) – Cat. No. 235. Ships June 2014. In final development. Final page count and date of release yet to be determined.**



Heroes Unlimited™

30th Anniversary Hardcover Edition

– only \$40 while supplies last

Half of the **Heroes Unlimited™ RPG Hardcovers** are already sold. Only 200 copies are left. This **HU2 30th Anniversary Edition** is *visibly different* (and cool) than the original hardcover and cannot be confused with the earlier printing. 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. The original HU2 hardcover sold for \$50 and has since become a collector's item that sells for \$200-\$350 on the secondary 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 now, direct from Palladium Books. 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.
- Also available as a 352 page “softcover” edition – \$26.95 retail – Cat. No. 500 – Available now.

A few notable Heroes Unlimited™ Sourcebooks:

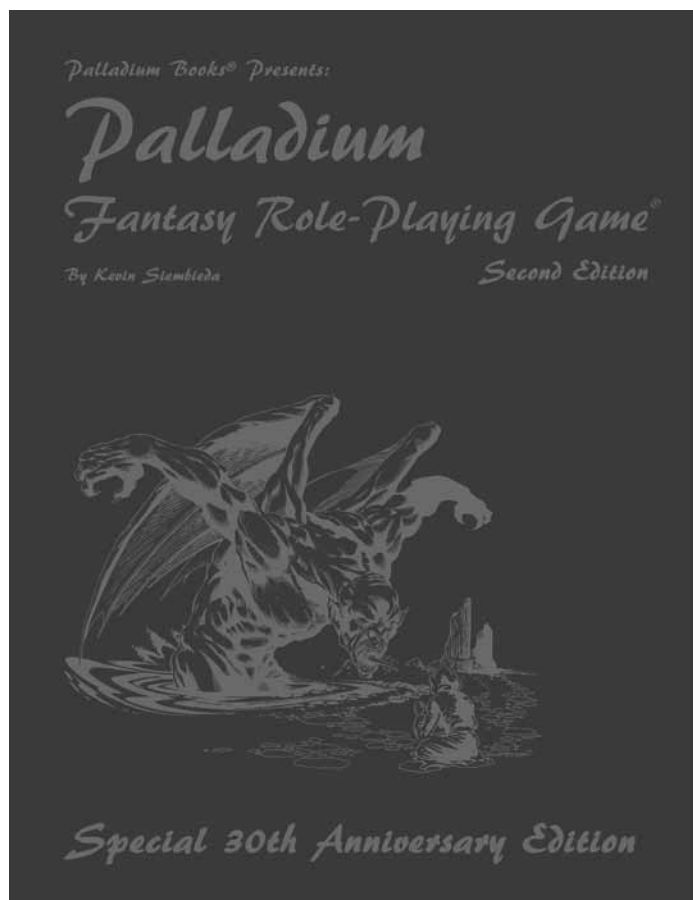
Instantly expand your playing experience with these and other HU2 sourcebooks.

- **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! Palladium Fantasy RPG® 30th Anniversary Hardcover Edition

– only \$40 while supplies last

The **Palladium Fantasy® Special 30th Anniversary Hardcover** is selling even faster than the **Heroes Unlimited** hardcover. We sold 200 copies in half the time! Only 250 copies are left. This **Palladium Fantasy® 30th Anniversary Edition** is *visibly different* than the original hardcover and cannot be confused with the earlier printing. We have kept the price an unprecedented,



low \$40 for a hardcover Gold Edition of this size. We want to give **Palladium Fantasy®** fans a crack at purchasing one before the price skyrockets on the secondary collectors' market. The original Crimson Edition sold for \$50 and has since become a collector's item that sells for \$250-\$400 on the secondary market. Enjoy and unleash those imaginations.

- 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 is a Baal-Rog demon.
- A complete role-playing game with many sourcebooks.
- 352 pages – ONLY \$40 retail from Palladium Books only – Cat. No. 4500HC – available now! The price is only \$40 to celebrate the proud event of Palladium Fantasy's 30 years of continuous publication and to make sure the hardcover is accessible to our core fan base.
- **Palladium Fantasy®** – celebrating 30 years of wonder.



BACK IN PRINT – Rise of Magic™

A Rifts® Chaos Earth® Sourcebook – June

Rescheduled for a summer release.

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.

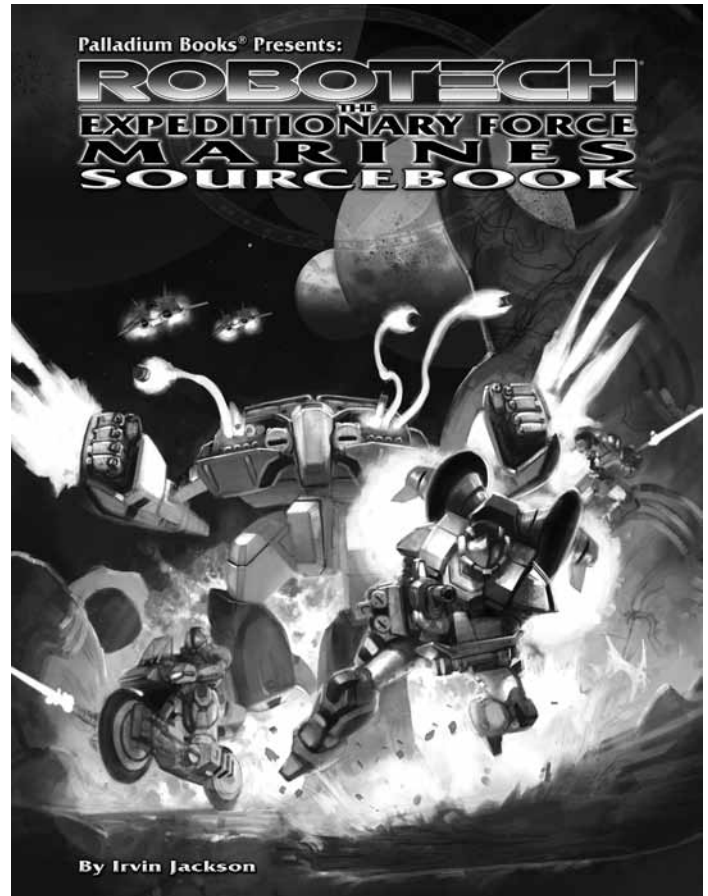
- **Chaos Magic**, new magic specific to the Chaos Earth® setting.
- **More than 100 unique Chaos Magic spells.**
- **New magic O.C.C.s** like the Blue Zone Wizard and Chaos Wizard.
- **New evil magic users** like the Chaos Witch and Demon Caller.
- **More on NEMA and the Demon Plagues.**
- **Written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

NEW! The Rifter® #67 – July

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® #67 – July, 2014:

- **Heroes Unlimited™ source material.**
- **Optional source material for 3-5 settings.**
- **News, coming attractions, product descriptions and more.**
- **Cover by Michael Wilson.**
- **96 pages – \$11.95 retail – Cat. No. 167. July 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.

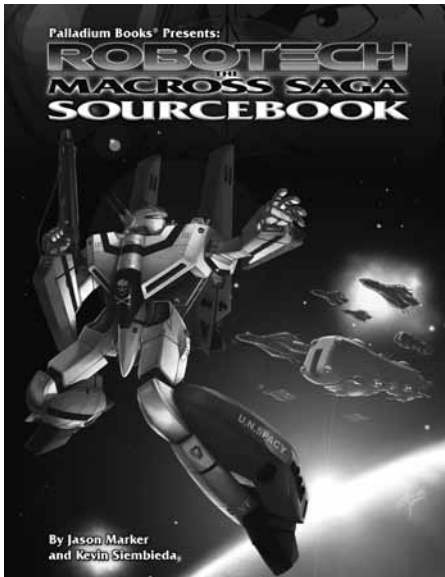
- **New mecha and weapons.**
- **Aliens and space adventure.**
- **Written by Irvin Jackson.**
- **160 pages – Cat. No. 553 – \$20.95 – July release.**

Robotech® Macross® Saga Sourcebook

Available in the 8½ x 11 size

All the famous mecha and action of **Robotech®** starts here with the **Macross® Saga** when an alien armada enters Earth orbit. They have come to reclaim a lost spacecraft that crash-landed on Earth 10 years earlier. A space fortress that Earth's protectors have rebuilt into their own flagship against alien invasion. The resulting conflict gives birth to heroes and becomes the stuff of legend, but the Earth will never be the same. Reminder, **Robotech® The Macross® Saga Sourcebook** is now available as an 8½ x 11 inch sourcebook.

- **Transformable Veritech Fighters** known as Valkyries take to the sky to defend the Earth.
- **Destroids**, giant walking tanks, are among Earth's front-line defenders.
- **The SDF-1 and Earth air, ground and space combat vehicles.**



- Zentraedi mecha, powered armor suits, and select spacecraft.
- The Zentraedi warriors, their war machines and culture.
- Notable characters from the TV series statted out.
- Quick Character Creation Tables enable you to make Macross characters in 15 minutes or less.
- New skills and M.O.S. skill bundles.
- The *Robotech® The Shadow Chronicles® RPG* “rule book” is needed to play (Cat. No. 550 or 550HC).
- 128 pages – \$16.95 – Cat. No. 551 – standard 8½ x 11 size – Available now.



Robotech® RPG Tactics™

– Summer 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*).
- 112 page 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:** Summer 2014.
- **\$99.95 retail price.**
- **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 this summer.

- **UEDF Valkyrie Wing** (2x each, Fighter, Guardian, Battloid) – Cat. No. 55201 – \$36.95 retail.
- **UEDF Tomahawk/Defender Destroids** (2x Tomahawks, 2x Defenders) – Cat. No. 55202 – \$32.95 retail.



- **UEDF Spartan/Phalanx Destroids** (2x Spartans, 2x Phalanxes), Cat. No. 55203 – \$32.95 retail.
- **Zentraedi Regult Battlepods** (6x Regults) – Cat. No. 55401 – \$36.95 retail.
- **Zentraedi Artillery Battlepods** (4x Artillery Battlepods) – Cat. No. 55402 – \$36.95.

- **Zentraedi Glaug 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. Summer release.

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. Summer (tentative).**

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. Summer (tentative).**



Splicers®: The Bestiary

Optional Source Material for the Splicers® RPG
By Edward Sauerland

Locked in a life or death struggle against the endless legions of the Machine, it's easy to forget that there are other dangers in the Splicers universe. Disease, hunger, the terrain, and even the weather can kill a man just as easily as a rail gun blast. Even teetering on the brink of extinction, humankind still tears at itself. Waste Crawlers and other brigands strike in the open while the Librarians, power-hungry rivals, and other upstarts and madmen plot from the shadows. But what of the dangers that have only been hinted at? The Splicers RPG teases us with warnings of terrible creatures that roam the Wastelands and serve as de facto guardians of the Nature Preserves. Some will be extinct animals reconstituted by Gaia from DNA samples. Others may be all new, possibly alien species from offworld, or cobbled together by some mad scientist. Each will present the players with new challenges (and opportunities) during their struggle to take back the planet.

Some quick notes regarding animals and monsters: Though these terms may be used interchangeably throughout this article, to clarify, animals are real world life forms that existed on the Earth at some point. With only a few exceptions (like dinosaurs), animals are S.D.C. beings that inflict only S.D.C./Hit Point damage.

Monsters, on the other hand, are usually Mega-Damage beings, often possessing Splicer level or even Supernatural Strength,

as well as natural weapons, making them a real threat to Splicer characters.

Animals and monsters have instincts and natural skills (Climb, Prowl, etc.) and their level of intelligence can vary greatly. And though people may label a shark or lion that kills humans as evil, strictly speaking, it isn't. These are not the cunning and diabolical creatures and demons of Rifts and other settings. They do not enslave humans, covet wealth, or kill for fun. These are just animals fulfilling their biological drives to eat, sleep, poop, and reproduce. In short, to survive. Thus, most, if not all animals and monsters are effectively Anarchist, associating only with their own kind and basically just wanting to be left alone. They may be territorial or even aggressive, but on the whole, if humans didn't wander onto their turf, they wouldn't bother us.

But your adventure is bound to take you far from the protection of your Great House. And out there in the wilds, who knows what you may encounter...

As for the Machine, the various personalities each treat the native wildlife differently, often on a case-by-case basis. Most will not take any action to harm a non-human creature, especially one that with a penchant for attacking Splicers. They will, however, defend any important outpost such as a Power Farm or Industrial Center, regardless of the damage that may be inflicted upon the local ecosystem.

Some typical Machine behavior regarding animals and monsters

Eve is the only NEXUS personality likely to target an animal in the name of preserving human life. This is especially true in and around the Retro Villages, doubly so if she can pull it off without alerting the other personalities. Eve has even attempted to send a few isolated robot patrols to stalk the outskirts and borders of a Nature Preserve in order to root out some of the larger Mega-Damage creatures that have been threatening the Resistance. These sorties are few and far between, as Gaia is far too protective of her parks to allow any such concerted effort, especially those entailing poaching and encroachment to last. Not even Eve will send robots into the nature Preserve.

Gaia is madly in love with all the many wondrous (and oft-times monstrous) creatures in her Nature Preserves. When she does employ robots near the fringes of these parks, it is usually to catch any human interlopers defiling her sacred Preserves. Occasionally, she will send a few robots on scouting missions to study some new species or even capture one for study, preservation (in a Cryo-Zoo), or to breed/clone the specimen, often to seed it in a new area of the globe outside of its natural habitat. Gaia prefers to use smaller, less obtrusive robots in these roles, such as Cable Snakes, Hunter-Searchers, Sewer Prowlers, and Skitter Pods.

Freya is obsessed with the clockwork functioning of her Ghost Towns. Any creature that might ruin the illusion of the normal, workaday society is targeted for destruction, despite any protests from Gaia. To maintain some tiny semblance of “realism” in these settings, Freya will send out Nex Androids programmed to emulate soldiers or police SWAT officers, all armed to the teeth. Larger robots, like an Assault Slayer, might do the job faster and more efficiently, but it disrupts the image of life as usual in the Ghost Town.

The only other notable personality to regularly interact with animals and monsters is Ishtar. If for no other reason than boredom, she will engage large, powerful Mega-Damage creatures in combat, usually out in the Wastelands far from prying eyes or any Preserve. To truly test her skill, Ishtar will fight at a three to one numerical disadvantage or use robots that are outmatched by their adversaries, such as a lone Slicer Robot taking on some hulking, 30 foot long beast.

Creatures of the Wilds and Nature Preserves

Basic Animals

Just like the name implies, break out a copy of Palladium’s Monsters and Animals or other tome and roll up a regular animal. Doesn’t sound too scary? Consider this: your Dreadguard is almost unstoppable when he’s suited up in his Host Armor. But what if he has to travel undercover or infiltrate a Retro Village or some other secure area? Without his Host Armor, he could be pretty easy pickings for a bear or lion.

Sure, your character might have his trusty Mega-Damage sword or pistol, but using such weapons might call unwanted mechanical attention down on his head, making a bad situation much worse. And what about the threat of predatory animals to

untrained or under-equipped villagers? It takes a LOT of courage to stare down a tiger or an elephant with stone tools and weapons. The average hero is likely to jump to the aid of civilians, heedless of the risk to himself. And let’s say that the player is armed to teeth and can make quick work of the beast. He still risks collateral damage (injuring civilians or damaging homes, crops, livestock, etc.), not to mention leaving telltale evidence for the Machines to find.

Maxi Animals

Maxi Animals are so named because all their stats are all maxed out. Take the common horse for example (page 121 of the **Splicers® RPG**). Don’t even roll for the attributes and other stats. Just max them right out. So, Hit Points would automatically be 30, M.A. would automatically be 24, etc. All other information (size, bonuses, attacks per melee, etc.) remains the same. Such perfect animals represent the absolute pinnacle of a breed, a sort of super-purebred.

Scientists are at a loss to explain the existence of such creatures. Selective breeding and deliberate genetic manipulation are the most likely explanations, but who is responsible? Is Gaia trying to repopulate the planet with perfect specimens or is some Great House breeding these animals, and if so, for what purpose? Trade or gifts for the Retro Villages and other Houses? Curiosity? Spite? Good old-fashioned insanity? No one knows, and the mystery is further complicated because Maxi Animals are impossible to distinguish from regular ones except through close medical examination or scientific study, often postmortem. Even then, the results can be inconclusive. The situation is a very low priority among Great Houses, so there isn’t likely to be much follow up unless there is an incident that ruins a mission or causes unnecessary death and destruction. Perhaps the players can investigate a lead...

Super Animals

Super Animals are a step beyond even the Maxi Animals above, and they can be a true danger, even to Splicers. A Super Animal looks like its normal counterpart, though it is about 10% larger. The attributes are all maxed out as above, but add 1D6 to P.S., +1D4 to P.E., and 2D6 to Spd. Strength is the equivalent of Splicer/Robotic P.S., enabling a seemingly benign animal to inflict Mega-Damage with its attacks.

Super Animals are Mega-Damage beings. Determining their M.D.C. is easy. Take their maxed out possible Hit Points and half their maxed out S.D.C. and add them together. Convert that number into M.D.C. Super Animals (and Maxi Animals for that matter) will always be the “alpha” or pack leader of a group of like animals. Super Animals in particular are also more aggressive and receive the following bonuses: +1 to initiative, +1 to strike, and one additional attack per melee round.

The best guess of scientists is that about 3 to 5% of the total animal population is made up of Maxi Animals, while only one out of every 1,000 normal animals is actually a Super Animal. However, these percentages are significantly higher in select areas, especially in or around Nature Preserves. Again, finding hard evidence is difficult and not a major concern of the Warlords. Still, what if Gaia *is* seeding her territory with disguised predators? How will the players respond when one of their few safe (sort of) retreats gets overrun with dangerous animals (monsters)?

Monsters and M.D.C. Creatures

Giant Chickens

The name says it all: these animals are identical to regular chickens, except that they stand roughly five feet (1.5 m) tall! How this peculiar breed of fowl came about is unclear, but it is known that they existed before the war against the Machine, though they were 25% smaller than the current incarnations. Most likely, a combination of selective breeding, genetic manipulation, and growth hormones were used to create ever-larger birds for food. Somewhere along the line, things got a bit out of hand.

Giant Chickens are not predators, but they can be dangerous. They are extremely docile, but skittish. When frightened, they flap their wings (they cannot actually fly), screech, peck, and make all kinds of racket. More than one Splicer has been uncovered because he spooked a wild Giant Chicken. A handful of survivalists have actually taken to using one or two of the critters as “watchdogs” in this way by posting them around a campsite. If a Giant Chicken is panicking, it’s a good bet that trouble is nearby.

Even though they are S.D.C. beings, they possess minor Splicer equivalent strength. Unwary caretakers can easily be injured or even maimed, losing a hand to an angry peck. This is why farmers and veterinarians should always wear light M.D.C. armor when working around these animals.

The most obvious use for Giant Chickens is food. One full-grown animal can feed 15 to 20 men or the equivalent in War Mounts depending on their feeding needs. Females lay 3 to 5 softball-sized eggs a week. Unfertilized eggs can be used for cooking and baking recipes just like regular chicken eggs.

The taste? Well, they taste like... you know, chicken.

Type: Domesticated farm animal.

Alignment: Effectively Anarchist. Cares only about eating and will seldom fight except to escape.

Attributes: I.Q. 1D4 (low animal intelligence), M.E. 1D4, M.A. 1D6, P.S. 1D4+10 (Splicer P.S.), P.E. 1D4+8, P.P. 1D6+8, P.B. 2D4, Spd can run up to 20 miles (32 km) per hour.

S.D.C.: 2D6+90

Hit Points: 1D4x10+30

Horror Factor: None, unless a whole pack of 10 or more are swarming you (H.F. 9).

Size: 5 feet, plus 1D6 inches (1.55 to 1.68 m) tall.

Weight: 250 to 300 pounds (112.5 to 135 kg).

Average Life Span: 10 years (estimated).

Feeding: Consumes 10 pounds (4.5 kg) of seed, grain, or other feed per day.

Attacks: Two.

Damage: Claw strike 1D4x10 S.D.C. Peck with beak 4D6 S.D.C.

Bonuses: +4 to automatic dodge (often bob and weave unpredictably), +1 to strike, +5 to save vs disease.

Habitat: Tend to be found most often in temperate climates and grasslands, but can be found periodically anywhere. Often kept in pens as livestock within the underground living spaces of a Great House.

Special Bonus: The bones of the Giant Chicken are dense but extremely prone to splintering. This can make them a potential choking hazard to humans and S.D.C. animals if the meal is not prepared properly. Gore Hounds, War Mounts, and other M.D.C. creatures are tough enough to chew and swallow the little bits without difficulty. There is a unique advantage to these bones, though. When used as ammunition in Shard weapons, they add a damage bonus of +4 M.D.

Glutton

There is no great mystery surrounding the origin of the Gluttons. It is a well known fact that they were an early creation of the Machine. And a very flawed creation at that.

Many vital strategic areas were being clogged up with the refuse of battle. Dead bodies, unsalvageable robots and vehicles, empty supply crates, spent shell casings, dud ordnance and other debris was starting to pile up. Some buried subroutine within NEXUS kicked in and started looking for a way to clean up the mess. Since most resources were tasked with wiping out humanity, the Machine struggled to develop an alternative. Finally, it had a flash of genius: a bio-engineered organism that could literally feed off of all the trash.

At this point in time, the distinctive personalities of NEXUS were not as defined, and so there was no steady guiding hand in the design of the Gluttons, resulting in a strange amalgamation of characteristics. One of the many conflicting goals that was brought up was the need to make the animals cute. A long forgotten marketing memo somehow became a cornerstone of the creature’s design! Such was the madness of the Machine.

And so it was, the Machine sent out a few hundred of these weird animals genetically designed to eat anything and everything, and it worked, for a time. Then things started to go awry. First, the Gluttons grew much larger and at a faster rate unanticipated by the Machine. And they were able to breed. The Machine had intended for the Gluttons to be neutered at the genetic level, but something went wrong in the recipe.

Third, and most dangerous of all, was that the creatures were all ticking time bombs. The powerful digestive acids that enabled the Gluttons to eat almost anything were highly unstable. A stray laser blast could set off a Glutton like it was a hydrogen balloon. Man and machine have both been slain by exploding Gluttons. Not the most dignified way to die.

Type: Scavenger animal.

Alignment: Anarchist.

Attributes: I.Q. 1D4+2 (low animal intelligence), M.E. 2D6, M.A. 1D4, P.S. 2D6+10 (Splicer/Robotic P.S.), P.E. 2D6+6, P.P. 1D6+4, Spd (see below).

Speed: Running: 20 mph (32 km). Leaping: Not possible. Digging: 10 mph (16 km) through dirt, half through rock and concrete. Swimming: Not possible. Flying: Not possible.

M.D.C. by Location:

Legs (4) – 70

* Head – 55

Main Body – P.E. plus 80

* Attackers are –2 to strike the head. Depleting the M.D.C. of the head or main body kills the creature. See vulnerabilities below.



Horror Factor: 10 to humans, none to machines, though both groups know the dangers of getting too close to a Glutton during battle.

Size: Roughly 3 feet, plus 4D6 inches (1. to 1.5 m) tall at the shoulder.

Weight: 150 to 400 pounds (67.5 to 180 kg).

Average Life Span: 5 to 15 years.

Bio-Regeneration: Heals 1D4 M.D.C. per minute for the main body and 1 M.D. per minute to all other locations.

Feeding: Gluttons earn their name by devouring at least 50% of their body weight in food each day! See natural abilities below.

Natural Abilities: The Gluttons were designed so that they could eat anything: plastic, metal, wood, corpses, you name it. The jaws, teeth, throat, stomach and digestive tract are all powerfully built and extremely rugged. The stomach is a pool of powerful corrosive acids that can process anything the Glutton can chew and swallow. A design quirk gives the creatures an accelerated metabolism that works just a little too well. 80% of what they consume is simply burned up, keeping the creature alive, so even the ones that feed regularly tend to be gaunt and sickly looking.

Skills: Identify Plants & Fruits 70%, Land Navigation 55%.

Vulnerabilities: Vulnerable to Mega-Damage weapons. Specifically, any damage in excess of 20% of the creature's main body M.D.C. has an 80% chance of starting an explosive chain reaction. The damage is 2D6x10 M.D. to a 50 foot (15.24 m) radius. Luckily, the caustic, unstable juices inside the beast can *only* be set off with energy blasts or explosive attacks. Hacking a Glutton to pieces with a sword has zero chance of

detonation. Likewise, rail gun bursts and other kinetic attacks can kill a Glutton without fear of an explosion.

Attacks: Two.

Damage: As per Splicer P.S. Bites inflict 4D8 M.D. (powerful jaws and grinding teeth).

Bonuses: +1 to dodge, +8 to save vs poison and disease.

Habitat: Virtually anywhere.

Grave Robber

Grave Robbers are as repulsive to the Machine as they are to humans. They are essentially giant rats that feed off of the discarded remains found in Boneyards. The deep-rooted hatred of all rodents is just too much for the Machine to bear, and so Grave Robbers are some of the few non-human life forms regularly targeted for destruction by robots.

While the bodies of these foul creatures may resemble rats, their heads and faces are even more terrible to behold. The faces are smushed in, sort of like a pug dog or Persian cat. The ears



are about half as large as they should be, while the eyes are 50% larger, bloodshot, with yellow irises, giving the creature a manic or crazed look.

Grave Robbers always move in packs of 6 to 20, though there can be five times that many in an underground warren. Disgusting, but relatively easy to kill, they are best avoided for one simple reason: living amongst the dead and feeding off their remains has exposed the Grave Robbers to all manner of horrid diseases. Cuts and bites dished out by Grave Robbers are guaranteed to become infected unless treated immediately, preferably by a Saint after the wound has been flushed with alcohol or other disinfectants and/or cauterized. Even Slap Patches will be half as effective curing disease and injury caused by a Grave Robber. And every Packmaster and Outrider is taught to *never* allow their charges to eat a Grave Robber, and if possible, avoid even biting one for fear of contracting some illness.

Type: Scavenger animal.

Alignment: Anarchist.

Attributes: I.Q. 1D4+4 (low animal intelligence), M.E. 1D4+4, M.A. 1D4, P.S. 1D6+12 (Splicer/Robotic), P.E. 2D4+10, P.P. 2D6+4, P.B. 1D4, Spd (see below).

Speed: Running: 30 mph (48 km). Leaping: 25 feet (7.62 m) high or across from a dead stop, 50% more with a running start. Digging: 30 mph (48 km) through dirt, half that through rock and concrete. Swimming: 10 mph (16 km) paddling along the water's surface. Flying: Not possible.

M.D.C. by Location:

* Tail – 15

* Hind Legs (2) – 50 each

* Front Legs (2) – 30 each

* Head – 45

Main Body – 40 plus P.E. number

* A single asterisk indicates a small, difficult target to hit. Attackers are –3 to strike these areas. Depleting the M.D.C. of the head or main body kills the animal.

Horror Factor: 9 to humans for a single animal, 13 for a group of 4 or more, none to machines, although they will usually destroy Grave Robbers on sight.

Size: About 3 feet (0.91 m) tall, nearly as wide and long, with a thin, 4 foot (1.22 m) tail.

Weight: 60 pounds (27 kg).

Average Life Span: 10 years.

Bio-Regeneration: 1D6 M.D.C. per day to the body, 1D4 to all other locations.

Feeding: Carnivores that feed exclusively on dead or decaying animal matter, even bones. Requires 8 pounds (3.6 kg) of food per day.

Natural Abilities: Immune to normal (S.D.C.) weapons and attacks as well as normal heat and cold. Passive nightvision, range: 300 feet (91.4 m). Excellent sense of smell: can smell blood and decaying flesh up to 2 miles (3.2 km) away. Highly resistant to disease and poison (see bonuses).

Skills: Climb 75%, Land Navigation 50%, Prowl 60%.

Vulnerabilities: Vulnerable to Mega-Damage weapons.

Attacks: Three.

Damage: As per Splicer P.S., though bites inflict 2D6 M.D. regardless.

Bonuses: +2 to initiative, +2 strike, +2 to parry, +3 to dodge, +4 to save vs Horror Factor, +10 to save vs poison and disease.

Habitat: Boneyards and recent battle sites in addition to their underground dwellings.



Gut Ripper

The Gut Ripper is one of the most dangerous and feared creatures that stalk the landscape. The name is derived from the creature's signature killing move: a slash across the abdomen to get at the soft, tasty innards of their prey. Resembling a huge, horned wolverine (though one that walks upright, as a human), Gut Rippers possess supernatural strength as well as several built-in biological weapons akin to Splicer bio-tech. Even an experienced Dreadguard suited up in Host Armor can be slain with ease if he is caught unawares by a one of these monsters. Luckily, Gut Rippers seldom stray from their normal hunting grounds, and rarely travel in groups larger than two (usually a mating pair).

Gut Rippers are as cunning as they are powerful. They are highly skilled at tracking prey and setting up ambushes. They are aided in this by their natural ability to mimic animal sounds. A typical ploy is for a Gut Ripper to hide under some brush or in a cave, then impersonate some other animal (the preferred sounds for these traps are mating calls of other animals) to lure the victim to his death. Thankfully, the Gut Ripper cannot impersonate human voices, though there are other ways to entice humans into a trap. Sounds of a horse, dog/Gorehound or other War Mount in

distress will often bring a human rushing in to investigate. The training of Splicers is geared toward Machine threats, so they don't expect a Gut Ripper to be waiting for them.

The Gut Ripper's combination of weapons and intelligence have led some Engineers and Librarians to theorize that they are not "natural," but are, in fact, creations of the Machine, bred to hunt and kill humans. Of course, there's no way to prove this (or is there? Possible adventure idea, G.M.s!)

Type: Predatory animal.

Alignment: Miscreant, lives to hunt and kill. Usually kills to eat, but sometimes kills for pleasure.

Attributes: I.Q. 1D4+4 (medium animal intelligence), M.E. 1D6+2, M.A. 1D4, P.S. 2D6+20 (Supernatural P.S.), P.E. 2D4+10, P.P. 1D8+12, Spd (see below).

Speed: Running: 40 mph (64 km). Leaping: 20 feet (6.1 m) high or across. Digging: 10 mph (16 km) through dirt, half through rock and concrete. Swimming: 20 mph (32 km). Flying: Not possible.

M.D.C. by Location:

Arms (2) – 120

Legs (2) – 150

* Horns (2 to 6) – 45 each

* Head – 130

Main Body – P.E. number times 10, plus 125

* Attackers are –2 to strike the head. Depleting the M.D.C. of the head or main body kills the creature.

Horror Factor: 14 to humans, none to machines.

Size: 7 feet, plus 4D6 inches (2.13 to 2.74 m) tall when standing fully erect.

Weight: 400 to 600 pounds (180 to 270 kg).

Average Life Span: 30 to 45 years.

Bio-Regeneration: Heals 2D4 M.D.C. per melee round for the main body and 1D4 M.D. per melee round to all other locations.

Feeding: Gut Rippers are carnivores that consume 25 pounds (11.25 kg) of meat or carrion per day, but may gorge on up to three times that amount. After gorging, can go for 2D4 days without eating.

Natural Abilities: Immune to normal (S.D.C.) weapons and attacks as well as normal heat and cold (can withstand temperatures of –55 degrees/-48 C to 185 degrees Fahrenheit/85 C). Partially resistant to physical attacks (punches, kicks, etc.): reduce damage by 25%. Keen color vision nearly equal to a hawk or Host Armor (perfect vision with a range of half a mile/0.8 km). Can also see in total darkness without the need for ambient light. Range: 100 feet (30.5 m). Enhanced sense of smell equal to a Gorehound. Also has the ability to mimic animal sounds (roughly equal to the Imitate Voices skill) at 85%.

Skills: Camouflage (hiding) 75%, Climbing 80%, Land Navigation 55%, Prowl 65%, Tracking (animals and humans) 80%, Track by scent 65%, Track by scent of blood 85%.

Vulnerabilities: Vulnerable to ordinary poisons, disease, and Mega-Damage weapons.

Attacks: Five.

Damage: Punches and kicks as per Supernatural P.S. Claw strike: 4D6 M.D. plus punch damage. Horns: 2D6 M.D. plus punch damage. Grows a set of horns for every 8 to 10 years of life, so elder Gut Rippers often have a "crown" of devil horns.

Bonuses: +2 to initiative, +4 to strike, +1 to parry, +2 to dodge, +2 to save vs poison and disease, and immune to Horror Factor, possession, and mind control.

Weapons: The Gut Ripper possesses a crude gore cannon. There is no barrel or appendage like standard Splicer weapons mounted on Host Armor or War Mounts. Instead, the energized gore/slime is regurgitated directly from the monster's stomach and spat out through the mouth. This only adds to the shock and horror of the attack.

Mega-Damage: 4D8 M.D.

Rate of Fire: Each use counts as one melee attack.

Maximum Effective Range: 250 feet (76.2 m).

Payload: 10 blasts per 24 hours, double if the beast gorges itself first.

Habitat: Tend to be found most often in temperate climates, but can be found periodically anywhere. Likes forests and mountainous areas (many natural hiding places).

Janus Eel

Though called an eel due to its electrical discharge ability, the Janus Eel is actually more closely related to a viper. The "Janus" part of its name comes from the snake thing's two heads – one at either end of the slender Y-shaped body. It uses these two heads in a unique hunting tactic. One of the two heads will lie out in the open to draw in would-be predators. Most animals will home in on the head as a source of danger and position themselves to avoid it and attack the main body. When they do, the concealed second head strikes.

As stated previously, the Janus Eel can generate electrical charges within its body to zap and disable larger prey. Brushing the sides of the animal or being bitten by one of the mouths jolts the victim and may cause lightheadedness. But being latched onto by both heads at once completes an electrical circuit, resulting in a prolonged, more powerful electric attack that can kill.

The animal preys mostly on smaller animals such as birds, rodents, lizards, snakes, and the occasional small cat or dog. Curiously, the Janus Eel *never* targets Rat Bombs, and will not fight one even in self-defense, always choosing to flee. How they can tell the difference with such amazing accuracy is a mystery to the Resistance.

Type: Predatory animal.

Alignment: Anarchist.

Attributes: I.Q. 1D4+2 (low animal intelligence), M.E. 1D4+2, M.A. 1D4, P.S. 1D6+12, P.E. 1D4+8, P.P. 1D4+10, Spd (see below)

Speed: Running/Slithering: 25 mph (40 km). Leaping: Not possible. Digging: 10 mph (16 km) through dirt and soft soil, cannot burrow through rock and concrete. Swimming: 10 mph (16 km) on the water's surface. Flying: Not possible.

M.D.C. by Location:

* Heads (2) – 30

Main Body – 35 plus 4D6

* Attackers are –3 to strike the heads. The "brain" of the eel is located along the entire length of the spinal chord, so destroying one or even both heads will not truly kill the animal. Only depleting the M.D.C. of the main body will kill it.

Horror Factor: 8 to humans, none to machines.



Size: 6 to 9 feet long (1.83 to 2.74 m), 8 to 12 inches (20 to 30 cm) in diameter, unless it has recently fed.

Weight: 60 to 110 pounds (27 to 49.5 kg).

Average Life Span: 8 to 15 years.

Bio-Regeneration: Heals 1D6 M.D.C. per day.

Feeding: Carnivores that consume 2 pounds (0.9 kg) of fresh meat per day, but may gorge on up to four times that amount. After gorging, can go for 2D4 days without eating.

Natural Abilities: Immune to normal (S.D.C.) weapons and attacks as well as normal heat and cold. Able to breathe underwater and is resistant to electrical attacks (takes no damage). Equipped with Heat Pits and a Forked Tongue.

Skills: Camouflage (hiding) 85%, Climb 60%, Land Navigation 45%, Prowl 85%, Swim 80%, Tracking (animals and humans) 60%.

Vulnerabilities: Vulnerable to ordinary poisons, disease, and Mega-Damage weapons.

Attacks: Three.

Damage: Bite: 1D4 M.D. Strangulation attack: 4D6 S.D.C. or Hit Points per melee.

Bonuses: +2 to strike, +1 to dodge, +4 to save vs poison and disease, and immune to Horror Factor, possession, and mind control.

Electrical Attack: The Janus Eel can generate electrical discharges and release them through its skin or deliver more powerful shocks during bite attacks. Brushing up against the skin of the Eel delivers a stinging jolt of 2D6 S.D.C. Enough to hurt, but not seriously impair a healthy, full-grown human. An electrical strike delivered in conjunction with a bite inflicts 6D6 S.D.C. and unarmored characters must save vs stun attack (10 or higher, plus any P.E. bonuses). If both heads strike and launch a simultaneous electrical attack, damage is 1D6x10 S.D.C. or 2D4 M.D., and the character must save vs stun attack by rolling a 15 or higher. Stunned characters lose initiative, two attacks per melee, and are -4 on all combat actions for 2D4 melee rounds. Payload is unlimited as long as the Janus Eel stays fed.

Habitat: Swamps and shallow inland waterways, especially in hot and humid climates.

Jonah, the Sea Dragon

One of the largest creature ever cataloged on the Splicers planet is the mighty Jonah, a bird-like sea serpent that rules the Great Ocean. (The name stems from some misinterpretation of the biblical tale.) These massive creatures have only been glimpsed rarely, always alone, always attempting to avoid contact with men and machines alike, so very few hard facts are known about them. It might seem strange that such powerful beasts would flee rather than fight, though some would call this evidence of intelligence or a healthy respect avoidance behavior between sympatric species. The Jonah appears to stake its claim to a vast swath of ocean, striking only at trespassers, and even then, only to drive them off, not to kill them outright, though, that is often the result. They are absolutely smart enough to track such interlopers back to their home or base of operations. If fishermen or traders from a seaside village are repeat offenders, the Jonah may come ashore and devastate the community in order to discourage further intrusions into the beast's territory.

Physically, the Jonah is reptilian, scaled, with powerful limbs and a long body, but built sleek, like a predatory bird to reduce drag while speeding through the water. This speed comes from the wing-like flaps that span the length of the front limbs and stretch down to the Jonah's waist. The flaps are similar to gliding membranes, and their great volume allows the Jonah to displace vast amounts of water with each powerful stroke, propelling the titan through the water at incredible speeds. The wings tuck in close to the body while on land. The clawed "fingers" and "toes" of the Jonah are webbed and help add speed and remarkable agility underwater.

Type: Predatory sea animal.

Alignment: Effectively Anarchist, though cunning and territorial.

Attributes: I.Q. 1D6+4 (medium to high animal intelligence), M.E. 1D8+10, M.A. 2D4+12, P.S. 3D6+45 (Supernatural P.S.), P.E. 2D4+20, P.P. 2D4+16, Spd (see below).

Speed: Running: 50 mph (80 km). Leaping: 40 feet (12.2 m) high or across, can leap out of the water up to 150 feet (45.7 m) into the air (counts as two attacks). Digging: 10 mph (16 km) through dirt, half through rock and concrete, three times as fast through sand. Swimming: 150 mph (240 km). Flying: Not possible.

M.D.C. by Location:

Wings (2) – 250

Legs (4) – 450

Tail – 1,000

* Head – 800

Main Body – P.E. number times 100, plus 6D6x100

* Attackers are -2 to strike the head. Depleting the M.D.C. of the head or main body kills the creature.

Horror Factor: 18 to humans, none to machines.

Size: 70 to 90 feet (21.3 to 27.4 m) long from nose to tail, stands about 20 feet (6.1 m) at the shoulder, wingspan is 50 to 60 feet (15.2 to 18.3 m).

Weight: 50 to 80 tons.

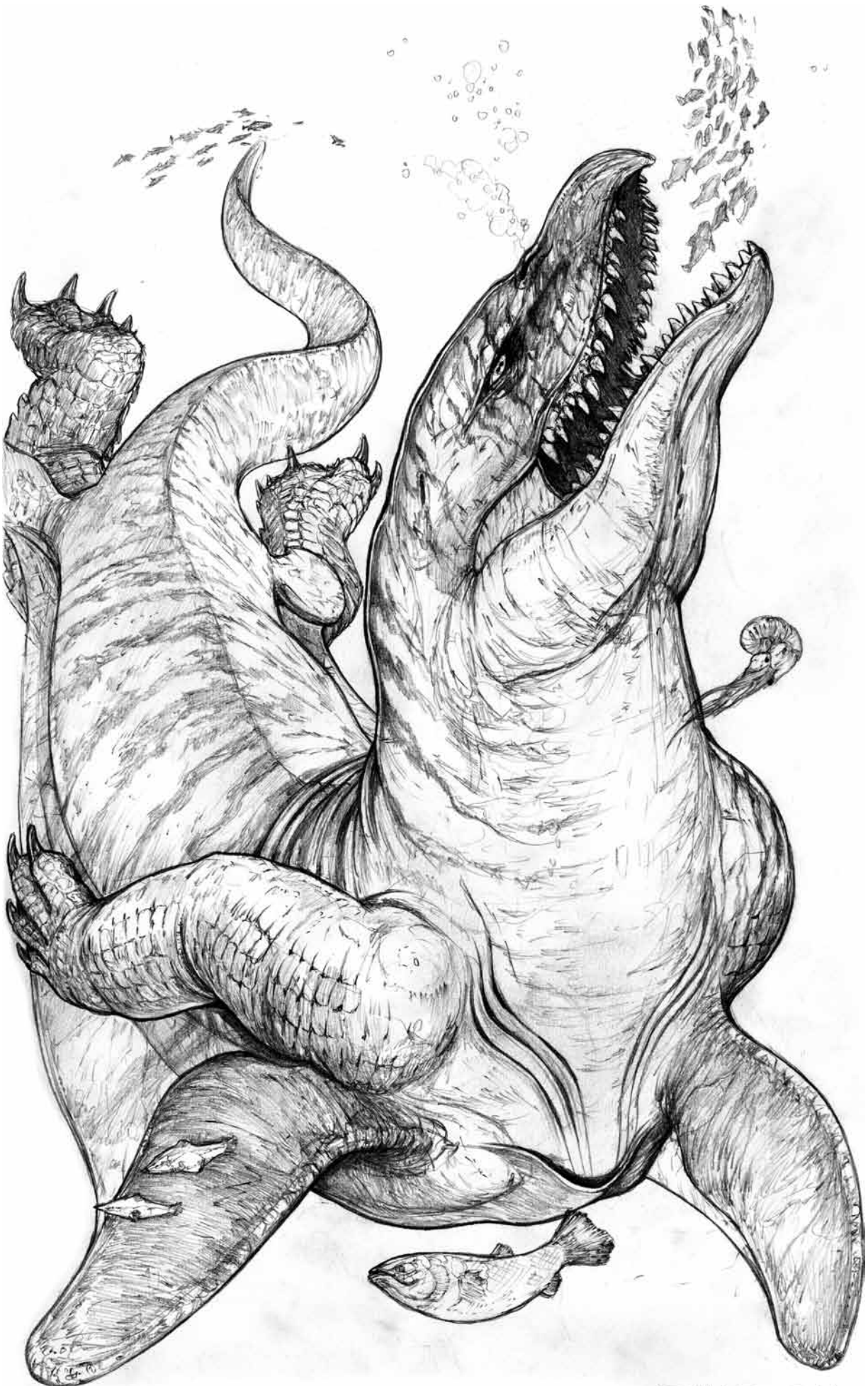
Average Life Span: Estimated to be 200 years or more.

Bio-Regeneration: Heals 4D10 M.D.C. per hour for the main body and 2D10 M.D.C. per hour to all other locations.

Feeding: Omnivores that consume 3 to 7 tons of organic matter per day.

Natural Abilities: Immune to normal (S.D.C.) weapons and attacks as well as normal heat and cold (can withstand temperatures of -80 degrees to +120 degrees Fahrenheit/-62 to 49 C). Maximum depth tolerance is 3.5 miles (5.6 km). Keen color vision nearly equal to a hawk or Host Armor (perfect vision with a range of a mile/1.6 km. One third that range underwater). Passive nightvision that magnifies ambient light, range: 1,000 feet (305 m), half that underwater. Thermal vision, range: 400 feet (122 m). Enhanced sense of smell equal to a Gore Hound; can smell blood in the water up to 3 miles (4.8 km) away.

Skills: Climb 50%, Land Navigation 45%, Prowl 35%, Sea Navigation 70%, Sense Magnetic North, Swim 90%, Tracking (land animals and humans) 60%, Tracking Sea Animals (including humans at sea) 75%, Track by scent 55%, Track by scent of blood 85%. Can breathe both air and in the water. Equipped with Gills and Sonar.



C. WALTON

Vulnerabilities: Vulnerable to Mega-Damage weapons.

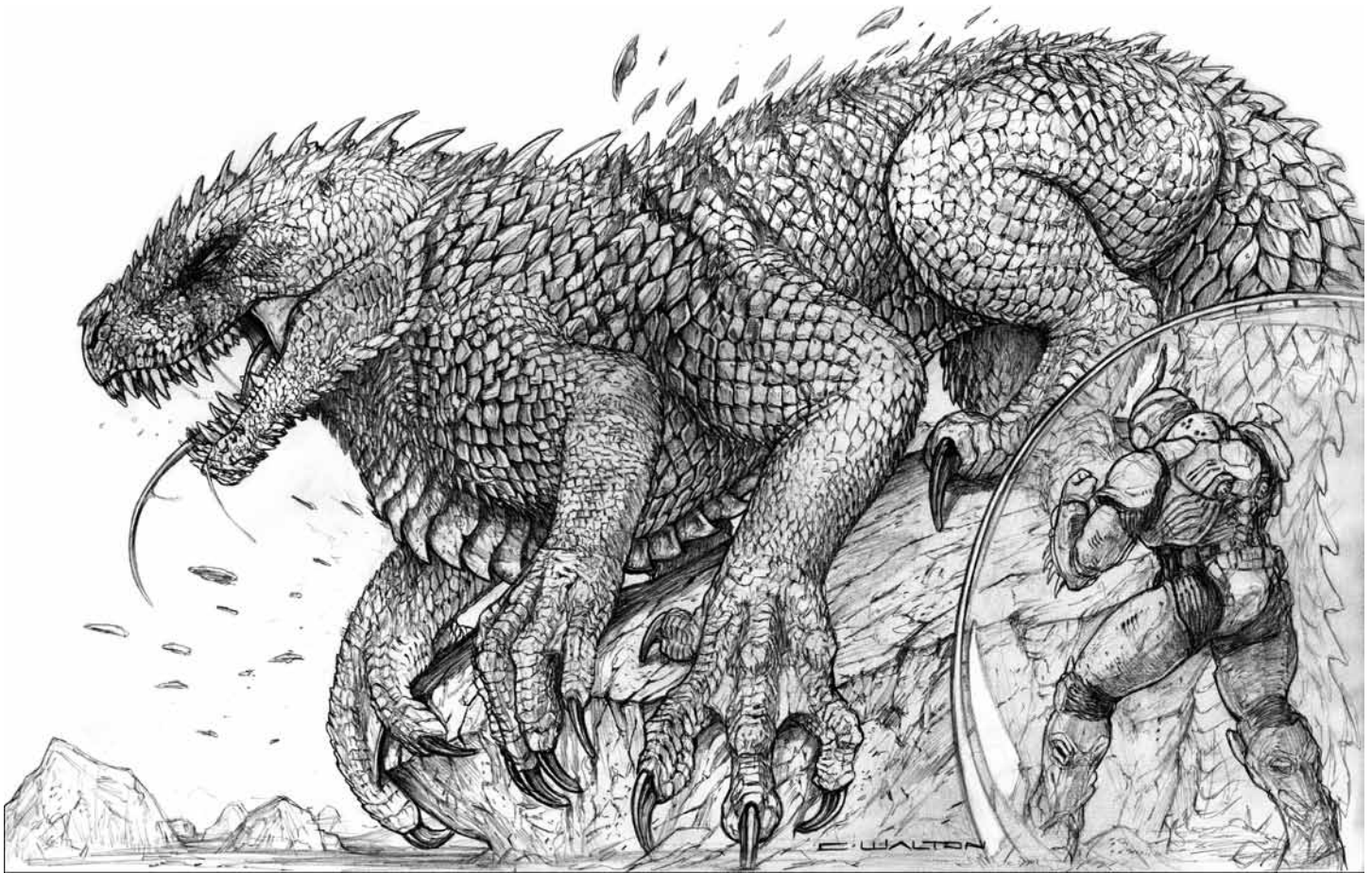
Attacks: Six.

Damage: Punches and kicks as per Supernatural P.S. Claw strike: 3D6 M.D. plus punch damage. Tail swat/strike: 4D6 M.D. plus punch damage. Body blocks: 6D6 M.D. plus punch damage (lots of mass = lots of damage). Stomp: 5D6 M.D. Swimming ram: 2D10 per 10 mph/16 km.

Bonuses: In the Water: +3 to initiative, +5 to strike, +3 to parry, +4 to dodge, with an additional +1 to dodge for every 20

mph/32 km. On Land: +1 to initiative, +3 to strike, +2 to parry, +2 to dodge. Also +9 to save vs poison and disease. Immune to Horror Factor, possession, and mind control.

Habitat: The Great Ocean. Found only in salt water. It is unknown if the Jonah can live in fresh water or how long it can survive on land.



Knifeskin

King of the Wastelands

The lion is known as the king of the jungle, but the undisputed ruler of the Wastelands is a powerful brute called the Knifeskin. It is one of the largest predators that Splicer characters are likely to ever encounter on the surface of a wasteland. And even then, they had better hope they don't see it more than once.

The Knifeskin is a muscular, six-legged, lizard creature covered with dazzling scales that glitter like a beacon in the sun. These very scales are what give the Knifeskin its name. The monster can cause the scales to ripple or stand on end much like the Quill Defense enhancement. Anyone striking the creature with physical blows will slash or impale themselves on the extruded scales. The Knifeskin can also slice enemies with a charge or sideswipe attack. Worst of all, the creature can spray down an area with the scales in a jagged version of the Needle Death Blossom.

Mercifully, Knifeskins are rare, with perhaps fewer than 60 of them dotting the globe. They are fiercely territorial, with each claiming an area of no less 50 square miles (128 square km). The problem is that these territories are often used by Splicers to move about undetected by the Machine. More than one patrol has had to beat a hasty retreat to avoid confronting a roving Knifeskin.

Even one Knifeskin is enough to inflict serious damage to the Machine's infrastructure, so when one of the Waste Kings is detected, a pack of Hunter-Searchers or other robots is sent out to observe the giant. Should it come within 20 miles (32 km) of some vital installation, the Knifeskin will be bombarded at long range by a combination of Sky Fighters, Battle Tracks, and other heavy robots, as well as any static defenses within range.

Type: Desert predator animal.

Alignment: Anarchist and extremely territorial.

Attributes: I.Q. 1D6+2 (low to medium animal intelligence), M.E. 1D6+6, M.A. 2D6, P.S. 3D6+20 (Supernatural), P.E. 2D6+14, P.P. 1D4+14, P.B. 1D6, Spd (see below).

Speed: Running: 100 mph (160 km). They can also put on a burst of speed up to 150 mph (240 km) for 2D6 minutes, after which the creature must slow down back to normal speeds for at least one hour. Leaping: 20 feet (6.1 m) high or 30 feet (9.14 m) across. Digging: 20 mph (32 km) through dirt, half as fast through rock and concrete, 35 mph (56 km) through sand. Can dig down enough to conceal itself in sand in just 1D6 melees. Swimming: 20 mph (32 km) with a depth tolerance of 200 feet (61 m). Flying: Not possible.

M.D.C. by Location:

Tail – 110

Legs (6) – 130

* Head – 110

Main Body – P.E. number x 10 plus 450

* Attackers are –3 to strike the head, –2 to strike the legs or tail. Depleting the M.D.C. of the head or main body kills the animal. Note: Elder Knifeskin (at least 60 years old) are larger and even tougher. Add 10% to overall size and increase all M.D.C. by 25%, add one additional attack per melee, +2 to strike and +2 to Horror Factor.

Horror Factor: 16 to humans, none to machines.

Size: The body is 11 to 14 feet (3.4 to 4.3 m) long, plus a 16 foot (4.9 m) long tail for an overall length of 27 to 30 feet (8.2 to 9.1 m) Height: 5 to 6 feet (1.5 to 1.8 m) at the shoulders. Overall width is roughly 8 feet (2.4 m).

Weight: 5 to 7 tons.

Average Life Span: 80 to 120 years.

Bio-Regeneration: 6D6 M.D.C. per hour for the main body, 3D6 for all other locations.

Feeding: All Knifeskin are carnivores that feed on 200 to 400 pounds (90 to 180 kg) of animal matter per day. Their great endurance means that they can go up to 3D4 days between meals, if necessary. (Reduce attacks per melee by one and M.D.C. by 10% under these circumstances, but also *add* +2 to initiative and +2 to strike, as they will be desperate for food.)

Natural Abilities: Immune to normal (S.D.C.) weapons and attacks as well as normal heat and cold. Highly resistant to heat: can withstand temperatures of up to 250 degrees Fahrenheit (121 C) with no ill effects. Takes only half damage even from M.D.C. heat and fire. 100% immune to the effects of radiation. Resistant to lasers: takes only half damage from non-variable laser weapons. Even Splicer light cell weapons are not quite as effective: reduce damage inflicted by light cell lasers by 25%. Can see into the infrared spectrum, range: 2,000 feet (610 m) and has polarizing light filters on its eyes. Excellent sense of smell that is ten times better than a human.

Skills: Climbing 70%, Dowsing 65%, Land Navigation 80%, Prowl 35%, Sense Magnetic North, Swimming 50%, Tracking (all) 70%, Track by smell 80%.

Vulnerabilities: They are vulnerable to ordinary poisons, disease, and Mega-Damage weapons. Takes triple damage from any cold-based attacks and is sluggish in temperatures below 70 degree Fahrenheit/21 C (reduce attacks by two, –1 on all combat rolls).

Attacks: Six.

Damage: Punches/kicks: as per Supernatural P.S. Tail strikes: equal to punch damage. Bite: 5D8 M.D. Tusk/Mandible: 4D6 M.D. Claws: Add 3D6 M.D. to punch/kick damage. Crush/pry/tear or stomp attacks: 4D8 M.D. Ramming attack: 5D6

M.D. with a 75% chance of knocking an opponent down. Sideswipe (slice or rake with scales): 3D6 M.D. Anyone striking the Knifeskin when its scales are extended takes 3D6 M.D.

Bonuses: +2 to initiative, +4 strike, +5 to parry, +2 to dodge, +6 to roll, +12 to save vs poison and disease. Immune to Horror Factor, mind control, and possession.

Special Scale Rain Attack: The Knifeskin can shower an area with deadly sharp scales in a manner similar to the Needle Death Blossom. Anyone caught in the 50 foot (15.2 m) radius takes 5D10 damage. Up to four radius attacks can be performed per 24 hours (regenerates automatically).

Habitat: Deserts, wastelands, and any other hot, arid environments.

Nocturne

The Nocturne is a sleek but powerfully built big cat, as if a cheetah and a lion were interbred. The difference is that these cats possess Supernatural strength and are covered in jet black fur that enables them to blend into the darkness.

Nocturnes live in packs of 6 to 12, but prefer to hunt alone, and only at night. Their natural camouflage and superior senses give them a decided edge over any other creature out and about at night, particularly livestock and humans. And that is where the problem lies. Nocturnes know they can score easy meals around Retro Villages, picking off a dog, sheep, or cow here and there. But sometimes they will strike at lone humans, especially children and the homeless. The Machine knows this full well, but usually chooses to do nothing to drive the animals away, and so the responsibility of defending the settlement falls to the villagers themselves. This is one of the many dilemmas facing Resistance fighters. Do they intervene and drive off the prowling Nocturne, possibly revealing their presence? If the Machine suspects that the Village has been harboring Splicers, it will raze the settlement and kill every man, woman, and child in the place. Resistance members (the player characters) must always use the utmost caution and leave no evidence of their passage.

Type: Predatory animal.

Alignment: Anarchist, though its stalking habits and targeting of humans and their animals might cause folks to think of it as pure evil.

Attributes: I.Q. 1D4+6 (medium to high animal intelligence), M.E. 1D6+8, M.A. 1D4+4, P.S. 1D6+20 (Supernatural), P.E. 2D4+10, P.P. 1D6+18, P.B. 2D6+6, Spd (see below).

Speed: Running: 55 mph (88 km), but is able to put on a burst of speed up to 120 mph (192 km) that lasts 1D6 melees, after which the Nocturne must drop back down to cruising speed for 10 minutes. Leaping: 50 feet (15.2 m) high or 80 feet (24.4 m) across from a dead stop, twice that with a running start. Digging: 20 mph (32 km) through dirt, one quarter or that through rock and concrete. Swimming: 10 mph (16 km) paddling along the water's surface, but hates the water and generally avoids it. Flying: Not possible.

M.D.C. by Location:

* Tail – 40

* Legs (4) – 55 each

* Head – 50

Main Body – 90 plus P.E. number



* A single asterisk indicates a small, difficult target to hit. Attackers are -3 to strike these areas. Depleting the M.D.C. of the head or main body kills the animal.

Horror Factor: 9 to humans, none to machines.

Size: 5 feet (1.5 m) long with a 2 to 3 foot (0.6 to 0.9 m) long tail, and roughly 3 feet (0.9 m) tall at the shoulders.

Weight: 120 to 170 pounds (54 to 76.5 kg).

Average Life Span: 30 years.

Bio-Regeneration: 3D6 M.D.C. per day to the body, 2D4 to all other locations.

Feeding: Carnivores that consume 10 pounds (4.5 kg) of (preferably fresh) meat per day.

Natural Abilities: Immune to normal (S.D.C.) weapons and attacks as well as normal heat and cold. Superior passive night-vision, range: 2,000 feet (610 m), and can also see in total darkness, range: 250 feet (76.2 m). Excellent hearing, can hear a whisper at 500 feet (152 m). Equipped with Sensitive Whiskers and Righting Reflex.

Skills: Camouflage (hiding) 85% (-25% in brightly lit areas). Climbing 80%, Land Navigation 70%, Prowl 85% (-25% in brightly lit areas), Surveillance 75% (will often study a target for hours), Tracking 80%.

Vulnerabilities: Nocturnes are easily blinded by any light greater than a 40 watt bulb. A simple flashlight or torch will disorient the creature (usual penalties for fighting blind) and force it to flee. They are also vulnerable to ordinary poisons, disease, and Mega-Damage weapons.

Attacks: Four, plus one during a speed burst.

Damage: As per Supernatural P.S., claws add 2D6 M.D. Critical strike with a leap attack on a roll of 17 or better.

Bonuses: +4 to initiative, +3 strike, +2 to parry, +3 to automatic dodge (does not use up melee attacks to dodge), +5 to roll with fall, and +6 to save vs Horror Factor. During a speed burst, add another +1 to initiative, as well as +2 to strike, parry, and auto-dodge.

Habitat: Any temperate or subtropical zone, regardless of terrain. Likes forests and tall grasses that provide concealment.

Packrabbit

The Packrabbit is one of the less overtly dangerous animals found in the wild. They are inquisitive little thieves who love to rummage through garbage piles, bags, sacks, pockets, you name it.

They are called Packrabbits because they hoard things and have four long bunny ears, but the creatures mostly resemble kangaroos, complete with a pouch to hold their treasures. They even travel in a continuous hopping gait much like kangaroos.

Packrabbits operate alone or in groups of 2 to 6, but live together in groups of up to 20. Physically, they pose very little threat to most people. The real problem is that the little sneaks love to steal things and take them back to their den. Many Resistance patrols have lost vital equipment in the dead of night and were forced to press on without it or waste valuable time recovering their goods.

Type: Scavenger animal.

Alignment: Basically Anarchist: there's not a mean bone in their bodies, it's just that their tendency to steal valuables makes them a nuisance.

Attributes: I.Q. 1D6+6 (medium to high animal intelligence), M.E. 1D6+4, M.A. 2D4+3, P.S. 1D6+8, P.E. 2D4+4, P.P. 2D6+8, P.B. 1D6+8, Spd (see below).

Speed: Running: Can run/hop up to 20 mph (32 km) all day long, and they can also put on a burst of speed that boosts them up to 50 mph (80 km) for 1D4 minutes, after which they must slow back down to normal speeds for at least thirty minutes. Leaping: 30 feet (9.1 m) high or 50 feet (15.2 m) across from a dead stop, 50% more with a running start. Digging: 15 mph (24 km) through dirt, one quarter of that through rock and concrete. Swimming: 5 mph (8 km) paddling along the water's surface. Flying: Not possible.

M.D.C. by Location:

* Tail – 55

* Hind Legs (2) – 50 each

* Arms (2) – 25 each

* Head – 35

Main Body – 4D12 plus P.E. number

* A single asterisk indicates a small, difficult target to hit. Attackers are –3 to strike these areas. Depleting the M.D.C. of the head or main body kills the animal.

Horror Factor: 6 to humans unfamiliar with them, none to machines.

Size: 3 feet, plus 1D6 inches (0.94 to 1.07 m) tall.

Weight: 40 to 60 pounds (18 to 27 kg).

Average Life Span: 20 years.

Bio-Regeneration: 1D6 M.D.C. per day to the body, 1D4 to all other locations.

Feeding: Omnivores that prefer fruits and vegetables (about five pounds/2.25 kg per day).

Natural Abilities: Immune to normal (S.D.C.) weapons and attacks as well as normal heat and cold. Color vision roughly equal to a human. Passive nightvision, range: 1,000 feet (305 m). Can also see into the infrared light spectrum, range: 200 feet (61 m). Outstanding hearing, can hear a whisper at 1,000 feet (305 m). Has fully dexterous, humanlike hands with three fingers and an opposable thumb.

Skills: Climbing 75%, Detect Concealment 80%, Identify Plants & Fruits 75%, Land Navigation 70%, Pick Pockets 75%, Prowl 75%.

Vulnerabilities: They are vulnerable to ordinary poisons, disease, and Mega-Damage weapons.

Attacks: Three.

Damage: As per standard P.S., with the exception of power kicks that inflict 1D6 Mega-Damage (counts as two attacks), and double kicks (stands/balances on their tail and strikes with both feet, does 3D6 M.D. with a 70% chance of knocking an opponent off their feet; counts as two attacks).

Bonuses: +5 to initiative, +1 strike, +4 to strike with kick attacks, +2 to parry, +4 to automatic dodge (does not use up melee attacks to dodge), +3 to disarm with kicks, +4 to save vs Horror Factor.

Habitat: Prefer forests and grasslands with temperate climates, but can be found periodically anywhere.

Stinger Moth

Stinger Moths have the same physiological arrangement as birds: a head, slender body, two legs, and two wings. But the Stinger Moth looks more like an insect. The head sports two disproportionately large compound eyes as well as four tiny antennae. The body and thin legs are very reminiscent of a preying mantis, while a pair of fragile moth or butterfly-like wings provide flight.

Almost always appearing in groups of at least four, Stinger Moths are drawn to human (and animal) activity. This trait is extremely annoying to the point of being hazardous. A sharp eyed robot patrol will always follow a group of Stinger Moths because the Moths themselves are often following in the footsteps of humans.

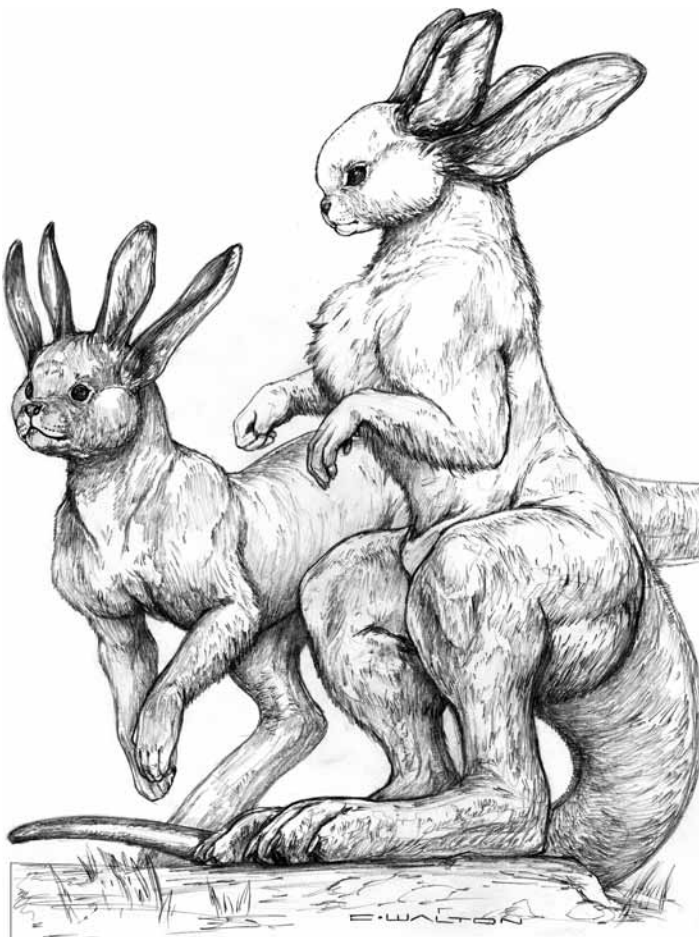
Stinger Moths are opportunists and scavengers, preferring to feed off of leftovers and scraps instead of fighting for their meals. When they do find it necessary to fight or kill, they have a powerful offensive weapon: a stinger tail that injects a fast-acting poison to weaken their prey. While the victim of the poison is drowsy and delirious, the Stinger Moth can feed at its leisure.

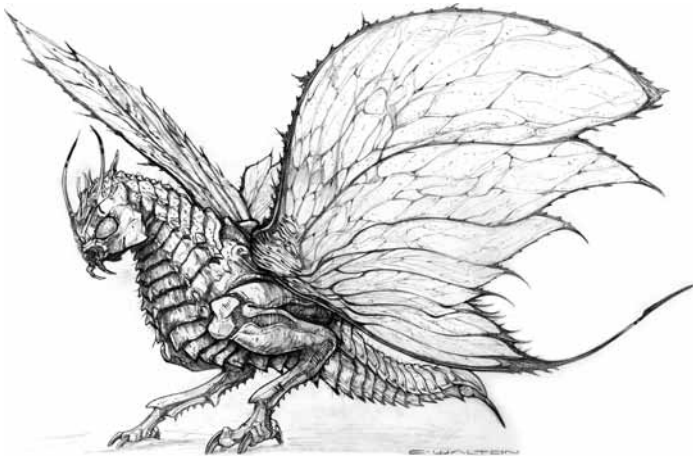
Type: Airborne hunter/scavenger animal.

Alignment: Anarchist. Generally hunts and kills only to survive and will try to flee if it is discovered or outmatched.

Attributes: I.Q. 1D4+1, M.E. 1D6+1, M.A. 1D4, P.S. 1D4+10 (Splicer/Robotic), P.E. 1D4+10, P.P. 1D6+10, P.B. 1D6, Spd (see below).

Speed: Running: 10 mph (16 km), a bit awkward and slow due to the tiny legs. Leaping: 60 feet (18.3 m) high and across, but only possible with a little lift from the wings. Digging: Not possible. Swimming: 10 mph (16 km) on the water's surface.





Flying: 75 mph (120 km), with a maximum altitude of 8,000 feet (2,438 m), with full hover and VTOL capabilities.

M.D.C. by Location:

- * Legs (2) – 12 each
- * Stinger Tail – 15
- * Wings (2) – 25 each
- * Head – 22
- Main Body – 2D6+25

* A single asterisk indicates a small, difficult target to hit. Attackers are -3 to strike these areas, and -6 for the head and legs. Depleting the M.D.C. of a wing makes flight impossible. If this happens when the Stinger Moth is in flight, it falls to the ground, suffering 1D6 M.D. per 100 feet (30.5 m). Depleting the M.D.C. of the head or main body kills the animal.

Horror Factor: 6 for a single Stinger Moth, 10 for a group of 6 or more, none to machines.

Size: The insect body is roughly 3 feet (0.9 m) long, including the stinger tail. The body is 8 to 10 inches (20 to 25 cm) in diameter. When fully opened, the wingspan is 5 feet (1.5 m).

Weight: 20 to 30 pounds (9 to 13.5 kg).

Average Life Span: 5 to 15 years.

Bio-Regeneration: 1D4 M.D.C. per day for the main body and wings, 1 M.D.C. per day for all other locations.

Feeding: Stinger Moths have a Vampiric metabolism and require 1D6 Hit Points of blood per day, though they can gorge themselves on up to 4D6 Hit Points in one sitting. Gorging makes them incredibly sluggish: reduce attacks per melee to one and reduce all speeds and combat bonuses by half for 1D4 hours. They have a probing, tongue-like proboscis that can lap up spilled blood from open wounds or dead animals (no more than two days old).

Natural Abilities: Immune to normal (S.D.C.) weapons and attacks as well as normal heat and cold. Partially resistant to cold: can withstand temperatures of -25 degrees Fahrenheit (-31.6 C) without damage. Can see into the ultraviolet spectrum, range: 1,000 feet (305 m), and has polarizing light filters. Compound eyes provide a 300 degree field of vision.

Skills: Climbing 35%, Prowl 75%, Swimming 30%, Tracking (all) 60%.

Vulnerabilities: They are vulnerable to ordinary poisons, disease, and Mega-Damage weapons. Takes double damage from Mega-Damage heat and flame attacks (triple damage to the wings).

Attacks: Three.

Damage: Bite: 3D6 S.D.C. in combat or 1D4 M.D. when feeding (more deliberate, not suitable for combat). 2D6 S.D.C. for limb strikes. Also see stinger tail, below.

Bonuses: +2 strike, +1 to dodge, +5 to auto-dodge while flying, +6 to save vs poison, +1 vs Horror Factor. Immune to mind control and possession.

Weapons: Stinger tail: 3D6 S.D.C. or 1D4 M.D., plus poison effects. The Stinger Moth's greatest advantage in hunting and killing larger prey is its stinger. The stinger is used to inject a powerful, debilitating poison to slow down its prey and make feeding easier. Those injected with the poison must make a save vs non-lethal poison. Those who do save take no further damage. Victims who fail to save suffer the following: they take 2D6 damage direct to Hit Points (4D6 M.D. to Mega-Damage characters and creatures) and suffer from a fairly strong headache, fever, chills, and slightly hypnotic but confusing visions or hallucinations like a bad drug trip. Blurry vision and swirling, colorful lights are common, as is the sensation that sounds are speeding up or slowing down randomly. The effects last for 1D6 hours and during that time, those who are poisoned lose two attacks per melee, are -40% on skills, and see their combat bonuses reduced by half.

Habitat: Any temperate climate regardless of the terrain. Likes mountains and cave entrances.

Stonebacks

In a harsh world filled with deadly predators, Stonebacks truly stand apart. They are armored primates with thick, dark gray skin and earth-tone plates, like an armadillo. Their physical structure and behavior is akin to silverback gorillas, hence the name Stoneback. Like many great apes, the Stonebacks are very intelligent, living in a social group, and able to coordinate their actions to solve complex puzzles or accomplish other tasks. They are curious about humans, but cautious enough to keep their distance most of the time. They will attack machines that push too close to their habitat, employing ambush tactics and brute strength to demolish any robot intruders.

A further sign of the Stoneback's intelligence is their (limited) ability to understand human words and sign language. A Stoneback can be taught to understand between 100 and 300 words given enough time, but this will have to be done in the wild, as they will never allow themselves to be taken captive. Before the player characters jump for joy, they need to understand the limitations of this skill. First, it takes time (2D4 weeks) to build up trust with these creatures, and even more time (2D4 additional days) to teach them a few words here and there. Plus, they do not understand human concepts like definite time and numbers. So a 6-bot patrol of Steel Soldiers that passed through a forest two days ago might be described as "many shining men after the last rain" and so forth. So sorry, they are not the perfect spies, but they are fearsome in combat, defending their homes and families with muscle and hurled debris.

Type: Hunter/gatherer.

Alignment: Anarchist with strong leanings toward Scrupulous.

Attributes: I.Q. 1D6+4 (medium to high animal intelligence), M.E. 1D6+8, M.A. 1D6+8, P.S. 2D6+20 (Supernatural), P.E. 1D6+16, P.P. 1D6+14, P.B. 1D6+4, Spd (see below).

Speed: Running (on all fours): 20 mph (32 km), but able to climb and swing through trees 50% faster than that. Leaping: 25 feet (7.6 m) high or 40 feet (12.2 m) across from a dead stop, twice that with a running start. Digging: 10 mph (16 km) through dirt, half that through rock and concrete. Swimming: 5 mph (8 km). Flying: Not possible.

M.D.C. by Location:

- * Legs (2) – 90 each
- * Feet (2) – 60 each
- * Arms (2) – 85 each
- * Hands (2) – 70 each
- * Head – 90

Main Body – P.E. number times 10 plus 40

* A single asterisk indicates a small, difficult target to hit. Attackers are –3 to strike these areas. Depleting the M.D.C. of the head or main body kills the animal.

Horror Factor: 7 to humans, none to machines.

Size: (If standing upright like a human) 5 to 7 feet (1.52 to 2.13 m) tall, 4 feet (1.22 m) wide at the shoulders.

Weight: 220 to 425 pounds (99 to 191 kg) for sub-adults and females, with the larger mature Stoneback males reaching 425-645 pounds (191 to 290 kg).

Average Life Span: 25 to 50 years.

Bio-Regeneration: 2D6 M.D.C. per hour to the body, 1D6 to all other locations.

Feeding: Omnivores that require 12 pounds (5.4 kg) of organic matter per day.

Natural Abilities: Immune to normal (S.D.C.) weapons and attacks as well as normal heat and cold. Able to withstand temperatures of –15 degrees (–26 C) to 120 degrees Fahrenheit (48.8 C) without ill effect. Excellent daylight vision roughly twice as good as a human, and in full color. Passive night-vision, range: 250 feet (76.2 m). Excellent sense of smell: roughly three times the sensitivity of a human. Resistant to physical attacks (takes only half damage from falls, punches, etc.). Partially resistant to the nanobot plague: requires three times the duration of exposure to trigger a response.

Skills: Climbing 90/80%, Herding 40%, Identify Plants & Fruits 65%, Land Navigation 68%, Prowl 55%, Tracking 70%, Track and Trap Animals 60%, Wilderness Survival 65%, and can communicate through Sign Language at about 60% proficiency if taught by a human.

Vulnerabilities: They are vulnerable to ordinary poisons, disease, and Mega-Damage weapons.

Attacks: Four.

Damage: As per Supernatural P.S.

Bonuses: +2 to initiative, +2 strike, +4 to parry, +3 to dodge (with another +2 when climbing/swinging through trees), +6 to roll with impact, +6 to save vs Horror Factor, +6 to save vs poison and disease. Also +2 to strike with thrown objects like rocks and +3 to strike with blunt objects like fallen tree branches.

Habitat: Grassy highlands and forests.



Quick Roll Monsters

The following tables are designed for Game Masters to quickly create a new creature or monster for their campaign. Feel free to roll on as many (or few) of these tables as you like, or simply pick and choose the characteristics you want. Remember that not every monster needs to be fully fleshed out like a normal NPC or villain. Sometimes all the G.M. cares about is how much damage a creature can take (M.D.C.) and how much it can dish out (P.S. or special weapons).

Because these tables are random, you might run into a few traits that either contradict one another or just don't seem logical. For instance, if you roll "Arctic" for Habitat, but then you later roll "Vulnerable to cold" as a weakness, well, that wouldn't make much sense, would it? Make any adjustments accordingly.

Your new monster can have multiple features from a single table. Roll 1D4 or 1D6 to determine how many times to roll on a single table (Weapons and Defenses, for example).

Size

The Size table is perfect for the Game Master who needs only the bare minimum: size, strength (P.S. may be normal human type strength, Splicer/Robotic level, or Supernatural), and Damage Capacity (either S.D.C. or M.D.C.). Game Masters creating more detailed monsters should also start with this table or use it in conjunction with the Body Type table that follows. Note that the P.S. range, weights, and other examples given are to help the G.M. and players get a clearer picture of what they are dealing with. There is a big difference between a critter that's the size of a copier paper box versus one that's the size of a full-grown elephant. Adjust the size, weight, strength, and M.D.C. to suit your needs. Creatures that are human-sized or larger get three attacks per melee round to start, smaller critters get two. Additional features may add to these (see below).

01-14% Tiny: The smallest type of animal or monster, generally about the size of a shoebox or average housecat. Weight is less than 35 pounds (15.75 kg), P.S. is 1D4+6. May be either an S.D.C. or M.D.C. creature, with just 2D10+15 points worth of Damage Capacity.

15-27% Small: Typically under three feet (0.9 m) tall, or roughly the size of an office chair or a largish dog (though definitely smaller than a Gorehound). Weight is less than 75 pounds (33.75 kg). P.S. is 1D6+12, probably standard strength (only a 01-25% chance of possessing Splicer level strength). An S.D.C. creature will have 2D10+70 S.D.C./Hit Points. A Mega-Damage creature will have 2D10+40 M.D.C.

28-46% Human-Sized: 5 to 7 feet tall/long (about 1.5 to 2.1 m), weighing 100 to 250 pounds (45 to 112.5 kg) with a P.S. of 2D6+12. Roll percentile to determine strength type: 01-35% is standard human type strength, 36-85% is equal to Splicer/Robot Strength, 86-100% is equivalent to Supernatural Strength! The creature will most likely (01-75%) be a Mega-Damage being with 3D10+70 M.D.C. (or 4D10+80 worth of S.D.C./Hit Points if it is an S.D.C. being).

47-67% Medium-Sized: About the size of a gorilla, tiger, Gorehound or average grizzly bear. Standing 6 to 10 feet tall or long (about 2.7 to 3 m), weighing 250 to 1,000 pounds (112.5 to 450 kg) with an average P.S. of 2D6+16, potentially more if in the higher scale. Roll percentile to determine strength type: 01-35% is standard human type strength, 36-85% is equal to Splicer/Robot Strength, 86-100% is equivalent to Supernatural Strength! The creature will most likely (01-75%) be a Mega-Damage being with 2D8x10+100 M.D.C. (or 1D6x10+100 S.D.C./Hit Points if it is an S.D.C. being). Add 1 to Horror Factor.

68-79% Large: About the size of a large horse, grizzly bear, or four door family car. Weight will be from 1,000 to 3,500 pounds (450 kg to 1,575 kg), maybe more. P.S. is 2D4+20. (01-10% means normal human strength, 11-75% means Splicer/Robotic level strength, 76-100% means the monster possesses Supernatural Strength!) M.D.C. is 6D6x10+100. Add 2 to Horror Factor.

80-97% Gigantic: These are towering beasts like the tyrannosaurus rex, approximately the size of a tractor trailer. Height/length can range from 45 to 90 feet (13.7 to 27.4 m), sometimes more. Weight is anywhere from 6 to 30 tons. P.S. is 2D4+35, often higher. 01-40% means Splicer/Robotic level strength, 41-100% means Supernatural Strength! M.D.C. is 2D4x100+200. Add 4 to Horror Factor.

98-100% Epic: The rarest of all beasts in the Splicers universe, Epic-scale monsters should be once in a lifetime encounters as only a handful of such titans could exist on the planet at any one time. These large mega-fauna should have a surrounding habitat that supports its necessary requirements via food sources, refuge area to rest, territory to traverse, etc. Height would be on par with a 30 story skyscraper. Supernatural P.S. is 4D10+50. M.D.C. is 2D4x1000+2500! Add 8 to Horror Factor.

Body Type

Use this table as a starting point for creating a new life form. A slight change to that basic shape can lead to an entirely new species. After all, many creatures of myth and lore are one-offs. Add a horn to a horse and you get a unicorn. Add wings instead and you get a Pegasus. Further rolls on the later tables can modify or deform the basic body shape until it is all but unrecognizable. Or roll multiple times on this table to combine aspects of multiple animals into a new amalgamation.

01-04% Alligator or Crocodile: Add +4 to P.S., +2 to Horror Factor, increase M.D.C. by 10%. Also +1 to strike and is able to hold its breath for 10 minutes.

05-08% Arachnid: An eight-legged animal such as a spider (gains Spinnerets) or scorpion (gains a poison stinger tail). Add 3 to Horror Factor and one attack per melee round.

09-12% Bat: Gains sonar, flight, and vulnerability: light. +2 to Horror Factor.

13-16% Bear: +2 to P.S., +2 to strike, +10% to Climbing, and increase M.D.C. by 10%.

17-20% Bird: The basic avian form: head, body, two wings that attach at the shoulders, and two legs.

21-24% Buffalo: +2 to P.S., increase M.D.C. by 10%.

25-28% Canine: +10% to Tracking, +1 to strike and dodge, +1 on initiative, and bite damage is 2D6. Add 5% to Prowl.

29-32% Crab or Lobster: Armed with pincers that add 2D6 to punch damage. Increase M.D.C. by 20%.

33-36% Deer: +10% to Camouflage, +2 to dodge, +2 on initiative. Antlers inflict the equivalent to normal punch damage plus 2D6.

37-40% Elephant: Add 40% to M.D.C. and +1D6 to P.S. Tusks inflict 3D6 damage.

41-44% Feline: Sense of balance is 70%, Righting Reflex, passive nightvision: range is 100 feet (305 m). Also able to leap twice its body length high or across, without a running start. Add +10% to Prowl.

45-48% Fish: Covers a wide range of aquatic life, from sharks to goldfish. Fitted with fins or flippers of some kind and cannot normally operate on dry land. Starts with Gills and Floating Air Bladder.

49-52% Frog or Toad: Starts with prehensile Tongue and is able to leap three times its body length high or across without a running start.

53-56% Giraffe: Add 10% to speed, +1 to initiative, and +10% to Detect Ambush due to height advantage.

57-60% Hippopotamus: Add 20% to M.D.C., +3D6 to bite damage, +2 to strike.

61-64% Horse: Use stats as per page 121 of the **Splicers® RPG**.

65-68% Humanoid: The basic human shape: two arms, two legs, one head, with a body that stands upright. A humanoid creature will always seem a bit more intelligent and far more frightening/revolting due to perversion of the human form, adding +2 to Horror Factor. Starts with fully dexterous human hands.

69-72% Insect: Any of the thousands of species. Gains Compound Eyes. +2 to Horror Factor.

73-80% Lizard: Add 10% to M.D.C. and +1 to Horror Factor.

81-84% Primate: A less developed humanoid (with or without a tail) but still smarter than the average animal. Add 5% to any skills/instincts. Starts with full dexterous hands.

85-88% Rhinoceros: Add 25% to M.D.C., +10% to speed, +2 to strike. Ram or head butt is equal to normal punch damage plus 3D6.

89-92% Rodent: Righting Reflex, able to leap twice its body length high or across, digging speed is doubled and +2 to dodge.

93-96% Slug: Vulnerable to poison (salt) but otherwise immune to pain and tough to kill. Gains Resistance to Physical Attacks. Quite revolting, +3 to Horror Factor.

97-100% Snake: +3 to Horror Factor, gains Wrestling and +2 P.S., or Poisonous Bite.

Limbs

Use this table to alter the original limbs of an animal and/or to add other “non-standard equipment” to your creation (giving a dog human hands, adding wings to a snake, creating a horse with six legs, etc.). Game Masters may opt to re-roll on the Body Type table above to determine what type(s) of altered/additional limbs to use. Example: Let’s say you start off with a Humanoid shape. Then you roll for limbs and the result is Additional Legs. But what kind? You can opt to simply add additional human legs, or roll on the Body Type table. You roll 71%, resulting in Insect legs. Creepy. In this case, it might make more sense to make ALL of the Humanoid creature’s legs insectoid.

01-13% Additional Arms: A pair of arms that are human-like in their shape, range of motion, and capabilities, including dexterous hands (see below). Note that the actual appearance of

the arms need not be human (could be covered with fur, scales, etc.). Every pair of arms after the first adds one attack per melee round and +1 to parry.

14-27% Additional Legs: Multiple legs will add to the overall speed and stability of the creature: +10% to speed and balance, +10 feet (3 m) to jumping distance, and +1 to roll with impact for each additional pair of legs. Large numbers of legs (more than six) may result in a sort of centaur appearance because the body shape must be adapted to fit the extra limbs. Any number of total legs more than four also means that each leg tends to be thinner than normal. Roll for the number of extra legs.

01-30% Two.	55-64% Eight.
31-44% Four.	65-74% Twelve.
45-54% Six.	75-84% Twenty.

85-100% One Hundred: these will be tiny in comparison to the rest of the body (think centipede or Sewer Crawler).

28-38% Dexterous Hands: These are fully articulated, human-like hands with three or four fingers and an opposable thumb. The creature is able to use any weapons or skills requiring full human hands.

39-49% Fins/Flippers: Just like those of a fish or other sea creatures, these appendages are ideal for speed and agility in the water. Increase Swimming speed by 50%, +2 to dodge in the water, and add +25% to the Swimming skill. However, fins are worthless for delicate work requiring articulation (-70% to skills that require hands if used in place of hands) and they are a liability on dry land if they are used in place of normal legs (reduce speed by 80%).

50-55% Multiple Heads: Very rare, normally resulting from deliberate genetic manipulation (the Dracos, for example). Always frightening, add +2 to Horror Factor for each additional head. Each head doesn’t necessarily have to match the body to which it is attached (roll or pick from the Body Type table above). Roll for the number of *additional* heads:

01-40% One.	66-90% Three.
41-65% Two.	91-100% Four.

56-70% Tail: Starts with a basic Prehensile Tail, but can be altered into any of the Combat types, as per pages 94-95 of the **Splicers® RPG**. Again, you may roll or pick from the Body Type table to find a tail that suits your creation (rat tail, lizard tail, etc.).

71-85% Tentacles: All details, bonuses, and penalties, as per page 89 of the **Splicers® RPG**.

86-100% Wings: Roll or pick from the following, then roll for Flight Speed, below:

01-20% Bat (dragon or demonic looking).
21-40% Feathered (standard bird wings).
41-60% Insect (varies, can be hard, frail looking, lustrous, or colorful).
61-80% Leathery (pterodactyl type).
81-100% Weird Wings (these wings look more like spider legs, like the Archangel illustration).

Speed

As the name implies, these tables determine the speed of a creature in its varying modes of travel. Many animals have multiple forms of locomotion. Humans can walk/run, or they can swim. Most birds can fly, and they can also walk, and so forth. Assume for our purposes that there is a primary mode of trans-

port, running in the case of humans. This default mode will always be the fastest of those available to the creature. Again, some examples are provided to give the G.M. and players something concrete to help their imaginations. All values are in miles/kilometers per hour.

Running

01-08%: Slow: 1D4+1 mph (3.2 to 8 km), -1 to dodge.

09-22%: Peak Human Athlete: 3D6 mph (4.8 to 28.8 km). (An average human: 2D6 mph 3.2 to 19.2 km).

23-50%: Fast Animal: 5D6 mph (8 to 48 km).

51-65%: Horse: 3D6+20 mph (36.8 to 60.8 km). Add +1 to dodge.

66-80%: Standard Host Armor: 1D6x10+60 mph (112 to 192 km). Add +2 to dodge.

81-92%: Race Car: 2D6x10+100 mph (192 to 352 km). Add +3 to dodge and +2 to initiative.

93-100%: Rocket Car: 1D4x100+150 mph (400 to 880 km). Add +5 to dodge and +3 to initiative.

Flying

Creatures that can fly are +1 to dodge for every 20 mph (32 km) of speed.

01-08%: Ponderous: 2D4+2 mph (6.4 to 16 km).

09-22%: Slow: 2D6+10 mph (19.2 to 35.2 km).

23-50%: Average: 2D10+20 mph (35.2 to 64 km).

51-65%: Quick: 3D10+30 mph (52.8 to 96 km). +1 on initiative.

66-80%: Fast: 1D4x10+60 mph (112 to 160 km). +2 on initiative and +1 to dodge.

81-92%: Very Fast: 1D10x10+100 mph (176 to 320 km). +1 on initiative and +3 to dodge.

93-100%: Incredibly Fast: 1D10x10+250 mph (416 to 560 km). +2 on initiative and +5 to dodge.

Swimming

01-08%: Ponderous: 2D4+2 mph (6.4 to 16 km).

09-22%: Slow: 2D6+10 mph (19.2 to 35.2 km).

23-50%: Average: 2D10+10 mph (19.2 to 48 km).

51-65%: Quick: 2D10+30 mph (51.2 to 80 km). +1 to dodge in the water.

66-80%: Fast: 1D4x10+40 mph (80 to 128 km). +2 to dodge in the water.

81-92%: Very Fast: 1D6x10+80 mph (144 to 224 km). +3 to dodge in the water.

93-100%: Incredibly Fast: 2D6x10+100 mph (192 to 352 km). +4 to dodge in the water.

Digging

Except for special cases, digging speed will seldom exceed 10 mph (16 km). Digging speed is halved when digging through stone, concrete, or other dense materials.

Leaping

Use the creature's height or length to determine standard leaping distances as follows: jumping height is equal to half the crea-

ture's height, jump lengths are equal to 1.5 times the creature's height. Add 50% to these values with a running start.

Habitat

Simply put, where does the creature call home? What climate is it best suited to live in? This isn't quite the same as its native environment, but the two can be linked. While all fish live in the water, some live only in fresh water and others in salt water. There are some fish that can only thrive in warm tropical waters, yet others do just fine in frigid rivers and oceans. Creatures gain +2 to initiative and +1 to dodge in their native habitat(s).

01-08% Arctic: The animal is well suited to frozen conditions, gaining Resistance to Cold.

09-16% Arboreal: This is some sort of tree-dwelling animal that spends most of its life living among the upper branches, often to avoid predators. Add +20% to Climbing skill.

17-24% Deserts: Likes hot, dry conditions. Gains Resistance to Heat.

25-32% Forests: A woodland creature that seldom strays from the cover or food provided by trees and shrubs. +10% to Camouflage.

33-40% Grasslands: Suited to open plains and grassy fields, usually in temperate climates. Increase speed by 10%.

41-48% Jungles: Thrives in humid, tropical environments. Needs to be tough to survive: add +1 to initiative, and +1 to strike.

49-56% Mountains: These can range from barren and arid desert mountains to frigid, snow-covered peaks. Add +10% to Climbing skill, +3 to roll with fall or impact.

57-64% Swamps: Favors wetlands of all kinds. May spend an equal amount of time on land or in the water. Add +10% to Swimming skill and increase swimming speed by 15%.

65-72% Underground: This can be an animal that digs its own burrow like a mole, or one that has learned how to survive in tunnels and caves, whether natural or artificial. This can include human dwellings (even Seedlings), abandoned communications conduits, old sewer systems, and so forth. +10 to Spelunking.

73-81% Water: A born swimmer (add 30% to the Swimming skill) that lives most or all of its life in the water.

82-93% City Ruins: These creatures manage to survive among the destroyed monuments of humankind's past: abandoned skyscrapers, overgrown parks, rubble piles, etc. These scavengers are adept at avoiding humans and robots alike: +10% to Camouflage, +1 to dodge.

94-100%: Adaptable: Much like humans, these animals have found a way to survive almost anywhere on the planet, even under the harshest conditions. Special adaptations can crop up within a single species to help it survive in a new environment: tough, leathery skin to protect against the heat or thick fur to ward off the cold, etc. These beings must also be physically fit and mentally tough: add +1 to initiative, +2 to save vs Horror Factor, +1 to strike and dodge.

Behaviors

You might think of this as the personality or temperament of an animal. Some will be friendly or even helpful towards humans, like a dog or dolphin. Many more will be aloof, going out of their way to avoid human contact. A handful will even attack humans

on sight. Some animals will be much smarter than they let on, others will fight to the death for no good reason at all.

Remember that looks can be deceiving. Something cute and cuddly can turn on you in an instant. In my experience, the smaller a dog is, the more likely it is to bite or snap at you. Perhaps not too scary, but imagine a pack of 30 of these things surrounding you. Horses, on the other hand, are pretty big, but tend to startle easily. Just more of Mother Nature's irony.

01-12% Aggressive: Fights to defend its turf, intimidate, or show off for a potential mate, but will seldom fight to the death. Add +2 to initiative, +2 to strike, and +3 to save vs Horror Factor.

13-24% Cautious: Generally wary about the unknown, these animals notice anything unusual or out of place. +10% to any skills used to hide/sneak or uncover something hidden.

25-36% Curious: The need to learn overpowers any survival instincts. These animals will approach humans, machines, and anything else that draws their attention, though they will often be prepared to make a quick getaway. +5% to any skills, +1 to initiative, +2 to save vs Horror Factor, and +2 to dodge.

37-48% Herd Animal: Relies on the group for protection and generally does the same thing as the next member of the pack, so if one animal gets spooked and runs, they all do.

49-60% Loner: Tends to avoid human and machine contact, tries to hide or flee, but will still fight furiously when injured or cornered. Doesn't even associate with others of its kind, and so is usually encountered alone except for mating season. +10% to Prowl and Camouflage, +2 on initiative, +2 to dodge.

61-72% Suicidal: Only the most reckless, belligerent, or just plain bold animals will fight to the death, but it does happen. Add +6 to save vs Horror Factor, one additional attack per melee round, +2 to initiative, and +3 to strike.

73-84% Territorial: Similar to the Aggressive animal, the Territorial beast has staked out an area that it defends against any intrusion. Not necessarily hostile, it will fight only to drive the interlopers or competitors of its food or threats to its family out of its territory, and will seldom pursue anyone beyond its boundaries. Add +1 to initiative, +2 to strike, and +2 to save vs Horror Factor.

85-100% Timid/Passive or Ornery: These animals are either too bold, stubborn, unadjusted, unaware, unintelligent or too easy-going to worry about what's going on in the world around them. Adds +10% to any skill used to train or domesticate them unless it is a particularly obstinate breed like a stubborn donkey (-10% to training skills).

Hunting/Fighting Style

Animals employ vastly differing tactics to hunt, kill, and survive, relying on stealth, speed, brute strength or strength of numbers to get the job done.

01-18% Ambush Predator: This type of animal lies in wait for its prey, often concealing itself through camouflage or by hiding underwater, up in a tree, etc. When the time is right, the ambusher strikes with the intent of killing its target within the first few moments. Will sometimes pursue wounded prey, but is likely to stick close to its home or hiding spot. +10% to Camouflage or Prowl.

19-34% Burst Predator: Capable of a burst of speed (25% higher than normal top speed for that animal) lasting 2D4 melees that adds +2 to strike, +4 to dodge (or auto-dodge, if applicable),

and one attack per melee. The animal will be fatigued from the burst, requiring a rest period of 3 to 10 minutes, during which time top speed and combat bonuses are half.

35-50% Guerrilla Tactics: This type of animal does not fight protracted battles, but darts in and out to strike at its targets, usually picking off the smaller, weaker, young, or sickly members of a pack. This type of species is very familiar with its habitat and how to use it to its advantage for intimidation, harassment, combative prowess and escape. +3 to initiative and +10% to speed.

51-66% Pack Hunter or Herd Animal: Hunts or fights within a group of 3 to 10 animals who coordinate their efforts to bring down larger prey or drive off attackers. Such pack hunters often operate with a hierarchy and strategy and can identify the strongest, the weakest and the wounded of a herd of prey species or rival pack. Such socialized species will also benefit from the pack by ensuring every member feeds and increases the chance of healing from otherwise disabling wounds that would typically be the death of a single predator. Thus, the larger the pack the larger the food requirements will be to also sustain the pack. Gains +1 to strike and +1 to save vs Horror Factor for each member of the group.

67-85% Stalker/Tracker: Studies their targets from afar, looking for weaknesses, often tracking them for days at a time. Gains Surveillance +10% and +1 to Horror Factor.

86-100% Trapper: This animal is capable of constructing some sort of trap such as a pit or web to catch its meal. Gains Trap Construction +10%.

Skills and Special Instincts (common)

These are pretty much the same skills used by Splicer characters. Roll 1D6+4 to determine the animal's level of proficiency. Certain traits from other tables may add to this percentage.

01-10%: Camouflage (either hides under cover or has natural coloring that enables it to blend in with its surroundings).

11-20%: Climb (rappelling may not be possible/applicable depending on the animal's anatomy).

21-30%: Fasting.

31-40%: Identify Plants and Fruits.

41-50%: Land Navigation.

51-60%: Prowl.

61-70%: Swim.

71-80%: Tracking (by scent).

81-90%: Tracking (by sight).

91-100%: Weather Sense. (The ability to predict upheavals in weather or other natural phenomena, like earthquakes and tidal waves. Base skill is equal to 25% +5% per level.)

Skills and Special Instincts (uncommon)

01-10%: Acrobatics (uncanny balance or grace, adds all the bonuses from the Physical skill).

11-20%: Detect Ambush (knows when it's being watched/hunted).

21-30%: Dowsing.

31-40%: Excavation (builds a home underground like a mole or ant).

41-50%: Herding.

51-60%: Imitate Sounds or Sing.

61-70%: Spelunking.

71-80%: Understand human languages (must be trained to do so by a human, and often a sign of an intelligent animal).

81-90%: Understand sign language (must be trained to do so by a human, and often a sign of an intelligent animal).

91-100%: Wrestling (often fights by grappling or strangling its prey).

Feeding

Everybody's got to eat, right? The metabolism of a creature is often a big determining factor in its behavior towards humans and other life forms.

01-10%: Carnivore: Add 10% to Tracking or Prowl; typical bite damage is 3D8.

11-20%: Herbivore: Grazing (eats hay, wheat, oats, and grass). +10% to Land Navigation and Identify Plants & Fruits; typical bite damage is 1D8.

21-30%: Herbivore: Fruits and vegetables (can still eat other substances like grass, but prefers a diet of 80% fruits and vegetables). +10% to Land Navigation and Identify Plants & Fruits; typical bite damage is 1D8

31-40%: Insectivore: Eats bugs, ants, spiders and other tiny life forms; typical bite damage is 1D6.

41-50%: Lithovore: (rare) Typical bite damage is 3D8.

51-60%: Omnivore: Eats raw meat or fruits and vegetables, basically whatever's available; typical bite damage is 1D8.

61-70%: Scavenger: Feeds off of carrion, garbage, and human discards. +6 to save vs Poison and Disease, typical bite damage is 1D8 for very small scavengers. Small size to large size scavengers from wolverines (2D8) to hyenas (3D8) can wield amazing jaw power for crushing bone and sinew. Larger scaled scavengers may reach 3D8+8.

71-80%: Vampire: (blood drinker) +20% to track by scent of blood; typical bite damage is 1D8.

81-90%: Vampire: (consumes ALL bodily fluids, leaving behind only a dry husk) Typical bite damage is 1D8.

91-100%: Water Drinker: Filters all the nutrients it needs through drinking water. +20% to Dowsing.

Special Features

Additional traits that make the beast unique in some way.

01-07%: Ambidextrous: Add one attack per melee, +2 to parry.

08-14% Automatic Dodge: Does not use up melee attacks to dodge.

15-21% Bioluminescence: Gives off a glow (like a firefly) equal to a 40 watt bulb, making it impossible to prowl in darkness unless the glow can be switched off. This may be used as a warning to threats, when startled, to communicate and coordinate with its own species/pack.

22-28% Climbing Claws: +10% to Climbing skill, +3 to punch/claw damage.

29-35% Enhanced Agility: Add 1D4+2 to P.P.

36-42% Enhanced Speed: Add one attack per melee, +2 to dodge, and 20% to top speed.

43-49% Enhanced Strength: Add 1D4+6 to P.S.

50-56% Extraordinary Endurance: A hardy beast that is very resistant to disease and injury and may harvest a good stamina for running with a P.E. of 20+1D6.

57-63% Gills: Breathes underwater like a fish.

64-70% Hold Breath: Able to survive underwater for 10 plus 2D6 minutes.

71-77% Human Factor: One of those cute animals like puppies and dolphins that people just love, making them hesitant to attack or kill them: -1 to initiative and -3 to strike such animals unless said animal attacks first.

78-84% Non-Skid Pads.

85-91% Righting Reflex.

92-100% Super Senses: Choose one: eagle-like vision that can recognize a face one mile (1.6 km) away; ears that can hear a whisper at 500 feet (152.4 m); sense of smell equal to a bloodhound; Seismic Sense; sense of taste that can identify a specific taste at 40 +4% per level.

Weapons and Defenses

Unless stated otherwise, these features are identical to those found in the Splicers RPG.

01-05% Acid Blood: Burns organic matter.

06-15% Armored: Increase S.D.C./M.D.C. by 50%, and add +1 to roll with impact.

16-20% Bio-Force Field: 2D10 plus 60 M.D.C.

21-28% Blades or Claws: Add 2D6 to punch damage.

29-36% Combat Tail.

37-43% Horns or Antlers.

44-52% Natural Camouflage: A natural coloration of the fur, hair, scales, or skin and or movement imitation of its immediate surrounding habitat that enables the animal to blend in to their surroundings. +10% to Camouflage and Prowl skills.

53-57% Rapid Healing: Restores 4D6 S.D.C. or 2D6 M.D.C. per melee round.

58-63% Resistance to Cold.

64-69% Resistance to Heat.

70-74% Resistance to Physical Attacks.

75-82% Poisonous: The creature has poisonous skin, secretes a toxin from its body or is deadly if tasted or eaten (roll on the Poison/Toxin table below).

83-89% Special Senses: As per special features above, or add a Forked Tongue, Heat Pits, Radar, or other feature.

90-95% Spines or Spikes: The animal is covered with short but strong spikes or spined ridges that add 10% to overall M.D.C., and inflict an additional 2D6 damage to rams, punches, or tail strikes. Attackers who roll a 10 or lower when striking this animal inflict 1D10 damage to themselves.

96-100% Teeth and Jaws: Powerful jaws like a crocodile, hyena shark coupled with razor sharp teeth. Bite damage is 5D6.

Ranged Weapons

01-15% Breath Attack (poison): The creature is able to exhale a ten foot (3 m) noxious cloud of poison up to 8 times per day (each counts as one melee attack). Range: 40 feet (12.2 m). Roll or select the type of poison (see below).

16-30% Breath Attack (fire): Range: 100 feet (30 m). Damage: 2D6 Mega-Damage (up to twice that for larger beasts). Payload: 12 blasts per day. Rate of Fire: Once per melee.

31-42% Needle Death Blossom: Identical to the listing in the *Splicers® RPG*.

43-60% Quill Launchers: Identical to the listing in the *Splicers® RPG*.

61-75% Scream or Shriek: The animal can produce an ear-splitting cry that will deafen anyone without hearing protection: -4 to initiative for 1D6 melees. Plus, that noise can be heard for miles, giving away the character's position.

76-90% Spit Poison: Similar to the Poison Breath attack above, but in this case, the venom is in the form of a liquid or sticky glob that can be spat up to 50 feet (15.2 m) away. Some substances work on contact or are absorbed through the skin, others must be shot directly into the eyes, mouth or other sensitive area.

91-100% Spinnerets: Identical to the listing in the *Splicers® RPG*.

Vulnerabilities

Many animals and monsters have weaknesses that savvy hunters can exploit.

01-12% Cold: Suffers the effects of hypothermia in temperatures below 60 degrees Fahrenheit (15.5 C). Takes double damage from cold-based attacks.

13-24% Heat: Suffers 2D6 points of damage per day when exposed to temperatures above 50 degrees Fahrenheit (10 C). Takes double damage from flame, plasma, and other heat-based attacks.

25-35% Impact: The skin, shell, or bones are thin and prone to breakage. Takes 50% more damage from physical strikes (punches, falls, etc.), and any single attack that inflicts more than 10% of the animal's S.D.C./M.D.C. will stun it for 2D6 minutes.

36-47% Light: The animal is blinded if exposed to light greater than a 25 watt bulb or simple burning torch.

48-58% Nocturnal: This type of animal finds it difficult to operate during daylight hours. It will be sluggish and uncoordinated: reduce all bonuses by half, -15% to skills.

59-69% Odorous: Like a skunk, the animal gives off a distinct odor that can be smelled for miles. -20% to hide, Prowl, or to avoid being tracked or followed.

70-80% Poison: The creature is allergic to some common substance, and contact with that substance, or worse yet, ingesting it, causes reactions including weakness, dizziness, fever, blurred vision, and physical pain or damage.

81-92% Physical Deficiencies (slow, weak, etc.): This particular specimen is flawed in some way due to injury, disease, or birth defect. Options for a sickly animal include reducing speed by half, reducing P.S. by 50%, reducing S.D.C./M.D.C. by half, or some other impairment such as blindness. Note that this may be a single instance and does not necessarily reflect a trait common among the species.

93-100% Radiation: This animal must avoid the Wastelands and other "hot zones" for fear of contracting radiation poisoning. Every hour of exposure to even moderate levels of radiation inflicts 1D6 points of damage. Furthermore, the creature cannot bio-regenerate while being exposed to radiation and the radiation damage takes twice as long to heal.

Uses

There must be some reason(s) for humans to go after a particular animal or monster.

01-15% Construction Material: Most ancient cultures used assorted animal parts for building something. Hides and furs can be made into clothing, bones can be fashioned into tools or weapons and so forth.

16-30% Domestication: These types of animals are generally meant to be used as food, guardians or pets.

31-47% DNA: The animal or monster contains genetic material that can be used to create new Bio-Tech devices, War Mount designs or enhancements.

48-68% Food: Pretty much self-explanatory.

69-77% Fuel: Some substance within the animal is suitable for use as fuel (whale oil, for example).

78-89% Medicinal: Some substance within the animal has medicinal properties useful for the treatment of wounds or disease.

90-100% Poison: Some substance within the animal can be extracted and/or processed for use as a toxin or poison (or as an antidote/cure for such substances).

Types of Poison/Toxin

01-17% Deadly Poison: The most dangerous types of venom will cause 4D6 points of damage direct to Hit Points/M.D.C. (half with a successful save) per day unless an anti-venom or other special treatment (a Saint) can be administered. Even though the character is dying, there is often no physical pain accompanying the poison.

18-34% Hallucinogen: This toxin causes perceptions to be distorted. The victim will be confused and off balance for 1D6 hours (just 3D6 minutes with a successful save vs non-lethal poison). Attacks per melee are reduced by two, all combat bonuses are halved. Concentration is difficult at best: -25% to all skills.

35-51% Mild Poison: Symptoms may include nausea, cramps, dizziness, and stiffness in the joints. Reduce attacks per melee by one, -2 on all combat rolls. Duration is 2D6 hours (just 5D6 minutes with a successful save).

52-68% Paralyzing Agent: This toxin disrupts the motor functions but leaves its victim fully awake and aware, a frightening predicament. Victims who fail to save vs non-lethal poison will fall to the ground, their limbs feeling like lead weights. Speed is reduced to just 10%, they have one attack per melee round, no initiative, and -10 to all combat rolls. Skill performance is at -80%. Duration is 6D10 minutes. A successful save means most of the effects are shrugged off: just -1 to all combat rolls and -10% to speed and all skills for half the usual duration.

69-85% Sedative: The character must roll to save vs non-lethal poison or risk falling into a short but complete slumber that lasts 5D6 minutes. The character cannot be roused through usual means for the duration of the poison's effect, though special treatments (holistic medicines, the healing powers of a Saint, or a near fatal overdose of adrenaline) can snap the person awake. A successful save means only mild drowsiness (-1 attack per melee round, -1 to all combat rolls, -5% to all skills) for half the duration.

86-100% Virulent Disease: The animal carries some terrible illness that debilitates the victim. Those who fail to save vs disease suffer 1D6 damage to Hit Points (or 2D6 M.D.) per day as well as the temporary loss of 1 P.E. point per day. The disease is

no doubt painful as it runs its course: reduce attacks per melee by two, -3 on all combat rolls, -10% to all skills. Unless treated, the illness lasts 1D6 days (just one day with a successful save). Lost P.E. returns at a rate of one per day of rest, or one for every *two* days of activity.



Ranger O.C.C.

Naturalist, Scout, and Explorer

Long before humans sought to solve all their problems through science, native peoples found ways to live in harmony with their surroundings and reap nature's bounty with care and respect. The modern Splicer Ranger harkens back to these simpler times. In keeping with the earliest definition of their title, these Rangers are students of nature who learn to live off the land and survive on the war-torn surface for extended periods.

A Ranger's training begins in the classroom but quickly moves on to the stables and farm areas of the underground havens. There, they learn first-hand how to care for all manner of creatures, from ordinary cows and livestock to adolescent War Mounts. Rangers spend at least six months training to become full-fledged veterinarians, then another three months or so tending to hydroponic gardens or Seedling-spawned underground farms. With some basic military training and the issuance of armor and equipment, the rookie is ready to begin a dangerous career as a Ranger. At the end of that career, those who are too old or injured to carry on in the field often return to the farms and nurseries to teach the next generation.

The Ranger can best be thought of as a field scientist or naturalist, though one with some combat training. The majority of their time is spent on the surface studying nature in all its splendor and cataloging it, from insects and shrubs to giant Mega-Damage creatures. There is a very important reason for all this research: to unlock new Splicer bio-technologies.

While it is true that only the Librarians have the raw processing power to create new hybrid DNA strands and that the Engineers have the technical know-how to oversee the creation of fresh bio-tech, they often rely on outside "consultants" to bring them new ideas. This is one of the most crucial jobs for a Ranger. Long hours are spent studying various animals in the lab or in nature so that the Ranger can develop a sense of the creature's strengths, weaknesses, abilities, and limitations. The best aspects of several species are combined into new breeds of War Mounts. Likewise, the hunting or fighting style of some beast could serve as inspiration for the basic "programming" of a new War Mount (as reflected in its bonuses, instinctive skills, etc.). Perhaps some animal has a unique adaptation that enables it to overcome the odds and survive in an inhospitable environment. Such an animal is a prime source of genetic material for creating new enhancements for Host Armor.

The Rangers' intimate knowledge of animal life serves other vital functions. They are in effect, combat medics/veterinarians, trained in the care of animal life, including Gorehounds and War Mounts. Like a paramedic, the Ranger can get an injured War Mount back on its feet (or tentacles, wings...) and either get it back into the fight or evacuated to a safe location so the creature's natural healing powers can kick in.

Man (and carnivorous Host Armor and War Mounts) does not live by bio-tech alone. Such metabolisms cannot survive on Seedling grown food for long. They require fresh sources of meat, which may be difficult to find in the field. Enter the Ranger, who uses his stealth and knowledge to track animal herds across the land, capturing lone specimens or even dozens at a time (with some help, of course) to replenish the food supply. Many of these animals are returned to the safety of a Great House, where they are bred or cloned to provide a steady stream of food for man and bio-tech beast alike.

Not to be forgotten is the Rangers' knowledge of plant life. They are experts at determining the usefulness of a leaf, twig, tree bark, or other substance for use as food or in the brewing of medicines or poisons. A Ranger will always look to some all-natural cure for minor health problems, preferring a root or herb to some synthesized pill. This is an aspect of their personality that sometimes causes clashes with more militant Splicer O.C.C.s. Rangers always seem ready to spout some big, long speech about how mankind brought about their own downfall by ignoring the past and turning their backs on nature. Everyone knows it was a combination of hubris and shortsightedness that created NEXUS, but that doesn't stop the occasional fistfight from breaking out. The Rangers may be right, but they're also very self-righteous about it.

The Gaia personality of the Machine doesn't quite know what to make of the Rangers. On the one hand, she admires their viewpoint and the respect Rangers have for nature. On the other hand, she cannot abide humans traipsing through her Preserves, harvesting animals, and establishing safe havens for the Resistance. Wise Rangers have learned to *never* trust Gaia, even if her actions seem to have been (tentatively) helpful in the past. She is far too fickle, and her obsessions often lead her to make irrational choices.

Typical Ranger Duties (possible adventure hooks)

Scientific Research: Rangers are often deployed on extended patrols to study animal and plant life, collect samples, and conduct experiments. This might lead to the discovery of a new species that could prove vital to the Resistance. This can be a dangerous mission, especially if the subject is located near a robot concentration, or if the animal the Engineers desire is some deadly predator that they need taken alive.

Reconnaissance: Rangers are experts in stealth and concealment, becoming one with their surroundings. They are often pressed into service as scouts and pathfinders, leading a small team behind enemy lines. This may involve avoiding robot or human patrols, shaking off a pursuer or creating false trails, escaping predatory animals, or any number of other hazards. A Ranger may also set out ahead of time to establish a rally point or refuge, especially in and around Nature Preserves. Rangers also serve as point men in dangerous terrain. Like a sherpa, the Ranger acts as a guide to those not equipped to survive the harsh outside world (civilians, a Saint, a wounded soldier who cannot fend for himself, etc.).

Field Medic/Veterinarian: Rangers prefer to avoid stand-up fights, but when they are called to participate in large-scale battles, they try to stick close to the War Mounts and Gorehound packs, patching up the wounded (including humans) as best they can.

Goodwill Ambassador: Rangers spend so much time on the surface that they are bound to visit one or more Retro Villages. All Rangers learn a few extra languages so they can hopefully communicate with the people they come across. They are very well suited to meet-and-greet opportunities: they don't usually ride scary monsters (War Mounts), they never wear frightening disguises (Host Armor), and they are clearly human (civilians can be a bit taken aback by Scarecrows and Skinjobs). Plus, the Ranger is usually familiar with the area, so they have a common ground with the people and an understanding of their hardships (a bad spell of weather, earthquake, etc.). This makes them the trusted face of the human Resistance. A Splicer in need can often rely on contacts established by Rangers to get aid from a Retro Village.

Rangers also bring tokens of friendship that are easily understood inside the Retro Village. Bio-tech creations are usually too dangerous to trade, but furs, seeds, leather goods, or even news of the outside world are always welcome. Rangers will offer their skills to heal sick or injured pets and livestock and have been known to covertly deal with a troublesome predator (animal or human) that is pestering the Village.

Special Knowledge-Flora and Fauna

Rangers possess an encyclopedic knowledge of both plant and animal life as detailed in their training and O.C.C. skills. Taking the power of these combined skills and experiences into account, Game Masters and players have the option of playing out certain events in a more dramatic and realistic manner. This might entail adding bonuses to a skill roll or providing hints to help guide the players along.

Example: The G.M. asks the players to make a skill roll, say for Prowl, and everyone succeeds. He then slips a note to the Ranger player saying that the local wildlife is on alert. The Ranger player should hopefully deduce that the animals are worried about something other than the player characters: "Guys, see how that deer's ears are swiveling around? He's scared of something, and it ain't us." Other clues could steer the players

into side quests or serve as foreshadowing to build tension. "You [pointing at the Ranger player] realize that this lion (or whatever) was dragged some distance from where it was killed, and that this is unusual for the animal/people that you've been tracking." Or "These footprints are all over the place. Maybe the monster is wounded or searching for its young." Or a personal favorite: "Don't get too close to that thing. It's mating season."

The Ranger should be given a bonus of 5-10% when using skills such as Brewing, Holistic Medicine, and Use & Recognize Poison if the ingredients are all found in nature. Likewise, skills such as Tracking or even Intelligence could receive a bonus depending on circumstances and how the Ranger uses such skills. Conversely, the Ranger would be at a disadvantage when treating artificial sources of damage or illness (+5% to Medical skills when treating a snakebite, but -10% when dealing with nerve agents, mustard gas and other chemicals).

Example: Some Great Houses have a signature "look" or style to their bio-tech wares (Host Armor, War Mounts, etc.), such as a pattern of horns or coloration of fur, scales, and so forth. Other clues may require some lab tests that could lead (or mislead) the players to the next phase of their adventure. Ranger: "The courier was killed by refined tree frog poison. Only Great House Palladium is known to use this kind of poison. I wonder what he was carrying that they wanted badly enough to kill for."

Lastly, if the Ranger learns the Vital Points skill, the player only needs to spend one attack when using Vital Points against S.D.C. animals and humans. Host Armors and War Mounts feature many bio-enhancements, and so each one is just a little bit different, requiring the regular two attacks per Vital Point strike.

Ranger O.C.C.

Also known as Game Warden, Zookeeper, Wanderlust, and (sarcastically) Park Ranger.

Alignment: Any, but the overwhelming majority are of good or selfish alignments.

Attribute Requirements: I.Q. 11, M.E. 11, P.E. 10, a high P.S. and P.P. are also helpful.

Attribute Bonuses: +1D4 to I.Q., +1D4 to M.E., +1D6 to M.A., +1D4 to P.S., +1D6 to P.E., +2 to P.P.

O.C.C. Bonuses: +3 to save vs poison and disease, +1 to save vs insanity, +1 to save vs Horror Factor in general with a bonus of +1 to save vs the Horror Factor of biological threats (animals, War Mounts, Host Armor, and any other non-machine entities) at levels 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 10 and 12.

Base S.D.C.: 50

Common Skills: Standard +10%.

O.C.C. Skill Programs: Veterinary (+25%), Hunter/Trapper (+15%), Outdoorsman (+15%), Science (+20%, comprised of the following skills: Astronomy & Navigation, Botany, Chemistry, Genetics, Research, and Xenology), and the following additional skills (+10% where applicable): Hand to hand: Basic, Bio-Comms, Camouflage, Detect Ambush (+10% when dealing with animals and monsters), Operate Bio-Equipment, Surveillance, two other Languages of choice (Literacy not included) and W.P. Archery (special bonus of +1 to strike). Also see the Ranger's special knowledge in the description above.

O.C.C. Related Skills: Select three Elective skills from the following list at first level, plus two more skills at levels 2, 4 and 8, and one additional skill at levels 12 and 15. All new skills start at level one proficiency.

Communications: Any (+10% to Bartering, Language and Literacy skills, and Sign Language).

Domestic: Any (+10% to Begging, Brewing, Fishing, Gardening, or Sewing).

Espionage: Detect Concealment (+10%), Intelligence or Tracking (+5%) only. Vital Points may also be taken, but counts as two skill selections and may only be used against organic opponents.

Medical: Any (+10% to Brewing, Dentistry, and Holistic Medicine). Medical Doctor counts as two skill selections.

Military: Military Etiquette, Recognize Weapon Quality and Trap & Mine Detection (+5%) only.

Physical: Any except Acrobatics or Kick Boxing.

Rogue: Any (+5% to Concealment, +10% to Imitate Voices & Sounds when copying animal noises).

Science: Any (+10%).

Technical: Any (+5%, +10% Breed Dogs, Language and Literacy skills, and Rope Works).

Transportation: Any except Host Armor Combat (+10% to Breaking Horses, Horsemanship, and Teamster). Pilot Wing Pack counts as two skill selections.

Wilderness: Any (+10%, +15% to Dowsing, Fasting & Herding).

W.P.: Any except Bio-Weapons: Heavy or Siege Weapons.

Secondary Skills: The character gets to select five secondary skills at level one, two at level 3, and one at levels 9, 11 and 13. These are additional areas of knowledge that start without any O.C.C. bonuses. All new skills start at level one proficiency.

M.D.C. “Living” Body Armor: The Ranger is issued a special suit of Living Armor (typically Leatherback or Heavy Hide) brimming with bio-enhancements. The suit starts off with the following: Advanced Eyes, Nightvision Eyes, Advanced Senses, Antennae, built-in bio-comm, and Scent Glands (see below). The Ranger also gets 2D10+30 Bio-E worth of additional enhancements from any category, but most will choose from Eyes and Vision, Other Sensory Features, Biological Defenses, Offensive Bio-Weapons, Ranged Bio-Weapons and extra M.D.C. (2D6+18 M.D.C. per 10 Bio-E). This armor can also accept the Vine Camouflage enhancement for the reduced cost of just 8 Bio-E (see **The Rifter® #50**).

Standard Equipment: Dress uniform, two sets of travel clothing, a set of camouflage fatigues, two pairs of hiking boots, tinted goggles, 100 feet (30.5 m) of rope, fishing lures, 1D6 animal snares or traps, survival knife, set of skinning knives, small hatchet for cutting wood, compass, maps, two notebooks, a sketchbook, several pencils and pens, half a dozen specimen containers (various sizes), utility belt, large backpack, 2 small bags or saddlebags, well stocked first aid kit, two large water skins, two canteens, two weeks’ worth of emergency rations, blanket, sleeping bag, tent and various other camping gear. Also issued an Eye Pod, Face Wrap, 3 Slap Patches, and a ghillie suit (adds +10% to Camouflage and Prowl skills when used in the appropriate environment).

Weapons include a long bow or compound bow (crossbow if G.M. allows) with 2D12+10 arrows of various types (about a 50/50 mix of S.D.C. and specialty/M.D.C. types, see the Pinaak Longbow in **The Rifter® #37**), one light Bio-Weapon (usually a sidearm), one M.D.C. melee weapon, a Blowgun with 3D6 darts (mostly tranquilizers) and a Vine Launcher with 2D4 rounds. (Details on new equipment below). Obviously, not all this gear can be carried in the field. Some of it

will have to be left behind at the character’s Great House, at a campsite, or with a pack animal.

Transportation: Typically none to start. Most Rangers will travel on foot, especially when sneaking through the Nature Preserves. A horse or pack animal might draw attention or become a convenient meal for a predator. However, when a Ranger does request a mount, he will always have ready access to a horse, Mega-horse, mule or other pack animal. Smaller War Mounts are available with the approval of a superior officer for special assignments. Note to Game Masters: In high-powered campaigns with extremely powerful characters and deadly scenarios, you may need to permanently assign a War Mount to a Ranger to balance things out and give the player a fighting chance. Still, don’t give the player more than half the Bio-E points available to the Outrider O.C.C.

Money: 1D6x1000 in precious metals, relics, furs, skins, or trade items and 8D6x10 in available credits. Any savings can be spent now on additional equipment or saved for later. Credits are a lower priority for someone who spends so much time outdoors. Furs, skins, and other trade items are much more helpful on the surface, especially when bartering inside a Retro Village.

The Upside: You are an expert in a highly specialized field. Your knowledge and skills are essential for finding new sources of food and genetic material. Your research may pave the way for the creation of new War Mounts, better Bio-tech devices, or unlocking new enhancements for Host Armor. No one is better suited for countering organic threats like monsters or new types of enemy War Mounts. Unlike the average grunt, you fight with your mind, not just your fists.

The Downside: You are indispensable but also very isolated and vulnerable. You carry only lightweight weapons and have to rely on stealth for survival. Your academic background is of little use in combat against the Machines, and if you don’t keep your guard up, a lone bear or tiger could make quick work of you. Not the most noble way to die...

Experience: Use the Archangel experience table.

Vine Launcher (Light Bio-Weapon)

The Vine Launcher is a stubby organic rifle with a bell-shaped muzzle. The weapon fires special seed rounds that look like tiny cabbages. The rounds are loaded into the muzzle like a musket ball and fired through muscular contraction. When the round strikes a target, it releases a dozen tiny vines or tendrils that rapidly grow to cover 80% of the surface area of a human-sized target in a matter of seconds (half a melee round). The victim of the attack is often immobilized or at the very least, severely hampered by the encircling vines, giving the shooter a chance to escape or take advantage of the situation.

Weight: 7 lbs (3.15 kg).

Category: Light Bio-Weapon.

Mega-Damage: See below.

Range: 300 feet (91.4 m).

Rate of Fire: Single shots only. Each shot counts as one melee attack and it takes two melee actions to reload.

Payload: One shot.

Trade Value: 8,000 credits, uncommon.

Vine Ammo:

Tangle Vine: The most common type of ammo. Used for non-lethal takedowns, these vines simply immobilize the target.

Trapped victims that are roughly human sized (including Host Armor) are -6 to all combat rolls and -50% to any skills requiring manual dexterity or the use of hands. Escape Artist rolls are at -25%. Reduce penalties accordingly for larger targets. The vines or netting are very tough and require 25 M.D. to cut or burn through, or they can be forcibly ripped apart with a combined Splicer P.S. of 30 or greater or Supernatural P.S. of 25 or greater. However, the vines regenerate 2D6 M.D.C. per melee round for 1D4 minutes before dying, so it may take several melees for trapped victims to free themselves.

Burn Vine: These rounds quickly cover the victim with rapidly growing vines just like Tangle Vine, but the growth and damage regeneration only lasts one melee. When that melee is up, the vines burst into flame, coating the target in a nasty, napalm-like substance that cannot be doused with ordinary water. Initial damage is 3D6 M.D., and the fire continues to burn for 1D4 melees, inflicting 2D6 M.D. per melee round.

Grapple Line: Grapple Lines are not intended to capture targets, but to provide the user with an instant rope for climbing. The round sticks fast to any surface upon impact and unfurls 1D6 rapidly growing vines within 5 seconds. The lines will grow to 100 plus 5D10 feet (about 32 to 46 m) in length within moments. The round is capable of supporting up to 500 pounds (225 kg) total at one time, allowing for several lighter weight characters to scale the rope vines simultaneously.

Poison Ivy: Poison Ivy rounds behave exactly like Tangle Vine rounds except that they secrete a nasty chemical agent like tear gas. Organic targets caught in the Poison Ivy must roll to save vs non-lethal poison every melee round that they are trapped, otherwise they suffer -10 to all combat rolls for the next 1D6 melee rounds (even if they are freed from the vines).

Ripper Vine: Ripper Vines function exactly like Tangle Vines except that these vines have jagged thorns growing all along their length. Victims who struggle or try to pull themselves free through brute force suffer 2D6 M.D. damage per attempt.

Shock Vine: Shock Vine entangles and secures a foe just like Tangle Vine does, but it also delivers a powerful electric jolt every melee round. S.D.C. life forms suffer 3D10 S.D.C. damage per jolt, M.D.C. beings (including robots) take 2D6 M.D. The

continuous shocks cause muscle spasms in organic targets, reducing their actions (probably escape attempts) per melee by half.

Strangle Vine: Strangle Vines subdue their target just like Tangle Vine, but they also tighten and constrict, inflicting 4D6 S.D.C. per melee, increasing the Escape Artist skill penalty by another -15%.

Tranq Vine: Just like the Poison Ivy rounds above, only these vines continuously pump a mild sedative through the victim's skin. Organic targets caught in the Tranq Line must roll to save vs non-lethal poison every melee round that they are trapped. A failed roll causes the same effects as the Sleep Chemical under the Chemical Sprayer Bio-Enhancement.

New Bio-Enhancement: Scent Glands

Scent Glands are small, genetically engineered organs that mimic the natural scents or pheromones of animals. The glands combine chemicals from its "stockpile" to synthesize a faux scent that can be released in the form of a liquid spray or gas cloud. The primary uses of Scent Glands are to mask the scent trail of a human Splicer, either to shake off trackers or to lure animals into traps. The obvious disadvantage is that if anyone gets wise to the trick, they will still be able to easily follow the artificial scent trail.

Prerequisite: None.

Damage: None.

Rate of Fire: One use per melee.

Duration: Scents remain noticeable to humans for about an hour, roughly four times that for anyone packing Enhanced Senses (including many animals and monsters), ten times that long for Gorehounds.

Range: Self or up to 20 feet (6.1 m) away. Each spray can cover an area of about 10 square feet (0.93 square meters).

Payload: Six per 24 hours.

Bonus: When used in the proper context, adds +10% to skills used in hunting or trapping animals, or imposes a penalty of -15% for anyone attempting to track the character via scent.

Bio-E Cost: 10 points, or 6 if the Host Armor already has a Chemical Sprayer (the two share many design elements, reducing the cost).

Bite of the Snake Men

An Adventure for Heroes Unlimited™

This adventure can be for beginner or experienced players. The scenario is the player characters are employed by Eagle Knight Security; their mission is to protect an Indian scientist while he is visiting his daughter within the United States. Sounds simple enough to accomplish, unfortunately the man has a mutant brother hell-bent on killing him.

Eagle Knight Security

Eagle Knight Security is a privately owned, professional military, law enforcement, security, peacekeeping, and stability operations firm that provides specialist security and risk management

By Glen Evans

solutions to extreme threats, tailored for international clients, including governments, international agencies and the corporate sector. It is a registered and active UN contractor, a major security provider to the US government and security advisor to the United Nations. In short, they are professional mercenaries.

The US State Department employs Eagle Knight to provide support in danger zones that would be difficult for conventional U.S. forces. The military employs them as guards to extremely high ranking U.S. government officials in hot spots all around the world. Eagle Knight provides services for the Pentagon and indirectly assists in overseas theaters of operation. It also serves in advisory roles that help train local militaries to fight more effectively instead of intervening directly. But Eagle Knight is seen

most often in major cities serving as bodyguards and security personnel for corporate executives, celebrities, politicians, and the wealthy elite.

On the surface, Eagle Knight looks like any other security firm but nearly all the operatives for Eagle Knight are super-beings recruited from all walks of life, and intensely educated in all aspects of special law enforcement and military training. The supers' educational expenses are paid for, as well as any additional amount of training wanted. Upon completing the training, the individual receives an EKS badge and a protection detail (assignment). If the individual proves himself in the civilian sector, then he or she might be reassigned to a theater of operations overseas.

Eagle Knight is run by billionaire *Reginald Knight*. He created the company on the belief that both the U.S. military and law enforcement establishments require capabilities far beyond the normal standards to keep the country secure both here and abroad. Reginald is huge admirer of super-beings, and wishes he was one. Since his birth he's suffered from Severe Combined Immunodeficiency, or SCID, which makes him extremely vulnerable to infectious diseases so he must live in a completely sterile environment (a plastic bubble). As a result of having little contact with the outside world, he was home-schooled and learned everything from television, radio, books, and computers. Yet Reginald possessed an uncanny intelligence (he's not a Natural Genius, just an ordinary person), which he used to master the stock market at an early age, and in time, make himself into one of the richest individuals in the world.

Eagle Knight has more than 230 super-being operatives deployed in nine countries, including the United States. It has a private fleet of more than twenty aircraft, including helicopter gunships and robotic surveillance aircraft. Its 1700-acre headquarters just outside Ultropolis is one of the largest of its kind. Century Station is home to one of its four training academies. The others are in Worcester, Seattle, and Bismarck.

Eagle Knight is backed by Reginald's crack law firm; White and Knight (1170 attorneys). He doesn't like the idea of his operatives having to deal with silly laws, or the annoying Geneva Convention. Whatever works to get the bad guys is fine by him, even if the measures are unorthodox, so long as innocent bystanders are not put at risk, and the bad guys are taken down. White and Knight are quick to arrive to clean up any legal problems an operative might have in the course of performing their duties.

Presently, Reginald Knight is looking to expand Eagle Knight's role in the world by developing deeper and long-standing ties to the U.S. military and intelligence agencies. His ultimate goal is to see Eagle Knight become one of the most powerful military armies in the world. He also wants to expand the mercenary motivating factor (or rationalization) beyond simple monetary gain to a duty-oriented, patriotic justification.

On the downside, Eagle Knight is not appreciated by numerous third world countries, S.C.R.E.T., or G.I.G.M.A, namely because their operatives have interfered on numerous occasions in the course of their investigations. As far as they are concerned, Eagle Knight is nothing more than a band of Legionnaires with far too much influence in the Department of Defense and Homeland Security. Many in the government are fearful of their pro-super-being agenda and secretive nature. Several top U.S. officials are fearful that their growing private army of super-beings may one day engage the nation in an epic battle for control of the country, or perhaps the world itself.

EKS Player Characters

Step One: The Eight Attributes are determined as usual.

Step Two: Hit Points and S.D.C. are determined, however, regardless of the Power Category, EKS characters receive a onetime bonus of 2D6 additional S.D.C.

Step Three: Pick a Power Category and/or Determine Super Abilities. EKS works with anyone, including Ordinary People. All operatives also receive the following in addition to the usual attribute, skill, and hand to hand bonuses: +1 on initiative, +2 to roll with punch/fall/impact, +2 to pull punch, and +2 to save vs Horror Factor.

Step Four: Determine Education and Skills. There are two options. First, player characters can roll or pick one from the Education Level Table (pages 44-45 in **Heroes Unlimited™ RPG, 2nd Edition**), then choose the **Military (Basic) Program and 1D4 Espionage or Rogue skills**. If the character already has a Military and/or Espionage Background, the player character can select 4 additional skills from the following categories: Communications, Espionage, Military, Rogue, or W.P. (Ancient or Modern). The other option is to select the EKS Training Program which consists of the following: the **Military (Basic) Program, the Police/Law Enforcement Program**, and a choice of one of the following skill programs: Communication, Espionage, Military (choose 4 military skills), Physical, Pilot: Advanced Program, Rogue (choose 4 rogue skills), Technical, or W.P. Ancient or Modern. All scholastic skills receive a onetime +15% bonus. Regardless of the education/training option, all EKS player characters receives 8 Secondary Skills.

Step Five: Picking an Alignment. Individuals working for EKS must be any good or unprincipled. Anarchist or evil alignment characters are not tolerated and will be terminated from employment, and likely sought after by EKS agents, G.I.G.M.A., S.C.R.E.T., and other law enforcements agencies.

Step Six: Rounding Out One's Character: Roll 1D6 to determine how many years the Player character has been with EKS. For every year of employment, the character has earned 2D4x\$10,000. EKS provides uniforms, equipment (\$6000 worth of sensory and communications), conventional weapons (any within reason), a vehicle (only one), and pays for medical expenses (including cybernetic replacements and/or implants, but not bionic reconstruction, limbs, weapons, or armor), as well as clone replacements (but not modifications or augmentations). This means whatever the character earned over the years, he or she has kept, but it's safe to assume the Player character did spend, at a minimum, 30% of his or her earnings on personal items, vacation, etc.

The Player Character must then determine his or her current assignment. Civilian (bodyguard or security position here in the United States) or Mercenary (bodyguard in a foreign nation or contracted to assist the U.S. military or U.S. military ally). Those who have only one year of work experience or less, cannot serve as a Mercenary. One has to prove himself first on the civilian side before being allowed to work overseas.

Every EKS operative is required to wear his or her EKS badge (a bald eagle wearing plate armor) and have his EKS I.D. on their person at all times. These two things are the only physical proof of belonging to the agency. Documents are, of course, kept on file at the agency in the U.S. and its foreign operations HQ (as well as

with G.I.G.M.A. and possibly, The Sector, MTF, and other agencies or S.C.R.E.T. Defense Contractors).

Note: Being a member of the EKS doesn't give one a license to kill or diplomatic immunity, however the White and Knight law firm will be on hand to protect the Player Character from any legal suits or prosecution, and will pay for any damages and will attempt to settle civil suits brought up against the character. EKS will attempt to negotiate for an operative's release if arrested, and if all else fails, EKS will attempt a rescue if Reginald feels the operative is being held unjustifiably. That being said, it's far easier to get out of trouble while working within the U.S. and its NATO allies than working in most third world countries and world hot spots.

Eagle Knight Securities Organization Statistics

- A. Outfits:** Utility (2 Points).
 - B. Equipment:** Electronic Supplies (10 Points).
 - C. Weapons:** The Arsenal (30 Points).
 - D. Bionics & Robotics:** Cyber Agents (25 Points).
 - E. Vehicles:** Spy Cars (25 Points).
 - F. Communications:** Computerized (15 Points).
 - G. Offices:** Regional (25 Points).
 - H. Military Power:** Militia (15 Points).
 - I. Super-Powered Operatives:** Major Force (70 Points).
 - J. Sponsorship:** Private Industry (6 Points).
 - K. Special Budget:** Large Loans (25 Points).
 - L. Administrative Control:** Agency Protection (25 Points).
 - M. Internal Security:** Tight (10 Points).
 - N. External Infiltration:** Rare Minor Traitor (5 Points).
 - O. Excellent:** Superior Connection (20 Points).
 - P. Business Credentials:** Known (10 points).
 - Q. Employees' Salary:** Good (20 points). \$300-\$400 a day is about average.
- Total Agency Points:** 338 Points.

Part One: The Interview

The adventure starts in the city of Ultropolis in the middle of a spring Thursday afternoon. The players have been contacted by their Advocate (the man in charge of their team-Codename Waro). He informs them they will be meeting with a man they are to refer to as Mr. Blake in the lobby at the Startower Hotel (a Forbes five-star, AAA five-diamond luxury hotel). Their Advocate recommended them because as an EKS team they have a clean record (no run-ins with the police, FBI, G.I.G.M.A., U.S. S.C.R.E.T., or etc). They also have no political ties or connections with the country of India or Pakistan. The success of this mission he claims will go a long way in improving EKS relations with the U.S. State Department. Right now, the State Department wants to accompany all EKS agents operating in and around Africa and the Middle East. The State Department also wants to install video surveillance equipment in all their armored vehicles, and keep recordings of all radio communications between their personnel and any military and civilian agencies that supervise their activities. A successful mission here on home soil could lead to less oversight and possibly a renewal of a nice, fat government security contract for U.S.

diplomats. *Reginald Knight* (founder and owner of the EKS) believes there are individuals in the U.S. government who are looking for any reason to try and shut them down although they are heavily relying on "baseless" accusations that run the gamut from negligence, wrongful death, and murder. Proving to these liars and "anti-super-being advocates" that EKS is more than capable of performing a high priority protective detail is essential. It's the player characters' job to make life a lot easier for the company. Failure is not an option.

G.M. Note: The layout of any major hotel chain will work for this adventure. However, it must be at least three stories tall or more.

The Meeting: The players arrive in the lobby of the bustling hotel. They've been told to look for an American businessman with a green silk tie. The party will spot the man sitting in the bar reading the *India Times*. He will introduce himself as Mr. Blake. A successful skill roll of I.D. Undercover Agents will identify him as a U.S. government agent. He will ask the players if they know the name *Sharad Dasmunsi*. Most likely not, he is the Chief Scientific Adviser to the Prime Minister of India and the Secretary of the Defense Research and Development Organisation (which makes him responsible for the development of technology to be used by the Indian military). The man has received honorary doctorates from 40 different universities and many in the United States claim he is one of the most brilliant persons in the world. Unfortunately, the man has a twin brother who is a radical terrorist charged with dozens of crimes in both India and Pakistan. His name is *Rajiv Dasmunsi* and he is under the firm belief that he is an avatar of the god Shiva, and that he's been sent to destroy the modern world in order to bring about a thousand years of direct rule by the god. Madness of course, Mr. Blake will claim. Rajiv has no political ties to anyone, in fact, each side claims he's employed by the other. His ultimate goal appears to be forcing the two countries to start a nuclear war, thus destroying each other. Just utter madness, Mr. Blake will stress again. Sharad has been working tirelessly with the U.K. S.C.R.E.T. in an effort to help India develop its own paramilitary organization. This, of course, is the last thing Rajiv wants, so he's decided to kill his twin brother. The man will stop at nothing to see his brother dead. He's already failed on two separate occasions during the last six months. For weeks he's been emailing Sharad death threats at least once a week. Despite the best efforts of the IB (India's Central Intelligence Bureau, reputed to be the oldest intelligence agency in the world), they have not been able to locate Rajiv. To make matters worse, Sharad continues to be somewhat uncooperative in providing detailed information that might enable the authorities to capture his brother. He has received criticism from many of his peers back in India who claim he has "no authority" over meta-technology or super-beings. He has no background in the field, and the various degrees universities awarded him for his achievements have nothing to do with metaology (the biological, physiological, and social study of super-beings).

Mr. Blake will announce the reason the player characters are being hired is because Sharad's only child, *Indira Dasmunsi*, is going to school at Ultropolis University (UU or Double U) to study physics. With the recent threats to his life, he's come to the United States in an effort to convince his daughter to come back to India with him and attend the University of Madras (where he

graduated from). The IB was simply going to pick Indira up a few days ago, but Sharad insisted that he be allowed to try to convince Indira to return with him without forcing the issue. Their relationship has been seriously strained ever since Sharad's wife died 7 years ago.

The Set Up: Sharad will be staying at the hotel over the weekend. No one must know of his presence. Tomorrow afternoon, Sharad will arrive with a small entourage. He and his party will be staying in three rooms right off the elevators (rooms -02, -03, and -04; -02 and -04 share a common door). In room -04, Sharad's four plain-clothes bodyguards will be staying. The reason for this choice of hotel is the relatively ease to maintain basic surveillance and Sharad likes the fact that the "Bombay Chimney" (Ultropolis' best Indian Restaurant) is just down the street. The players will report to Sharad's Chief of Staff, *Arjun Pawar*. If the players have any problems they can contact Mr. Blake via a disposable phone that he hands them. It will function for the next 72 hours before becoming inert. The hotel staff has no idea who Sharad is and it must stay that way. Mr. Blake wishes the players good luck.

The Hotel Layout: Player characters who decide to scope out the hotel will learn that a large wedding reception (300+ people) will take place on Saturday Night. Otherwise, there is nothing else out of the ordinary to report.

Inside Information: Those who do some Research on Sharad and Rajiv Dasmunsi will learn they come from a poor background and both started working at an early age to supplement their father's poor income as a boat owner. Sharad had average grades, but was described as a bright and hardworking student who had a strong desire to learn and spend hours on his studies, especially mathematics. After high school, he went to the University of Madras, from where he graduated with a degree in physics. Later on, he attended Anna University where he studied aerospace engineering. Twenty years ago, he came to the United States and visited the *KLS Corporation* and *Cyberworks Network*. After spending ten years here in the States, he returned to India where he began working with the Defense Department to design an intermediate-range ballistic missile and a tactical surface-to-surface missile. Shortly afterward, his wife was killed after being bitten by an Indian cobra while preparing a meal to celebrate Sharad's recent promotion to the Defense Research and Development Organization. Sharad was named India's Chief Scientific Adviser three years ago. Two years ago, Indira came to the United States on a student visa, and has been attending UU ever since.

As far as inside information on Rajiv, he attended the same high school as Sharad then suddenly dropped out. Since then, he has remained an elusive individual with no ties to any particular criminal organization or terrorist camp. Nevertheless, he has claimed personal responsibility for the deaths of 31 individuals (names, position, status, etc.-all classified) in both India and Pakistan. Very few pictures of him are known to exist (most are partially out of focus), but according to intelligence reports, he is a perfect copy of Sharad. One final note, their mother was a priestess of a naga cult (snake worshippers). The house Sharad and Rajiv grew up in had a "Sarpa Kavu" (serpent grove) in the backyard where they worshipped the snakes that lived in there.

Part Two: The Snake in a Jar

Sharad's Arrival: Around 10:50 a.m., a large limousine will arrive at the hotel. Sharad and his entourage file out. Arjun Pawar will be on his telephone (speaking in Hindi) to someone about having a meeting on Sunday before Sharad leaves for India. Arjun is not in a big hurry to talk to the player characters. In fact, he seems more annoyed with their presence than anything else. Sharad, on the other hand, is very much interested in meeting them. He will ask dozens of questions, some of them rather personal, as if he's psychoanalyzing them for their reasoning to become "heroes" or better yet, going public with their super abilities. Despite the player characters' best efforts, Sharad will not discuss his brother, period. He will be adamant that his brother's terrorist activities must be stopped because he's playing both India and Pakistani officials for fools, forcing their governments to focus on each other, rather than him.

Players can give the four bodyguards a thorough look-over, and should be able to determine they are armed with conventional weapons, and concealed body armor beneath their clothes. They present themselves as 100% loyal operatives, willing to put their lives before Sharad's life if it's required of them.

Bodyguards (3rd level Ordinary Human Soldiers)

Each has identical weapons and equipment. They possess law enforcement and military (basic) scholastic skill programs. They can read, write and speak both Hindi & English.

Average Attribute: 10

Hit Points: 30

S.D.C.: 26

W.P.: W.P. Handgun, W.P. Submachine-Gun, W.P. Knife.

Bonuses: +2 to parry and dodge, +3 to roll with punch. +2 to aim/+1 burst with modern weapons. +2 to strike, parry, throw with knives. Hand to Hand: Basic.

Equipment: Concealed Body Armor (A.R. 10, S.D.C. 50), 9mm side arms (3D6 damage, 15 round clip), MP-5 SMG (3D6; 35 round clip), 2 throwing knives (1D6), two (2) extra clips for each weapon, and ear mic radio. They do not brandish the MP-5 while walking around in the hotel. These weapons are stored in the room in a special container.

The Hotel Rooms: Sharad's room is -02. Arjun and some of Sharad's aides (4) are staying in room -03. The 4 bodyguards are staying in room -04. They take shifts throughout the day and night.

After Sharad and his company unpack and make themselves comfortable, he will continue to "question" the player characters' motivations, especially if they are living a dual lifestyle (secret identity). "What do your parents think of your career choice?" "Do you plan on having children, and if so what sort of spouse are you hoping to marry? One like yourself or a normal person?" These are the types of questions Sharad will ask each of the player characters. At some point, one of the aides will come into Sharad's room carrying a large glass jar (two gallons/7.5 liters) filled with some kind of liquid, a cobra, and several other snakes. It's completely eerie looking. Those with the Anthropology skill or come from Southeast Asia will identify this as snake wine. The snakes are immersed in 100% rice wine in special glass bottles and then they are sealed and stored in a cellar for five years. The wine is considered a high quality tonic. Supposedly,

regularly drinking appropriate quantities can moisturize your skin, improve your appetite, and strengthen your bones, tendons, and muscles. Some claim it can be used to treat general fatigue, hair loss, migraine headaches, rheumatism (arthritis), and neurasthenia (“nerves”). Sharad’s reasoning for taking it is to increase his sexual performance, which he will openly talk about if allowed too. Sharad claims the drink doesn’t cause dryness syndrome, or lead to constipation, thirst, dryness of the throat and nose, “That’s just naysayers who refuse to admit the wine’s true benefits.” A successful skill check of Anthropology or Law (general) will inform the players that it’s illegal in the United States to import snake wine because the cobras and other snakes killed in the production are often endangered species, but Sharad has diplomatic immunity. Watching Sharad drink the wine requires a Horror Factor roll of 10. Just to be near the jar will require a roll of 7 or better. Sharad will offer the players a sample if they like. “People of all ages and both sexes, including pregnant women, should drink snake wine during all four seasons,” he will claim. If the players like, he will even provide them some snake blood wine. It too has snakes inside of it, but it’s prepared by slicing a snake along its belly and draining its blood into a mixing vat with rice wine or grain alcohol. “You can have the snake’s gall bladder emptied into glasses with wine and the snake’s meat, liver, and skin can be prepared to accompany the drink.” (If the players do a methodical search of Arjun’s room, they will find in his closet in room -03, two other jars of contraband snake wine.)

Heroes can try all they want, but they won’t be able to convince Sharad to talk about his brother. He does, however, have no problem talking about his family’s long tradition of snake worship. “They were called divine snakes which lived comfortably under the shade of foliage and bamboo trees that were all covered by green creepers. The former owners of my family’s house considered the shrine sacred and use to keep milk at the entrance of the serpent habitat. They worshipped them occasionally with mantras and flowers. Even after selling the house to us, they came back and continued the services. I remember they continued this practice for some 3-4 years. After my mother passed away, my family had some dispute with my grandpa and we left to the neighboring state where we settled with my father’s uncle. My grandpa sold our house soon after our leaving. He...poured gasoline on the Sarpa Kavu and set it and the snakes on fire.”

Sharad is not in the least bit worried about his brother. He’s far more worried about his daughter being “Americanized” to the point he’ll not be able to bring her back home. For the rest of the day and evening, nothing takes place or draws the notice of the heroes. They can wander about the hotel, but regardless, there is nothing strange or out of the ordinary happening anywhere in the hotel.

Part Three: The Girl in the Ugly Car

Saturday Morning: Sharad gets up in the morning (around 7:45 a.m.) and has another glass of snake wine. Once again, he invites the player characters to share some with him. Arjun arrives to go over his itinerary for today and tomorrow.

10:30 a.m. Meet with daughter in hotel lobby. Spend the day together.

4:00 p.m. Return to hotel to prepare for dinner.

6:00 p.m. Meet with *Charan Ram* to discuss proposal made by *Bradford Richardson*.

9:45 p.m. Return to hotel for the evening.

11:00 a.m. Sunday check out.

1:25 p.m. Sunday departure time for flight back to India.

The player characters are free to offer suggestions and change things around if they so desire, but any changes made will only irritate Arjun, who will complain, “Altering Sharad’s schedule is a complicated process that involves more than making life convenient for you.” Arjun seems more interested in keeping to his predetermined schedule than allowing Sharad any flexibility. Arjun insists it must be this way to ensure Sharad’s safety and to make sure he can keep his scheduled appointments. Note: Charan Ram is an Indian diplomat who spends most of his time in the United States. Bradford Richardson is an Undersecretary for Homeland Security in the field for U.S. S.C.R.E.T. Player characters will not be allowed to know the reason for their meeting, but an assumption can be made that it must have something to do with India wanting the U.S. to help them build their own S.C.R.E.T. organization.

Approximately 10:21 a.m., Arjun will inform Sharad it’s time to go down to the lobby. Sharad will put away his paperwork he was reading and ready himself. He seems extremely nervous, more so than he should be. “I can’t turn this into a dictatorship in which I simply force her to come home. That’s what I should do, and what I want to do, but she’s not going to respond to hostilities as such. It will only make her more defiant. I can only guess where she got that side of her personality from?”

Ten minutes later, Sharad and his entourage will go down to the lobby where a young woman dressed like a typical 19 year old American will be waiting for him. Sharad’s jaw drops. Immediately, he and the girl start speaking Hindi to each other, and the age-old battle between father and daughter erupts. Eventually, the two of them hug and walk out the front doors together. They head toward a 1970s, yellow/white, two seat, convertible MG Midget in excellent condition. The player characters can choose to accompany the two of them if they like, but nothing of any consequence will happen while Sharad is out and about with his daughter. They will go to her college dorm room, eat in the cafeteria, chat with some fellow students, meet with a few of her professors, and that’s about it. As for any players who stay behind, they can conduct a thorough search of the hotel but they will not find any suspicious characters or any activity that will draw their attention. They can observe the setting up for the wedding reception that will take place around 7:00 p.m.

Around 3:40 p.m., Sharad and his daughter will return to the hotel. He tries his best to convince her to return to India, but she refuses to be a part of his political lifestyle. He’s made his choice, she has made her own. They never mention Rajiv. They depart after a long embrace. She returns to her car and goes back to her dorm without any altercation. Player characters with some excellent coaxing skills or natural charms might be able to convince her to reveal that she’s been receiving e-mails from Rajiv (her uncle) every day for the last week, claiming that he was going to bring about the end of the world. She has disregarded them because her uncle is a raving lunatic incapable of accomplishing anything significant. She does not worship snakes nor did her mother. She witnessed her mother get bit by the cobra, an event that still haunts her.

Saturday Evening: The Wedding Reception

At 3:55 p.m., Sharad and his entourage head toward “Bombay Chimney.” During dinner, Sharad abruptly announces he is canceling his meetings with Charan Ram and instead wants to go see an American movie in a U.S. theater. Arjun is adamant about him staying on schedule, until Sharad pounds his fist on the table, “Damn it, I will not be leashed like a dog. I’m doing what I want to do. The Americans are not interested in helping us, that’s why we turned to the Brits, and they seem intent on shifting the responsibility onto the Australians whose third-rate agency couldn’t protect its citizens from a bedridden super villain. I’ve no intention of wasting my time here any longer. I’m going to a movie and that’s final.”

5:02 p.m., Sharad and his entourage return to the hotel where the wedding reception is beginning to set up. Lyle and Matilda Harvey is the name of the couple getting married. At the reception hall stands a flag that’s reads “United Humanity Stands” and depicts two fists with their knuckles showing. There is no question in any of the player characters’ minds of who these people are: **S.H.O.C.K.** (Super Human Observation & Control Knights). They are a fanatical army of human purists who operate as a political organization. They believe anyone who is not fully human, including mutants, cyborgs, super-soldiers, psychics, or anyone with super abilities, is a potential threat to “natural people” (Hardware, Natural Genius, Special & Physical Training, Wizards, and Type 1 and 3 Robotics are natural in their world and possess no risk to normal beings). With some quick fact-finding (Research skills), it won’t take long to learn that Lyle Harvey is leader of the Ultropolis field unit and best friends with Ander Michael-S.H.O.C.K.’s founder and leader. Note: For additional information on S.H.O.C.K., check out Alien Unlimited, 2nd edition, Revised or Century Station.

5:22 p.m., Sharad and his entourage, minus Arjun, leave for the movie theater (a quarter of a mile away). They will not return until 8:50 p.m. Meanwhile, Arjun will spend the rest of his evening at the bar (becoming quite intoxicated and loud if he’s allowed too).

6:00 p.m. The Wedding Reception arrives. There is nothing obvious about the group of people. Those with Detect Concealment skills will notice four men, including the groom and best man are carrying concealed handguns (yes, they have permits on them). There are four additional men dressed like SWAT police officers wandering around the ballroom in constant communication with each other (ear mic.s). Anyone who checks out in the parking lot will find a S.H.O.C.K. Mobile Headquarters (moving van) monitoring the area (driver, two technicians, one team leader). They have every right to be here, just monitoring the wedding reception just in case of a *possible* attack. No one is wearing S.H.O.C.K. armor (of course, G.M.s are free to allow this for their own adventure).

Part Four: The Snake Hits the Fan

The following events may or may not occur depending upon the decisions of the player characters and how they set up their surveillance of the hotel. G.M.s, feel free to make any necessary changes in order to make the likelihood of the final act to come about if it’s possible. If not, Rajiv will await until Sunday Morning for the Final Straw (see below):

1. Friday, 9:00 p.m. — Coils arrives at the hotel, stretches himself up to the top of the roof and hides in a concealed position. The only likely way to find him is if a player character just happens to go up there to set up his own concealed position. If he’s not discovered, Coils will radio Scales to go ahead with the “attack plan.” Coils will not attack player characters unless attacked first.

2. Saturday 11:00 a.m. — Scales checks into the hotel disguised as an elderly English gentleman. He will not risk a confrontation with any Player character nor does he seek to draw attention to himself. He goes to his hotel room and stays there.

3. Saturday 6:30 p.m. — Spit and Fangs approach the rear of the hotel. They will assault and kill a guest and take his room key. They will leave his body hidden in a dumpster. Using extreme stealth, they make their way toward the lobby of the hotel (automatic successful prowls).

4. Saturday 6:45 p.m. — (Optional) Scales will radio Coils to sneak down the air ducts of the hotel. Coils has blueprints of the hotel which allows him to do this. He makes his way into a bathroom near the bar in which Arjun is sitting next too. Scales will sit with Arjun at the bar (unless Player characters are present) and help him become fully intoxicated. When Arjun departs for the bathroom, Scales will stand outside the entranceway. Coils will snag Arjun the moment the coast is clear and drag him up into the ceiling where he will be disposed of (incapacitated). Scales will step into the bathroom and “impersonate” Arjun for the rest of the weekend. He will go to his room and stay there (faking intoxication) as a reason to not waste time dealing with an unreasonable Sharad.

5. Saturday 6:45 p.m. — (Optional) If it’s not possible for Scales and Coils to capture Arjun via the bathroom snatch and grab, they will attempt to grab him in the elevator while going up to his room. Coils will snatch him and drag him up into the ceiling of the elevator and then dispose of him.

If neither #4 nor #5 can be successfully completed, then part #6 is still a go.

6. Saturday 7:15 p.m. — Taipan comes charging into the hotel, attacking people and striking out with reckless abandon. He makes his way toward the wedding reception. “I come in the name of all mutant-kind. We shall rid the world of all who oppose our existence.”

At that moment, Fangs and Spit will also attack. Panic spreads throughout the hotel. Those armed at the reception start shooting at the Snake Men, putting innocent people in the crossfire. Coils and Scales do not involve themselves, even if they fail in their objectives (#4 or #5).

Player characters involving themselves will only add to the confusion. Forty percent of the people attending the reception are supporting members of S.H.O.C.K. The groom, the bride (a female technician), best man, minister, and the bodyguards are all active core members (same stats as Sharad’s bodyguards). Unable to tell which “freaks of humanity” are threatening them, S.H.O.C.K. members will defend themselves against obvious super-being looking individuals. Furthermore, everyone knows Eagle Knight employs supers amongst their ranks, so they will be highly prejudicial and suspicious of the player characters presence.

Contingency Plan? If Arjun has not been captured during #4 or #5, the chaos and confusion involving the Snake Men and

S.H.O.C.K., Scales and Coils will try for an opportunity to snatch and grab Arjun. They will not attempt this unless they “believe” it will be successful without drawing suspicion or attention, meaning they won’t try such an endeavor while he’s in his room with Sharad’s people across the hall or if the Player characters are nearby.

7. During the distraction provided by the Snake Men, Madam Venom will use her “Psionic Invisibility” to attempt to sneak Rajiv into the hotel (he will be a tiny snake in the bottom of a purse she’s carrying). If she cannot enter the hotel via the distraction, she will attempt some other means of getting inside the hotel. Upon arriving at the floor where Sharad and his entourage are staying, and if Scales has successfully impersonated Arjun, he will let them into his room. If Scales is not in the room, they will still try to sneak into the room unless the player characters have made it next to impossible to sneak in without being noticed. Essentially, Madam Venom is unwilling to rely on her psychic powers alone to fool any Player character standing in her way. If the risk is too great then they will call off everything and try for the Final Straw.

Saturday Night Aftermath

The police (SWAT) will arrive at some point (possibly U.S. S.C.R.E.T. if things get really out of hand). If the Player characters have engaged in any activity that results in the injury (or death) of any person amongst the wedding reception or hotel guests/employees, they are going to have to answer police questions. EKS agents don’t own a license to kill nor are they federal agents or even police officers. They are legally employed to protect Sharad and his entourage (that’s it). Police Detectives are not going to be happy if they’ve made a mess out of things. If they’ve managed to save lives, their help will be appreciated (although unwelcomed). Depending upon Arjun’s status (the real one or the impostor), he will either be too intoxicated to give a statement or too irritated to care. Player characters will also have to answer to their EKS superiors if bloodshed has occurred between them and anyone attending the reception (not the Snake Men).

8:50 p.m., Sharad returns to the chaos of the hotel. If the Player characters are involved with the death of (or have critically injured) anyone other than the Snake Men, he will admonish them to no end. He will demand to speak to their superiors at once. After speaking with Mr. Blake, he will cancel his contract with EKS and demand the Player characters be removed from his protection detail. The Player characters have little choice at this point. However, if the Player characters have been able to save countless lives and provide protection to **both** S.H.O.C.K. and innocent people within the hotel, he will be quite impressed with their heroic activities. Depending up Arjun’s status, he will demand he reschedule an appointment with Charan Ram and Bradford Richardson.

Note: If at this point all the Snake Men have been thoroughly defeated with only Madam Venom and Rajiv unaccounted for, then they have no choice but to call off the attack.

Part Five: Sunday Morning

If the Player characters have successfully thwarted the efforts of the Snake Men, but unknowingly allowed Scales (impersonating Arjun) to sneak Madam Venom and Rajiv into the room, then the following will occur:

1. Sharad will be sitting for breakfast and will request a glass of snake wine. The moment it’s brought to him and opened, Rajiv in the form of a highly venomous cobra (the real jar replaced by Scales or Madam Venom) bites Sharad. This is a surprise attack, however if there is a way to counter it, the Player character must beat a 21 strike roll and/or an 18 initiative roll. Scales and Madam Venom will attack any guards. Coils will emerge from the roof, smash open the large window, and attempt to rescue Rajiv (first and foremost) before the Snake Men try to make their escape.

2. If Arjun has not been replaced by Scales, he will have planted a bomb just outside the window of Sharad’s room, causing 4D6x10 points of damage to 50 foot (15.2 m) blast radius. Scales, Rajiv and Madam Venom (and Coils if he’s still around) will attempt to make sure that Sharad has been taken out before they depart. Player Characters, if they make a successful Roll with Punch/Fall/Impact will take one-quarter the regular damage and will only lose 1 attack/action and their initiative for the next melee round. Failure means taking half the regular damage from the explosion, plus lose 2 attacks/actions, -2 on all combat rolls, and their initiative for the next 1D4 melee rounds.

The Final Straw

The final straw is a last-ditch effort by Rajiv and the Snake Men to kill Sharad, but it will only be implemented if Rajiv is confident they will succeed. Nobody, especially Rajiv, is willing to sacrifice themselves in order to kill Sharad. Having witnessed the Player characters handle S.H.O.C.K. will be the determining factor if Rajiv believes the Snake Men will be successful in their efforts. If the Player characters prove too powerful, too confident and/or too well prepared, the mission will be scrubbed. Rajiv can always go after his brother at a much later date when there will be less protection.

G.M.s are, of course, encouraged to develop their own strategy for Rajiv at this point or perhaps improve upon his original plan if it’s too impractical or ineffectual against the Player characters. Whatever works the best to accomplish the mission and survive with the less casualties is the route Rajiv will always take.

Conclusion

If Sharad dies under the Player characters supervision, the consequences will be dire. Rajiv will claim his services were paid for by individuals within the Pakistani government. This will reopen hostilities between the two nations, and possibly move them closer to war. If his plan works and he escapes, he will attempt to kill a well-known Pakistani government or military leader within a week or more to only further spiral the two nations into war. As for the Player characters, Sharad’s death will not only get them fired, but will result in Eagle Knight not only losing its contract with the U.S. State Department, but the company will be forced to attend a congressional hearing. The Indian government will demand the player characters’ arrest. The United States Attorney’s Office will file charges against EKS, S.H.O.C.K. and the Player characters. Things will continue to escalate very poorly for the Player characters until they find it impossible to avoid any sort of jail time. Any attempt to flee will result in them being hunted by US S.C.R.E.T., G.I.G.M.A., and possibly the MTF.

If the player characters save Sharad, but participate in the mass shooting inside the hotel against S.H.O.C.K., they will find

a strong ally in Sharad who will help in any way he can, including providing testimony regardless of the circumstance. In the press, Sharad will argue that there is a “rush to judgment” about EKS, due to “inaccurate information.” EKS attorneys, White and Knight, will provide eyewitnesses from the hotel that will claim the player characters had not fired on the civilians but the Snake Men. Even G.I.G.M.A. and U.S. S.C.R.E.T., will get involved, claiming the player characters’ actions “fall within approved rules governing the use of force” based on information they obtained from eyewitnesses and hotel security cameras. In short, if the player characters make sure Sharad does not come to harm, *they will* be protected from prosecution and any lawsuits brought up by S.H.O.C.K. If anyone at the wedding reception is killed because of the player characters’ actions, their relatives will attempt to file a wrongful death lawsuit against the player characters and EKS, however, within a few weeks, a U.S. district judge will eventually dismiss the suit. Months later, EKS will agree to pay \$7.5 million in fines, without admitting guilt, to S.H.O.C.K. to settle various charges. Most of the charges will be dropped when it is revealed that the Player characters were acting under the orders of the US government.

Sharad’s survival will not only help the Player characters further in their careers within EKS but he will advocate they assist the Indian government in looking for potential candidates for their S.C.R.E.T. organization. Sharad will eventually open up about his mother being “cursed” with a strange affinity toward snakes and reptiles, a gift she passed on to only one of her twin sons. Sharad feels guilty about talking about his childhood and what occurred within his family. It was Rajiv who bit and killed their mother and Sharad’s wife.

If Rajiv or any of his Snake Men are captured, they will be taken away by U.S. S.C.R.E.T to be held indefinitely at a Medium Security Holding Facility for Super Beings in upstate New York. As for S.H.O.C.K., the Player characters may have likely gained potential enemies for the rest of their lives.

The Snake Men

Coils

The newest member of the Snake Men. His powers are snake-like, but the “true” serpents don’t regard him as one. Should Coils survive the mission, Rajiv does not intend on allowing Coils to remain a member of the team (as far as he is concerned, he’s expandable). Whether Coils figures this out in time remains to be seen. He is not a cold-blooded killer like the others, however he still loves a good fight and will hurt anyone he believes will keep him from completing the mission or prevents him from getting a paycheck, and in the end, that’s where his true loyalty lies.

Real Name: George Holt.

Occupation: Freelance Mercenary and Professional Thief.

Alignment: Anarchist.

Power Category: Mutant.

Experience Level: Third.

Hit Points: 90. **S.D.C.:** 257.

P.P.E.: 21

Appearance: He looks like an African American bodybuilder who engages in intense, regular exercise. His neck is a foot



long and he has no earlobes, just two small holes. His eyes are jet black and he shaves his head. He wears loose-fitting clothes and carries only what he needs.

Attributes: I.Q. 11, M.E. 8, M.A. 9, P.S. 44 (Superhuman), P.P. 11, P.E. 38, P.B. 8, Spd 16.

Age: 27. **Sex:** Male. **Height:** 6 feet, 1 inch (1.85 m). **Weight:** 225 lbs (101 kg).

Unusual Characteristics: Double Jointed, Long Neck, and No Ears.

Major Super Abilities: Stretching.

Minor Super Abilities: Indestructible Bones, Extraordinary P.E., and Superhuman P.S. Note: He can carry 8,800 lbs (3,960 kg) or 4.4 tons and lift 13,200 lbs (5,940 kg) or 6.6 tons.

Combat Training: Expert.

Attacks per Melee: 4 (2 initial + 2 from Hand to Hand).

Combat Bonuses: +2 to initiative, +3 to strike, +6 to parry, +6 to dodge, +29 to damage, +12 to roll with punch/fall, and +3 to pull punch.

Combat Skills: Punch 4D4, Power Punch 5D6+2 (counts as two attacks), Elbow/Forearm 2D6, Knee 2D6, Body Block/Tackle 2D4+2 + P.S. damage bonus (must parry/dodge or knock-down), Pin 18-20, Crush 2D4+2, and all Holds.

Saving Throws: Impervious to disease, +38% to save vs. coma/death, and +8 to save vs. poison & magic.

Educational Background: Trade School.

Common Skills: Language and Literacy: English 91%/86%, Mathematics: Basic 60%, and Pilot: Automobile 66%.

Criminal Program: Streetwise 47%, Pick Locks 60%, Pick Pocket 55%, Prowl 55%, and Tailing 65%.

Physical Program: Wrestling, Climbing 70%/60%, Body Building & Weightlifting, and Athletics (general).

Secondary Skills: Hand to Hand: Expert, Swimming 55%, Land Navigation 48%, General Repair/Maintenance 50%, Basic Electronics 45%, Basic Mechanics 45%, Rope Works 45%, Radio: Basic 50%, W.P. Handgun (+1 to aim).

Money: He's only been at this mercenary gig for about two years. He has a secret stash of \$87,000 hidden away in his safe house home in Ultrapolis. His goal is to make at least \$10 million then retire and live off the interest (he just has to figure out how to do that).

Weapons: *Two Beretta Model 92 9mm Auto Pistols*, **Range:** 180 feet (55 m), **Damage:** 3D6, **Rate of Fire:** Single shot or semi-automatic, **Payload:** 15 rounds.

Equipment & Vehicles: He brings only what will help him fulfill his mission. The less he has to carry the easier it is for him to use his powers.

Scales

A former agent of the German S.C.R.E.T., he quit prior to the Brotherhood of Armageddon taking it over. He still has some friends in both divisions. He wants nothing to do with the "Nazis" and is still bitter at the thought of them taking over the agency he was so proud to work for. That being said, he enjoys being on his own and selling his services to the highest bidder. The experiments to use lizard DNA to make him a human chameleon succeeded but came with a terrible price. He must always appear in public in disguise. He is extremely loyal to Rajiv who regards him as a true serpent although Scales has lied and said he was injected with snake DNA. He is the group tactician and strategist for the entire operation.

Real Name: Albern Burger.

Alias: Numerous.

Occupation: Freelance Mercenary and Spy.

Alignment: Aberrant.

Power Category: Experiment.

Experience Level: Sixth.

Hit Points: 39. **S.D.C.:** 54.

P.P.E.: 22

Appearance: His entire body is smooth and covered with tiny green scales. His tongue is forked and his eyes are reptilian looking. He speaks with a thick German accent. He engages in regular exercise and dresses in a manner that allows him to quickly change his identity.



Attributes: I.Q. 14, M.E. 27, M.A. 14, P.S. 16, P.P. 14, P.E. 15, P.B. 5, Spd 27.

Age: 30. **Sex:** Male. **Height:** 6 feet (1.83 m). **Weight:** 220 lbs (99 kg).

Side Effects: Odd skin texture (scaly skin).

Major Super Abilities: Chameleon and Alter Physical Facial Features & Physical Structure.

Minor Super Ability: Impervious to Poisons & Toxins.

Combat Training: Martial Arts.

Attacks per Melee: 5 (2 initial + 3 from Hand to Hand).

Combat Bonuses: +2 to initiative, +2 to strike, +4 to parry, +4 to dodge, +1 to damage, +3 to pull punch, and +4 to roll with punch/fall.

Combat Skills: Karate Punch 2D4, Power Punch 4D4 (counts as two attacks), Elbow/Forearm 1D6, Knee 1D6, Karate Kick 2D4, Crescent Kick 2D4+2, Axe Kick 2D6, Snap Kick 1D6, Tripping/Leghook (cannot be parried, must dodge or knock-down), Jump Kick 6D6, Flying Jump Kick 4D6, all Holds, and Critical Strike on an unmodified roll of 18-20.

Saving Throws: +6 to save vs psionics/mind control and +10 to save vs insanity.

Educational Background: Military Specialist.

Common Skills: Language and Literacy: German 94%/92%, Mathematics: Basic 90%, Pilot: Automobile 78%, and Language: French and Hindi 68%.

Military Program (Basic): Running, Climb 95%/85%, Forced March, Military Etiquette 85%, Radio: Basic 98%, W.P. Rifle (+3 to aim/+1 to burst), and W.P. Grenade (+2 to throw).

Espionage Program: Hand to Hand: Martial Arts, Detect Ambush 80%, Intelligence 76%, Wilderness Survival 85%, Disguise 95%, and Impersonation 98%/84%.

2nd Espionage Program: Detect Concealment 70%, Escape Artist 75%, Interrogation 75%, and Forgery 65%.

W.P. Modern: W.P. Handgun (+3 to aim/+1 to burst), W.P. Sub-machinegun (+3 to aim/+1 to burst), and W.P. Energy Pistol (+3 to aim/+1 to burst).

Criminal Program: Streetwise 54%, Pick Locks 75%, Imitate Voices & Sounds 76%/70%, I.D. Undercover Agents 79%, and Tailing 70%.

Secondary Skills: Athletics (general), Swimming 80%, Language: English 83%, Literacy: English 70%, Business & Finance 65%, Land Navigation 52%, Research 60%, History 64%/44%, and Performance 30%.

Money: He has a cash reserve of about 290,000 US dollars and quarter million Euro (342,321 US dollars) in a Swiss Bank account.

Weapons: *9 mm Model P5 Walther*, **Range:** 165 feet (50 m), **Damage:** 2D6, **Rate of Fire:** Single shot or semi-automatic, **Payload:** 8 round detachable mag.

9 mm Model MP5K H&K, **Range:** 660 feet (201 m), **Damage:** 3D6, **Rate of Fire:** Single Shot, Semi-Automatic, or Full Automatic, **Payload:** 30 round box mag.

Equipment & Vehicles: He needs little equipment in order to impersonate, however his smart phone and ear mic radio are important pieces of his work. Both are modified to assist in his disguise. He tries to keep them on his person all the time (so he takes great lengths to conceal them). He also uses dozens of fake I.D.s, passports, birth certificates, driver's licenses, etc. which he keeps in a special suitcase in his room.



Madam Venom

An alien from another part of the galaxy (Titiana Quadrant), she crash-landed on Earth and has chosen to make the best of her life here among Earthlings. In order to survive, she took up doing jobs for an organized crime boss in India. After a while, she began to really enjoy her work. She met up with Rajiv and the two became lovers. Now she will do anything to please him and will stop at nothing to help him fulfill his quest to bring war to Pakistan and India.

Real Name: Sslissa.
Occupation: Freelance Assassin.
Alignment: Aberrant.
Power Category: Alien (Humanoid Snake) with Natural Psionics.
Experience Level: Fifth.
Hit Points: 37. **S.D.C.:** 72.
P.P.E.: 26
I.S.P.: 170

Appearance: She resembles a large humanoid snake with arms and legs. She has green scales and a 10 foot (3 m) prehensile tail. She typically wears a purple nightgown and a black, hooded robe.

Attributes: I.Q. 9, M.E. 20, M.A. 16, P.S. 15, P.P. 17, P.E. 20, P.B. 5, Spd 50.

Age: 29. **Sex:** Female. **Height:** 7 feet (2.13 m). **Weight:** 170 lbs (76.5 kg).

Natural Alien Abilities: Infrared vision (25 feet/7.6 m), Fangs (Bite does 1D6 damage), Advanced Taste Tongue, Acrobatics, Outdoormanship, and Prehensile Tail.

Healing Psionics: Bio-Regeneration and Induce Sleep.

Physical Psionics: Ectoplasm, Float, Impervious to Poison/Toxins, Levitation, Mind Block, Nightvision, Summon Inner Strength, Telekinesis, and Telekinetic Leap.

Sensitive Psionics: Clairvoyance, Empathy, Presence Sense, See Aura, See the Invisible, Sense Evil, Sensory Link, Sixth Sense, and Telepathy.

Super Psionics: Bio-Manipulation, Hypnotic Suggestion, Mental Illusion, Psionic Invisibility, and Psychic Body Field.

Combat Training: Basic.

Attacks per Melee: 5 (2 initial + 3 from Hand to Hand).

Combat Bonuses: +1 to initiative, +2 to strike, +4 to parry, +4 to dodge, +7 to roll with punch/fall, and +2 to pull punch.

Combat Skills: Punch 1D4, Power Punch 2D4 (counts as two attacks), Elbow/Forearm 1D6, Knee 1D6, Karate Kick 2D4, Snap Kick 1D6, Tail Whip 2D6, and all Holds.

Saving Throws: Needs a 10 or higher to save vs psionics, +10% to save vs coma/death, +3 to save vs psionics/insanity, and +3 to save vs magic & poison.

Other Bonuses: 40% Charm/Impress.

Educational Level: Rogue with some familiarity of Earth.

Common Skills: Language and Literacy: Native Tongue 90% and Mathematics: Basic 85%.

Special Program: Prowl 75%, Pick Locks 70%, Pick Pocket 65%, Imitate Voices & Sounds 77%/71%, Seduction 58%, Tailing 70%, Interrogation 75%, Escape Artist 70%, Detect Concealment 65%, Tracking 65%, Radio: Basic 90%, Surveillance Systems 70%, Basic Electronics 70%, Computer Repair 70%, W.P. Energy Pistol (+3 to aim/+1 to burst), W.P. Knife (+2 to strike, parry, dodge), Gymnastics, Climbing 98%/98%, and Computer Operation 90%.

Secondary Skills: Hand to Hand: Basic, Athletics (general), Swimming 75%, Running, Wilderness Survival 55%, Pilot: Automobile 70%, Pilot: Airplane 70%, Animal Training 50%, W.P. Handgun (+2 to aim/+1 to burst), Land Navigation 48%, and Language and Literacy in English, Chinese, Hindi, and Spanish, all at 90%.

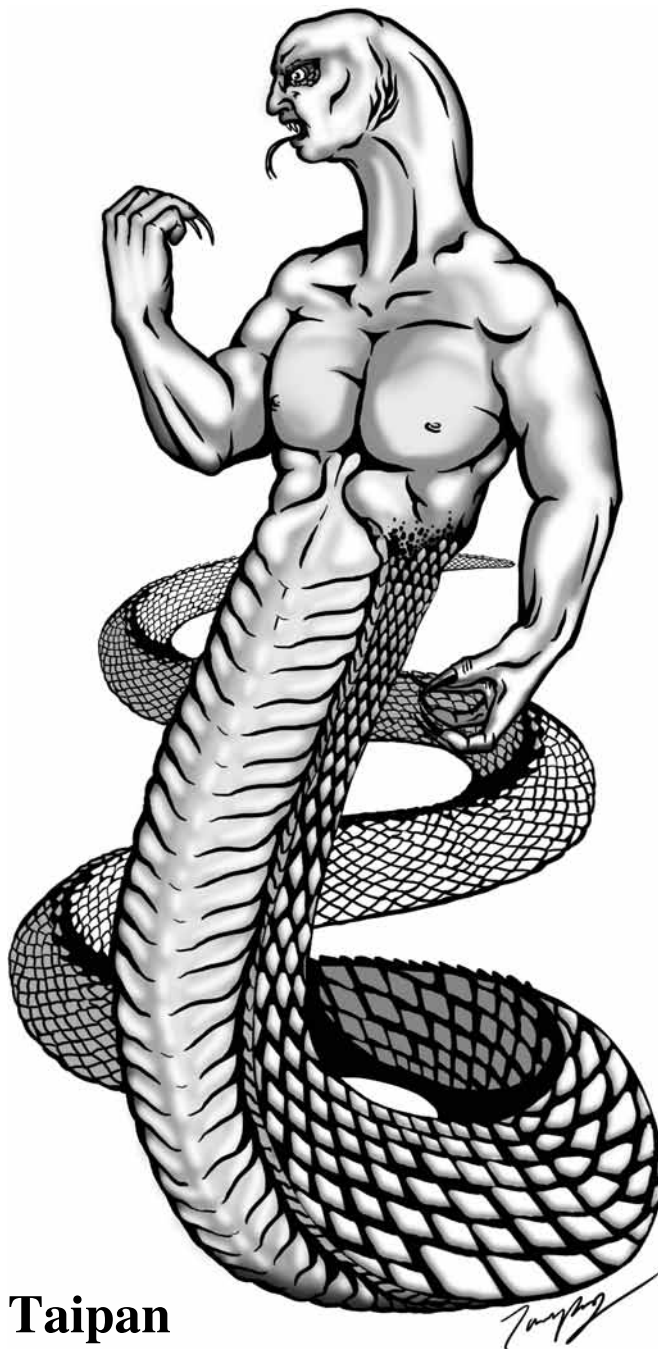
Money: She has only \$3,000 in precious stones left since her arrival. She earned over \$600,000 US dollars and 150,000 Indian Rupees (\$2,416 US dollars).

Weapons: *Ion Blaster*, **Range:** 200 feet (61 m), **Damage:** 5D6, **Rate of Fire:** Single Shot, **Payload:** 20 shot E-Clip.

Two Razors with Vibro-Blades, **Damage:** 2D6.

Armor: Her black, hooded robe functions as body armor (A.R. 10 and 30 S.D.C.).

Equipment & Vehicles: She steals whatever she needs in order to survive. Nagraj provides whatever she needs as well.



Taipan

Perry Rabbit was an Australian Field Naturalist and zoo-keeper. He spent many year catching dangerous snakes for **Bioforms Genetic Laboratories**, a top secret research lab that operated on a private island off the coast of Brazil near Uruguay. One day he was bitten by one of the facility's experimental snakes. He was in the hospital slowly dying from the poison. He was asked to volunteer to participate in an experiment that could possibly save his life but might leave some side effects. Not wanting to die, he saw no choice and agreed. A few days later, he awoke to discover he'd been turned into

a snake man. Rabbit eventually escaped his handlers and fled the island and made his way back to Australia. In time, he was found by Scales who recruited him to become a member of Rajiv's Snake Men. He's grown to love being a weapon of death and destruction. There are still agents from BGL who are still hunting for him.

Real Name: Perry Rabbit.

Occupation: Freelance Mercenary.

Alignment: Miscreant.

Power Category: Eugenics.

Experience Level: Fifth.

Hit Points: 41. **S.D.C.:** 202. **Armor Rating:** 12.

P.P.E.: 15

Appearance: He looks like a large humanoid snake man with a serpentine body (has no legs). His body is covered with fine, dark brown scales which fade to a lateral cream color. His hands are tipped with razor-sharp retractable talons. His eyes are yellow and his body is void of body hair.

Attributes: I.Q. 13, M.E. 14, M.A. 7, P.S. 24 (extraordinary), P.P. 12, P.E. 22, P.B. 5, Spd 39.

Age: 31. **Sex:** Male. **Height:** 18 feet (5.5 m). **Weight:** 570 lbs (257 kg).

Eugenic Abilities: Immune System, Lung, Spinal Cord, Ambidextrous, Light Armor, Double Jointed, Extraordinary P.S., S.D.C. Augmentation, Legs: Serpentine, Prehensile Tail, Forked Tongue, Heat Pits, Hollow Fangs with Lethal Poison, Kidney Enhanced, Built for Speed, Heightened Sense of Balance, and Retractable Large Claws.

Natural Abilities: Climbing 98% and Horror Factor 14. He can carry 2,400 lbs (1,080 kg) and lift 4,800 lbs (2,160 kg).

Combat Training: Basic.

Attacks per Melee: 7 (2 initial + 3 from Hand to Hand +1 from eugenics, +1 from tail).

Combat Bonuses: +2 to initiative, +2 to strike, +5 to parry, +5 to dodge, automatic dodge, +9 to damage, +3 to pull punch, and +12 to roll with punch/fall (takes only 1/3 the normal damage), and +5 to maintain balance.

Combat Skills: Punch 1D4, Power Punch 2D4 (counts as two attacks), Elbow/Forearm 1D6, Knee 1D6, Tail Swipe 1D6 + P.S. damage bonus, all Holds, Paired Weapons, Pin (must dodge), Crush/Squeeze 2D6 damage + P.S. damage bonus, knockout constrictive attack (save vs. blackout; 16 or better) or unconscious for 1D6+1 minutes/1D6 damage), Fangs 1D6 points of damage with a saving throw vs poison (14 or better) or take 5D6 points of damage (22 bites per hour), and Retractable Claws 2D6.

Saving Throws: Impervious to disease. Damage, penalties, and duration of toxins/poisons are one-half. +24% to save vs coma/death, +8 to save vs poison, +6 to save vs drugs & toxins, and +5 to save vs magic.

Educational Background: On the Job Training.

Common Skills: Language and Literacy: Native Tongue (Australian English) 90%/93%, Mathematics: Basic 87%, and Pilot: Automobile 75%.

Field Naturalist (based on John C. Philpott from Rifter #25): Animal Husbandry 80%, Animal Training 70%, Biology 80%, Camouflage 60%, Horsemanship 75%/55%, Land Navigation 71%, Prowl 82%, Tracking 65%, Wilderness Survival 75%, and Zoology 70%.

Wilderness Program: Hunting, Identify Plants & Fruits 70%, Track & Trap Animals 65%/75%, and Skin & Prepare Animal Hides 75%.

Secondary Skills: Hand to Hand: Basic, Athletics (general), Swimming 95%, Outdoorsmanship, Radio: Basic 75%, Cook 70%, First Aid 70%, Holistic Medicine 55%/45%, W.P. Knife (+2 to strike, parry, and throw), W.P. Handgun (+2 to aim/+1 to burst).

Money: He has little use for money anymore. He steals whatever he needs.

Weapons: He views himself as a living weapon.

Equipment & Vehicles: He has the knowledge to use equipment to help him with his research and knowledge of the outback, however he enjoys being a senseless killing machine.

Fangs

Lucifer was an experimental bushmaster snake used in a nameless research lab that was injected with human DNA. He mutated into a humanoid snake. At first they trained him to use his natural skills to go after escaped lab animals, but he refused to bring them back alive. He eventually decided to escape rather than be disciplined anymore. He is still being hunted by the lab's bounty hunters. Scales found him and with the help of Spit, convinced him to join the Snake Men. He and Spit have become almost like brothers, nearly inseparable. Fangs remains loyal to the Snake Men but still refuses to be disciplined. He will take off the moment anyone starts lecturing to him.

Real Name: Lucifer.

Occupation: Freelance Mercenary.

Alignment: Miscreant.

Power Category: Mutant Animal (Bushmaster Snake).

Experience Level: Fourth.

Hit Points: 34. **S.D.C.:** 62.

P.P.E.: 17

Appearance: His body is long and sleek. His head is smooth and covered with shades of brown to pale pink scales with dark brown or black blotches running the length of his body. His tail is 3 feet (0.9 m) long. He never wears clothes but does wear gear that allows him to hold onto his weapons.

Attributes: I.Q. 12, M.E. 23, M.A. 10, P.S. 15, P.P. 28, P.E. 16, P.B. 6, Spd 49 (34 mph/54 km).

Age: 4. **Sex:** Male. **Height:** 5 feet, 5 inches (1.65 m). **Weight:** 61 lbs (27.45 kg).

Human Features: Hands (full), Biped (full), Speech (partial), Looks (partial).

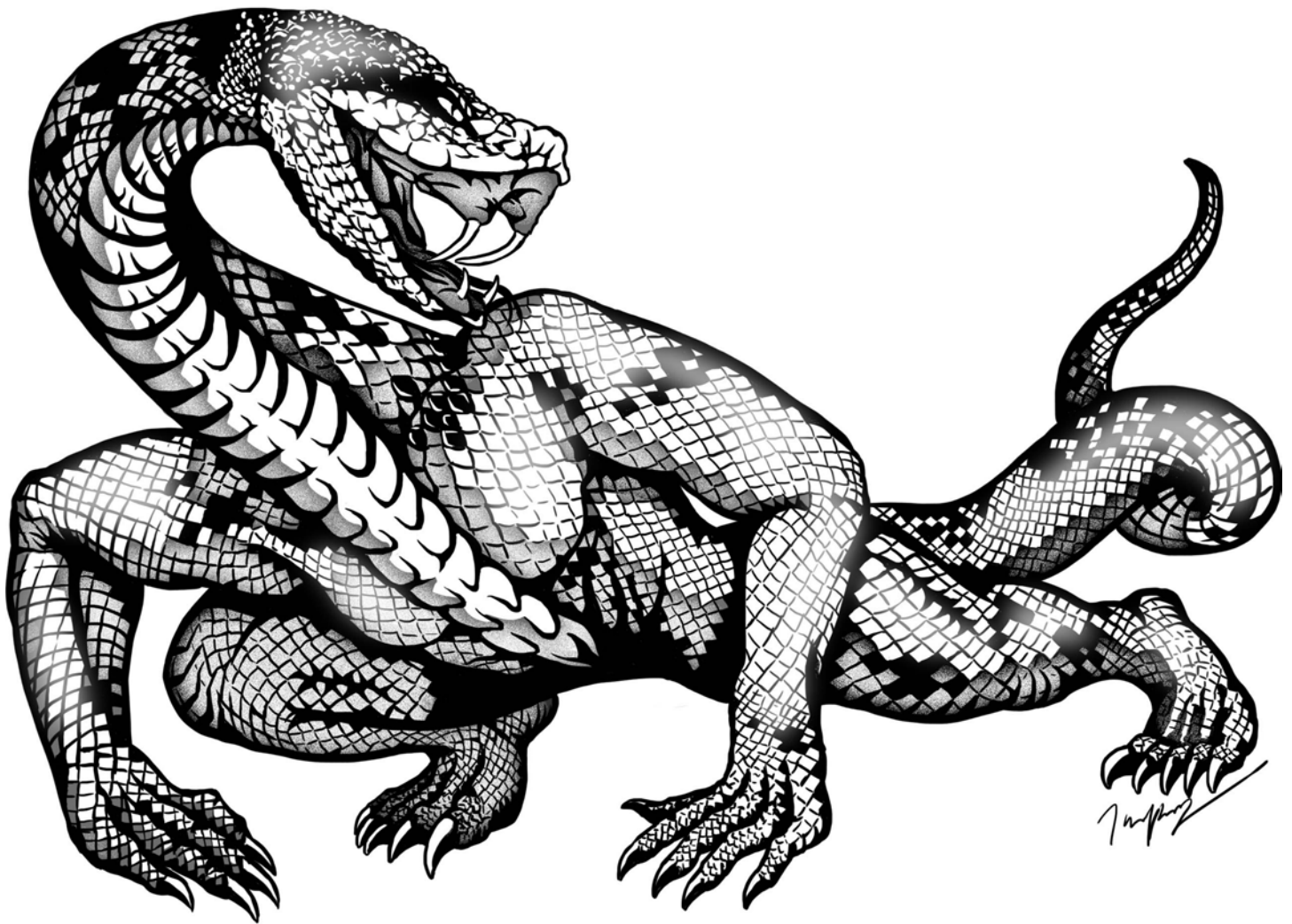
Natural Abilities: Horror Factor 10.

Mutant Animal Powers: Fangs (1D6 points of damage), Advanced Tongue Touch, Extraordinary Physical Prowess, Extraordinary Speed, and Deadly Poison/Venom (a bite requires a save vs lethal poison of 14 or better, or the victim takes 1D4x10 points of damage). A successful saving throw means the victim only takes 1D6 points of damage.

Vestigial Disadvantages: Diet Restriction: Carnivore and Vestigial Tail.

Combat Training: Assassin.

Attacks per Melee: 6 (2 initial, +3 from Hand to Hand, +1 from Extraordinary P.P.).



Combat Bonuses: +4 to initiative, +9 to strike, +8 to parry, +8 to dodge, +4 to damage, +5 to pull punch, +8 to roll with punch/fall, and +3 to disarm.

Combat Skills: Punch 1D4, Power Punch 2D4 (counts as two attacks), Elbow/Forearm 1D6, Karate Kick 2D4, Knee 1D6, and all Holds.

Saving Throws: +4 to save vs psionics, +6 to save vs insanity, +4% to save vs coma/death, and +1 to save vs poison & magic.

Educational Background: Trained as a Specialist.

Espionage Skills: Hand to Hand: Assassin, Detect Ambush 65%, Intelligence 63%, Wilderness Survival 70%, Pick Locks 65%, and Escape Artist 65%

Physical Program: Acrobatics, Gymnastics, Climbing 95%/85%, and Prowl 72%.

Secondary Skills: Athletics (general), Running, Swimming 70%, Outdoorsmanship, Sign Language 45%, Hunting, Track & Trap Animals 45%/55%, Land Navigation 52%, Literacy: English 93%, Language: English 88%, W.P. Sword (+2 to strike & parry), W.P. Knife (+2 to strike, parry, and throw), Streetwise 28%, and Juggling 45%.

Money: He has a secret stash of \$180,000 hidden away. His math skills are not that good so he is ware of how much money he actually has. He enjoys killing and only uses money when it's necessary for him to disguise himself as a human and behave as one.

Weapons: Six Throwing Knives (1D6), 1 Combat Bush Knife (usually envenomed with his own poison (D6+1), and 1 Short Sword (2D4).

Equipment & Vehicles: He avoids using modern technology whenever possible. He likes to rely on his natural skills and abilities. However, he is willing to participate and do whatever it takes to achieve his assignment.

Spit

Alfonso was a thug who spent his entire life in East and South Africa. While attempting to steal some valuables from a wealthy scientist, he was bitten by a Black Hooded Spitting Cobra. In an attempt to save his life, the criminal organization he was working for gave him an experimental anti-venom. Unknown to anyone, the cobra was a mutant animal snake. The combination gave him certain cobra-like attributes and the ability to spit or secrete toxic chemicals from his skin or from his saliva. He continued to work in Africa for the criminal organization until he got tired of his handlers, and went to the U.S. He met up with Scales and the two became partners. When Scales introduced him to a mutant animal named Fangs, the two became almost inseparable. He is regarded as true serpent; however he is sort of becoming unreliable because of his predator nature.

Real Name: Alfonso Machel.

Occupation: Freelance Assassin.

Alignment: Diabolic.

Power Category: Experiment.

Experience Level: Fourth.

Hit Points: 34. **S.D.C.:** 55.



P.P.E.: 19

Appearance: He is a native African male with green and scaly skin like a reptile. His nose is barely a bump with two tiny pin-holes. His eyes are almost entirely black with a dark iris. He has no obvious ears, but there is a pair of circular markings flush against his head and barely noticeable holes.

Attributes: I.Q. 12, M.E. 13, M.A. 10, P.S. 15, P.P. 15, P.E. 16, P.B. 8, Spd 26.

Age: 24. **Sex:** Male. **Height:** 5 feet, 10 inches (1.78 m). **Weight:** 160 lbs (72 kg).

Animal Traits, Features, & Powers: Chemical Secretion Power (Powers Unlimited One), Infrared Vision 25 feet (7.6 m), Advanced Tongue Taste, Running: Predator Burst, Venomous Attack (Blinding Venom/Powers Unlimited One).

Animal Trait Defects: Multiple Animal Traits (ears, nose, eyes, and skin) and Reptilian Brain: Predator.

Combat Training: Assassin.

Attacks per Melee: 5/7/6 (2 initial, +3 from Hand to Hand, +2 extra attacks for the first melee round of combat, which reduces to +1 on the second melee round, normal afterward.

Combat Bonuses: +3 to initiative/+5 for first melee round, +2 to strike, +1 to parry, +1 to dodge, +4 to damage, +5 to pull punch, +4 to roll with punch/fall, and +3 to disarm.

Combat Skills: Punch 1D4, Power Punch 2D4 (counts as two attacks), Elbow/Forearm 1D6, and Knee 1D6.

Saving Throws: +4% to save vs coma/death. +4 to save vs poisons, drugs, and chemicals, and +1 to save vs magic.

Educational Background: On the Job Training.

Common Skills: Language and Literacy: Swahili 92%/88% and Pilot: Automobile 68%.

Bodyguard/Assassin Program: Detect Ambush 65%, Detect Concealment 60%, Escape Artist 65%, Optic Systems 65%, Sniper (+2 to aim or called shots-counts as two attacks), Tracking 60%, W.P. Rifle (+2 to aim/+1 to burst), W.P. Handgun (+2 to aim/+1 to burst), and W.P. Energy Pistol (+2 to aim/+1 to burst).

Physical Program: Hand to Hand: Assassin and Prowl 62%.

Secondary Skills: Athletics (general), Running, Swimming 70%, Climbing 60%/50%, Outdoorsmanship, Wilderness Survival 55%, Land Navigation 52%, Language: English 77%, Literacy: English 50%, and Hunting.

Money: He keeps \$1D6x1000 U.S. dollars on him at all times. He attempts to pay off people rather than speak to them. He has a cash reserve of about \$310,000 U.S. dollars and a million in South African Rand (96,688 US dollars).

Weapons: *Browning GP 35* (9mm), **Range:** 164 feet (50 m), **Damage:** 3D6, **Rate of Fire:** Single shot or semi-automatic, **Payload:** 13 round detachable box mag.

5.56 R4 Assault Rifle. **Range:** 1,320 feet (402 m), **Damage:** 5D6, **Rate of Fire:** Single shot or Full Automatic, **Payload:** 35-round detachable box magazine. Has optical sights on it.

Dart Gun, **Range:** 110 feet (33.5 m), **Damage:** 1 point plus tranquilizer (save vs non-lethal poison; 16 or better). Failure renders victim unconscious within 1D4 melees. Even if a save is made, the victim will feel woozy in 1D4 melees, -2 to strike, parry, and dodge and -10% to skill rolls for 4D4 minutes. He will also use venom from Spit, **Rate of Fire:** 2 per melee round, **Payload:** Single shot.

Armor: Armored Vest (A.R. 10, 50 S.D.C.).

Equipment & Vehicles: He lives on the run, paying for what he needs or killing the owner and taking it. He doesn't like automatic vehicles and tries to steal only vehicles with a stick shift.

Nagraj (The Snake Man)

Nagraj believes himself to be the Avatar of the god Shiva, and that it's his purpose in life to destroy the world. India and Pakistan represent the world he knows so the two nations must be destroyed. He will take any steps necessary to fulfill his destiny. His brother is an obstacle who won't listen to reason and rejected their mother's sacred teaching (that is why he was not blessed by the snake goddess). After the destruction of the world, he will bring the people to a new enlightenment, but until then he must combat the evils that are trying to stop him from fulfilling his destiny. He is very much in love with Madam Venom. He is willing to sacrifice any of his Snake Men including Scales, to bring about the world's destruction, but not her. He is not about

to throw away his own life either. He must live so the world can be reborn.

Real Name: Rajiv Dasmunsi.

Occupation: Criminal Mastermind and Terrorist.

Alignment: Aberrant.

Power Category: Mutant.

Experience Level: Seventh.

Hit Points: 50. **S.D.C.:** 77.

P.P.E.: 31

Appearance: He looks like an athletic Indian male, but his ears are small, his eyes round, and his skin is rough. He has minimal body hair and a pointed tongue. He is usually accompanied by a dozen venomous snakes. He almost never wears shoes or a shirt, simply long, cloth pants.

Insanity: He suffers from God Syndrome and is convinced he is an avatar of the Hindu god Shiva. His powers were given to him by Mansa Devi, the Hindu folk goddess of snakes. He



must destroy the world before he can receive the power to restore it.

Attributes: I.Q. 14, M.E. 30, M.A. 21, P.S. 17, P.P. 20, P.E. 14, P.B. 11, Spd 27.

Age: 40. **Sex:** Male. **Height:** 5 feet, 5 inch (1.65 m). **Weight:** 140 lbs (63 kg).

Unusual Characteristics: A pointed tongue. Most of his traits are not truly all that unusual and he can easily pass as a normal person, at least until he speaks and his tongue is seen.

Major Super Abilities: Animal Abilities: Serpent and Animal Metamorphosis: Reptile. Note: He can control 9D6 snakes at any given time.

Combat Training: Martial Arts.

Attacks per Melee: 5 (2 initial, +3 from Hand to Hand).

Combat Bonuses: +2 to initiative, +5 to strike, +7 to parry, +7 to dodge, +2 to damage, +3 to pull punch, +6 to roll with punch/fall, and +2 to disarm.

Combat Skills: Karate Punch 2D4, Power Punch 4D4 (counts as two attacks), Elbow/Forearm 1D6, Knee 1D6, Karate Kick 2D4, Roundhouse Kick 3D6, Crescent Kick 2D4+2, Axe Kick 2D8, Wheel Kick 2D6, Snap Kick 1D6, Leaping Kick 3D8 (counts as two attacks), Tripping/Leghook (cannot be parried, must dodge or knockdown), Jump Kick 6D6, Flying Jump Kick 4D6, all Holds, Paired Weapons, Critical Strike on an unmodified roll of 18-20, and Venomous Attack (should he bite anyone in human form, he does 1 point of damage or if in snake form, 1D6 points. Opponents must make a saving throw vs lethal poison or take 1D4x10+8 points of additional damage direct to Hit Points. A successful save vs lethal poison still results in the victim taking 1D6 points of damage to S.D.C. if he is in snake form).

Saving Throws: +8 to save vs psionics and +13 to save vs insanity.

Educational Background: Masters Degree.

Common Skills: Language and Literacy: Hindi 94%/95%, Mathematics: Basic 93%, and Pilot: Automobile 74%.

Business Program: Business & Finance 95%, Computer Operation 98%, Law (general) 85%, and Research 98%.

Physical Program: Kick Boxing, Acrobatics, Swimming 98%, and Prowl 90%.

Veterinarian Program: Animal Husbandry 90%, Zoology 90%, Biology 98%, First Aid 98%, and Veterinary Science 98%.

Technical Program: Animal Training 90%, History 98%/93%, Art (Sculpting) 98%, and Philosophy 98%

Secondary Skills: Hand to Hand: Martial Arts, Language: Arabic 71%, Literacy: Arabic 75%, Swimming 85%, Climbing 90%, Language: English 86%, Literacy: English 75%, Wilderness Survival 65%, Streetwise 40%, Public Speaking 55%, Athletics (general), and Running.

Money: He has \$4 million US dollars in ready cash, 3 million Indian Rupees (289,816 US dollars) in a private Swiss Bank account, and another 7 million in Euros (9,572,983 U.S. dollars) in a bank in Berlin. He uses money to set everything up in order to accomplish his task. Otherwise, he has little use for the stuff.

Weapons: He is a living weapon.

Equipment & Vehicles: He utilizes technology only to help him bring about his ultimate goal. He has little use of the stuff but regards it as necessity right now.

Space Pirates



Optional Supplementary Material for the Phase World® Setting

By Braden Campbell

The chief weapon of sea pirates, however, was their capacity to astonish. Nobody else could believe, until it was too late, how heartless and greedy they were.

– Kurt Vonnegut, *Breakfast of Champions*

Throughout history, there have been individuals, and even cultures, that made their living by taking what they wanted from others. During the Interim, for example, the Three Galaxies were plagued by demons, Deevils, and untold numbers of interstellar raiders such as the Splugorth. As the newer societies of the Corkscrew and the Anvil began to organize themselves and the dark ages came to a close, the power of these monstrosities waned. Still, for 40,000 years they had run rampant across the skies, taking what they wanted and killing those who stood in their way. It was doubtless that their example would be followed.

Today, most people in the Three Galaxies have a distorted and romanticized view of space pirates. They are seen as free men and women, all of them healthy and beautiful, who never have to answer to any kind of authority; the rock stars of the interstellar age. In the popular media, pirates are depicted as swashbuckling adventurers who defy the conventional, love passionately, and die gloriously. However, this is rarely true. The life of a pirate is almost always a very harsh and dirty one, fraught with constant danger.

Pirate vessels are almost always “frankensteins”: a slap-dash conglomeration of other ships that requires continual repairs and maintenance. A pirate Captain’s main concern is in making sure he has working weapon systems, and a powerful engine. All other systems are secondary, and so, the ship is often very cramped, stuffed to overflowing with captured booty or a large crew complement. There is no such thing as privacy; a pirate will eat, sleep, and go to bathroom in full view of his crewmates. Smoking is never permitted on a pirate vessel as it can easily clog the air scrubbers. Most pirates who need a nicotine fix will chew tobacco. The water supply onboard will likewise be tightly controlled, since many older starships either have no water recycling plant, or one that does not work at full efficiency. Space pirates often go months between baths, and so the smell onboard a pirate ship can be overpowering. Food consists mostly of captured military rations and canned goods. Fresh meat, fruit and vegetables never last long.

All in all, a space pirate spends most of his time waiting to raid something. Until a promising ship or colony comes into sight, life is a boring routine of cleaning weapons, patching one’s spacesuit or combat armor, and keeping the ship “afloat.” To pass the time, they play games such as dice or cards, although actual gambling is almost never permitted onboard because it can divide the crew and easily lead to brawling and murder.

One of the most surprising facets of life as a space pirate is that it is almost entirely democratic. Unlike the starships of the Consortium or the Transgalactic Empire where the Captain’s word is law, many pirate crews demand the right to elect and replace their leaders. A great many space pirates were, at one point in their lives, crew members on one of the superpowers’ starships. They had little or no say over how the vessel was run. As pirates and

freebooters, they make certain that doesn’t happen again. Before a ship actually leaves port, the Captain and crew will meet to draft and sign a list of rules that everyone will obey for the duration of the voyage or raid. This document is referred to as “the articles.”

The following is an example of the Articles of Piracy used by the ship *Revenge* which was commanded by Captain John Phillips.

Article One: *The Captain shall have one full share and a half in all prizes. The Master, Chief Operator, and Gunner shall have one share and a quarter. To all others goes one share apiece.*

Article Two: *If anyone attempts to run away, or keep any secret from the crew, they shall be marooned with one energy clip, one bottle of Water, and one small arm.*

Article Three: *If anyone steals anything from their crewmates, or gambles to the value of ten credits, they shall be marooned (or shot dead).*

Article Four: *If at any time we should meet with another Marooned, then that man shall sign these Articles at once, and shall suffer such punishment as the Captain and Crew shall think fit.*

Article Five: *Anyone who strikes a fellow crew member while these Articles are in force, shall receive thirty-nine stripes on the bare back.*

Article Six: *Anyone who fires their weapon, or smokes tobacco in the hold without cap to their pipe, shall suffer the same punishment as in the former Article.*

Article Seven: *Anyone who does not keep their weapons clean, fit for an engagement, or neglects their ship’s duties, shall be cut off from their Share, and suffer such other Punishment as the Captain and Company shall think fit.*

Article Eight: *Should anyone lose a finger or toe during an engagement, they shall have 500 credits recompense: if they lose a limb, 20,000 credits.*

Now, even though space pirates may communally decide on the ship’s laws and codes of conduct, there is still a chain of command to be followed if anyone is going to make any money or even survive to get back to port. Below are some of the more specialized positions that one will find onboard any pirate vessel. (**G.M. note:** No matter what position they might have, everyone uses the basic Space Pirate O.C.C. as their starting point. Where they become specialists is in their skill selections. Recommendations for this are outlined below.)

The Captain

Most pirate Captains don’t command by an iron fist, but because of their skill, daring, and an ability to win prize and booty. A Captain’s main function is to oversee and direct a space battle. He must be physically tough, smart, and handy with a weapon. He should also know his space skills and quite often must be able to do complicated mathematics in his head (for quick navigation changes). The Captain is elected through a vote, and if he falls into disfavor, the crew is just as quick to maroon him, or “space” him, or if he’s lucky, just let him off at the nearest starport. In any event, the Captain never has the last say, except perhaps in the midst of battle. In fact, at certain times, the Captain has no more power than every other pirate on board. When not in battle or preparing to fight, quite often the Quartermaster is technically in charge of the ship. Important matters such as to where the ship might travel, whether or not to put into port, or if a certain target

should be engaged or not, are quite often not up to the Captain. These pressing details are decided by vote, with the majority ruling. If the Captain were to go against the vote, then he would be in violation of the Articles of Piracy, and would most likely step down from command. A new leader would then be chosen.

Recommended skill selections: Advanced Mathematics, Navigation: Space, and Pilot Starship are all a must for a Captain to have. Performance, Public Speaking, Intelligence, and Lore: Galactic are also fairly important. A good Captain should also have Barter as a skill and be able to both read and write several of the Three Galaxies' major languages.

Quartermaster

The Quartermaster is generally the second in charge. His main purpose is to distribute things like rations, E-Clips, work, prizes, and punishment. Since pirates don't trust authority, and refuse to let all the power of the ship rest on one man, command is split between the Captain, who navigates the ship and leads in battle, and the Quartermaster, who usually leads any boarding party. He also determines what prize is worth taking, and keeps custody of all booty until it is divvied up. As expected, all precious metals are taken, but beyond that, it is the Quartermaster who decides what else is worth nabbing. His decisions are often based on how much room the ship has, and how much time the crew might have to transfer it. The Quartermaster is also the only man who can dole out punishment. The Captain can order punishment, but only the Quartermaster can administer it. He also settles individual quarrels and if need be, and acts as a witness to any duels to insure that they are fair and just.

Recommended skill selections: Salvage, Recognize Weapon Quality, Find Contraband, and Gemology are all must-haves. As well, the Quartermaster should really think about beefing himself up with physical skills such as Body Building, Boxing, and Physical Labor. The bigger and tougher he is, the better.

Chief Operator

This is the man who keeps the ship in working order: making necessary repairs, patching holes if need be, debugging the computer core, and so on. Some ship's systems can be very complicated, especially if the pirates have just taken possession of a brand new starship or military-class vessel. These men are highly valued, and answer to the Captain and/or the Quartermaster depending on the task at hand.

Recommended skill selections: Space pirates may take any mechanical skills during their initial creation, so Spaceship Mechanics and Vehicle Armorer are a no-brainer. Electrical Engineer, Mechanical Engineer, and Salvage would also be good selections. If the Game Master allows it, this character could be drafted using the full-blown Operator O.C.C. or some variation thereof. The Trimadore aliens for example, who hail from somewhere in the Tail of the Corkscrew, are much sought after by pirate crews and cartels.

Gunner

Pirate vessels very often do not have advanced computer targeting arrays or automated weapon systems. Gunners are therefore skilled men who take on this job instead. In some instances, a Gunnery Master will give orders to the others on where to train

ship's weapons during an attack. It takes years of practice to become a good gunner.

Recommended skill selections: W.P. Heavy, Field Armorer, and Intelligence (for knowing exactly how and where to hit certain enemy vessels) should be chosen foremost. Gunners are also in charge of loading, arming, and firing torpedoes, since most pirate ships lack automated launchers. Demolitions will therefore be a must-have skill as well. A Master Gunner should have Advanced Mathematics and Public Speaking (for barking out orders).

Surgeon

Body Fixers and Cyber-Docs are highly valued among pirates. Whenever pirates capture other ships, they will press surgeons into service; that is, give them no choice but to join their crew. A surgeon is typically the only person kept on board who is not required to sign articles. Depending on the nature of the crew, some surgeons are still paid a share of the treasure even if they refused to sign on.

Recommended skill selections: If the pirates are lucky enough to have an actual doctor onboard, then the appropriate O.C.C. (Body Fixer or Cyber-Doc) should be used. However, many times they must rely on the services of a talented amateur from among their own ranks. A Space Pirate surgeon should therefore make sure he takes Paramedic, Biology, and Xenology to reflect either some fancy book learning in his or her past, or perhaps a failed attempt at medical school.

Cabin Boy

The Captain might sometimes employ a young, energetic fellow as a cabin boy. Typically the cabin boy will run messages and errands for the officers, prepare their uniforms, perhaps even fetch their dinner. Because he is an apprentice of sorts, he is also expected to learn all aspects of living and working in space. The cabin boy works long, hard hours, and takes more than his fair share of lumps. However, if he manages to live a few years, he might eventually make it to a position of more importance on the ship.

Recommended skill selections: Running, General Repair, Cook, and Physical Labor come with the territory. The cabin boy is a 1st level character who is likely to be taught a varied collection of skills from the other crew members.

Raiding

– some basic considerations

The most important thing to keep in mind with regards to space pirates and their potential targets is this: they will never, ever, pick a fight they can't win. If they don't think they can pull it off, they won't engage. They will not attack heavily-armed military ships that are six times their mass when all they have is a small destroyer (if that). Instead, they will focus on lightly armed merchant ships, personal space yachts, and maybe, if they are feeling especially frisky, an interstellar luxury liner. If space pirates do decide to take on something tougher, such as a Trade Cruiser or Naruni Enterprises vessel, then they will gang up on it to ensure success. This is, in fact one of the primary reasons

behind the development of the large and organized cartels; to be able to take down the increasing number of very heavily armed merchant vessels plying the spacelanes. Odds of 3-1 are most to a pirates' liking; any fewer ships and they risk a painful defeat, but anymore ships just means a smaller portion of the booty for everyone involved.

Above all else, speed is a space pirate's most important advantage. To be really successful, their vessel must be able to consistently overtake target ships, and outrun the authorities. Unfortunately, because of the energy/mass ratio inherent to contra-gravitic propulsion, having a super-fast engine often means that the ship is very lightly armored. To have both properties is ridiculously expensive, and a pirate Captain on a budget will always take speed over stamina. After all, if everything goes perfectly, the pirate's ship should never have to engage in a firefight, as the poor people they are attacking will be too scared or weak to put up any meaningful resistance.

When a pirate crew moves to attack another starship, it must decide whether to do so at FTL or at sub-light speeds. Each has its advantages and dangers. Attacking at sub-light velocities means that the target ship can put up their shields, which is just all the more protection that the pirates will have to get through. However, boarding actions are very safe (relatively) at such speeds. There can also be a greater distance between the two ships when the shooting begins, so cruise missiles and area affect weapons can be used without risk of damaging one's own ship. On the other hand, if the attack is made while traveling faster-than-light, the target ship will be running without any kind of variable force fields. This is great for the pirates, because it means that they can fire any and all of their weapons and hit the unprotected hull of the other ship. The downside is that they will have to be very accurate in their firing, and cannot use torpedoes or weapons with a blast radius of more than 80 feet/24.3 m (see **Fleets of the Three Galaxies™**, page 11).

So a merchant ship attacked at FTL speeds can just slam on the brakes, instantly drop back down into realspace, and then throw up the shields to give the pirates a bigger challenge, right? Well, unfortunately, it doesn't quite work that way. A starship traveling faster-than-light cannot simply stop on a dime, because the crew inside would all hit the front of the ship and liquefy. Instead, a contra-gravity engine must bleed the CG-field away at a controlled rate, usually taking one minute of deceleration for every light-year per hour the ship was going. Anything else is suicide. For the attacking pirates, this means that once they start fighting or boarding, they have only a few minutes to get into the enemy ship, and gain control of it. The pilot of the pirate's craft will also be working like mad to maintain an equal speed (control rolls every melee at -15%).

Once they decide at what speed their best advantage lies, the pirate ship will usually send a message to their intended victims, signaling that if they are shot at, they will take no prisoners. It's then up to the crew of the other ship to determine if this is a bluff or a serious threat, which is not always an easy call to make. One reason a merchant might decide to fight back is if the pirates off his bow have a reputation for torturing their enemies whether they resist or not. If he thinks his ship can out-gun the pirates, he may call their bluff and fight. It is almost a given that the pirates will run and not stick around for a prolonged firefight. Pirates are looking for easy pickings after all, not an early death. If the merchant vessel elects to make a run for it, quite often they will dump

their cargo (which is what the pirates are after) and accelerate to best speed. This is especially easy if the cargo is being carried in external cans. Most of the time the space pirates will be content with this, and let the fleeing cowards go. The cans will then be strapped onto the raiding ship, and carried home. Actually, this tends to work out best for all parties involved, since the merchant ship usually gets away with all hands still alive, the pirates get their booty, and the shipping company that got robbed simply files an insurance claim.

Remember though that while the pirates may have a smaller starship, they will almost certainly have a larger crew and more guns than the merchant ship they are attacking. If the merchant knows he is outnumbered and that he cannot get away, he may allow his ship to be boarded in order to spare the lives of his crew. The merchant Captain might also fear a mutiny among his crew if he forces a fight with the pirates, and so back down from resisting. The pirate Quartermaster selects a boarding party, usually by promising that any such volunteers will get first pick of any weapons found on the merchant ship. These men then go over and take control of the bridge. However, they then face another dilemma: do they unload the cargo, or just take the whole ship? And if they just take the whole ship, what will they do about her crew? If time is tight, or if the authorities are on route, the Quartermaster will quickly grab the most valuable items, get back to his ship, and flee. Pirates almost never have enough time or patience to take everything that a merchant might be carrying. Depending on the alignment of the pirates, any loot left behind might be burned or destroyed, mostly out of spite, but also to prevent rival pirates from making any money off this already raided ship. Whether or not the pirates simply take the merchant ship will depend greatly on how damaged it has become during the boarding actions. If the pirates had to cripple the engines, or blow the bridge to ribbons, chances are they will leave it behind or cause it to self-destruct. If it hasn't got a scratch on it, then... hey, free ship.

Surface raids (such as against colonies, outposts, or even cities) are much rarer than attacks out in space, but the rewards can be greater for the daring Captain. The size of their vessel will often hamper them; since it will generally be no bigger than a frigate, and it lacks any weapons that can strike a planet from far away. Things like bunkers, shield generators, and surface-to-air missile sites will all be intact when the pirates make their move. In some cases, to even get into the planet's atmosphere, the pirates will have to avoid being fired upon by orbital defenses such as space stations or satellites. In a ground attack, the advantage lies with the defenders, so pirates will always take the whole ship down, blasting away with every weapon they have. The goal is not so much to destroy the colony, as to force any potential defenders to run and hide. If the pirates have access to space fighters, they will remain in the air over the colony, strafing the ground and providing cover for the others.

So when pirates go out on the prowl, just what is it they are hoping to capture? The simple answer is: whatever they can readily use. If a computer has useful information, they will download it. If a ship has guns, they will take them. If a ship has food and water, they will take that too. If a ship has no remaining crew, they will simply take the ship. People are also a handy item for space pirates to grab, especially when raiding a luxury liner. Diplomats, high-ranking officials, and women who are as delicate as they are beautiful are often held for ransom. In the case of such kidnappings, the pirates will take the people they want, and then

send the ship on its way. The Captain will issue the victim ship a *letter of ransom* – a note that they can show to any other pirates they might encounter telling them that this ship is on its way back to port, and that still other pirates are awaiting a ransom payment, so please don't kill them. Rival pirates are under no obligation to respect a letter of ransom.

Oddly enough, space pirates almost never set about on a raid with the intention of grabbing money. This is because the cultures of the Three Galaxies are largely cashless. When trade is being conducted between two planets or star systems, the transactions are all logged into computer networks, and numbers are simply transferred from one corporate account into another. The Murana Banking Cooperative and the Royal Exchange of Dracul are prime examples of the kinds of massive interstellar banks that handle money from a multitude of sources. Even normal citizens will have at least one open account with their local bank, get paid by direct deposit, and will buy things they want by using their debit card. The only people still using cash are those who don't like to leave a paper trail or appear in bank records.

Because there are so many planets in the Three Galaxies to mine and exploit, there are actually only 150 precious metals that have much worth. Silver and gold are quite common throughout settled space, and thus have reduced value as a monetary unit. There are some gems and stones, such as darobite, ackanine, and periorin which are found on relatively few planets. Each of these precious stones is commonly used in jewelry and can have a liquid value of 500 credits per carat. Gantrium, stardust, and xanthine are also rare enough to be worth taking, and can be sold to any of the Dark Covens near the United Worlds of Warlock. Most recently, the material of choice is refined Killaryte. Since the discovery of this substance four hundred years ago, the Thundercloud Galaxy has been all but overrun with mining corporations and independent prospectors, all looking for the stuff. For the most part, Naruni Enterprises holds the monopoly on this material. Since Killaryte is so dangerous in its native form, it is refined "on site" in orbiting factories, and then loaded into cruisers for transport back to the Anvil and Corkscrew galaxies. It is as these ships are preparing to cross inter-galactic space that the pirates will strike. Captured Killaryte is then sold to black market buyers when the raiders return to the closest haven.

Privateer Navies

The word "privateer" is often used interchangeably with "pirate" but the two actually have completely different meanings. A privateer is an armed independent ship that is being employed by a government or company. What separates them from everyday raiders is that Articles of Piracy don't apply to them. Instead, they carry papers referred to as a *Marque of Letters*. This gives a privateer captain the right to commit acts of reprisal, escort merchants, or protect certain sectors or colonies. Often the limits of the Marque are vague, leaving it up to the captain and crew to determine what they can take or attack. Most of the time, Privateers are engaged in acts of reprisal against other nations; that is, they are busy committing acts of war. This is a politically sneaky way to attack one's enemies without using one's own armed forces, similar to fighting a proxy war. If the people being raided complain or threaten to retaliate, the nation that hired the privateers can simply claim

that the attackers are common pirates over whom they have no control or authority. Privateers are not paid by the people they are working for per se. Instead, they travel "on the account"; they can loot, pillage, and plunder all they wish, so long as they leave their employer's ships alone. For their efforts, the privateer Captain and crew may have safe harbor at any port controlled by their patron, and may keep a portion of whatever they plunder (between one-fifth and one-half, with the rest going back to their employers).

Just like pirates, privateers will quickly die if thrown up against military-grade targets such as destroyers, battleships, and space stations. Where they excel is in attacking lightly armed merchant vessels and civilian craft. Thus, a privateer navy is really only good for interrupting the flow of trade within an enemy's space. This practice is commonly called "commerce raiding" (where ships and cargo are most often captured), although it might sometimes be referred to as a "tonnage war" (which mainly focuses on simply blowing up both ship and cargo). Regardless, the overarching goal is to destroy the enemy's merchant fleet. The idea is that they have only a finite number of transport ships at their disposal and only a limited ability to replace them if they are lost. Therefore, if enough of them can be taken out, the general economy of the enemy will suffer for it, which in turn will affect his ability to make war. Some naval theorists consider this entire exercise to be a waste, a distraction from the destruction of the enemy's combat vessels. Still, privateer fleets are not uncommon across the Three Galaxies, whether they are used simply to harry merchant convoys, or as a poor man's substitute for a military-strengthened space fleet.

The first modern instance of large-scale commerce raiding dates back five hundred years to the time of the Great War. For a century previous, space pirates had grown in number all around the areas controlled by the Transgalactic Empire and the soon-to-be-created Consortium of Civilized Worlds. When hostilities broke out between these two super powers, it quickly slipped its bonds and engulfed nearly every part of the Three Galaxies in some way. Both sides made great initial strides, pushing deeply into each other's territories, only to become bogged down the closer they got to the enemy's Core Worlds. The home planets of the participating species were surrounded by so many redundant layers of defense that it became impossible to break through. Lines stabilized and instead of a fluid, mobile conflict, the Great War became one of attrition and the superiority of resources. All along the front lines raged star system-wide battles of unimaginable ferocity. The worst of these by example were the first and second sacking of Wiktor, the battle of Chakimitin, and the forty year-long fight simply named after the planet on which it took place: Tango Draconis. Into these places and a hundred others, flowed a constant stream of men and materiel. Since breakthrough had so far eluded everyone in terms of a stand-up military fight, the superpowers attempted to undermine each other's economies instead. The vessels that ferried these supplies to the front from the Core Worlds had to be stopped, but no one wanted to take battle cruisers and destroyers away from their duties in order to do so. Thus, both the CCW and the TGE issued Letters of Marque to any space pirates who wanted them. If they agreed to only attack the ships of the enemy, then they could have access to military-grade weapons and professional repair facilities. As well, they would be allowed to keep a portion of whatever they pillaged.

Privateers who fought in the Great War got very rich, very fast. They also became used to operating with relative impunity. When hostilities ended however, the party was over. Both the Consortium and the Transgalactic Empire cancelled their Letters of Marque and immediately sent their battle fleets out to arrest or destroy the men and women who had so recently fought on their behalf. It was simply part of the post-war clean up. Even the final armistice between the CCW and the TGE, the *Lanator Accords*, contained specific sections decrying the use of privateer fleets as being uncivilized and illegal.

Even so, because of the precedent they set during the Great War, privateer fleets are still used today in the remote, less developed portions of the Three Galaxies. These are most often tiny, independent star systems or planetary collectives, far removed from the influence of the major power blocs and their massive armadas. On a few occasions however, a larger, more influential nation has come to use privateers as their mainstay space force either because of happenstance, or financial constraints. The two greatest examples include:

The Free World Council

Shortly after securing control of Good Hope, news arrived that a sizable Imperial fleet was being assembled to bombard the planet into ashes for its insolence. The rebels at that time had only the captured Imperial Dreadnought *Nisbroloth* (now re-named the *Hope Bringer*), and powerful as it was, it was just a single vessel. They would be quite outmatched in the inevitable battle. This is not to say that the people of Good Hope stood entirely alone. In those early days, many unscrupulous and downright evil men and women joined the fight against the Kreeghor; not because they believed in the cause of freedom, but because they saw the opportunity to get in on the ground floor of a new galactic power. So it was that the pirate cartel under **Captain James Radnar** decided to throw its lot in with the Cadre. Radnar would order his ships to engage the Kreeghor alongside the Rebellion, but in exchange, he wanted safe harbor and political asylum on any and all FWC planets for so long as there was a FWC. Michael Klass agreed, having little other choice. He issued Letters of Marque to the pirates who streamed in from all across the Corkscrew. Eventually, two hundred dilapidated frigates and cruisers were in orbit of Good Hope. Radnar's cartel took full advantage of the planet's orbital drydock, and before the Kreeghor armada could arrive to destroy everyone, the privateer ships were in the best shape of their lives. Not only had their hulls been fully and professionally repaired, but they were now armed with Imperial-style anti-matter torpedoes instead of the less powerful nuclear ordnance to which they were accustomed. Rather than an easy slaughter, the Kreeghor were met with a shockingly strong resistance. They retreated back beyond Axis-5, and the Rebellion survived its first major crisis.

For over a century now, the pirates have kept their end of the bargain, raiding only Imperial ships and not attacking the FWC member planets. After all, they recognize that they have a pretty sweet deal going here. They eat regularly, never lack for a good space battle, and have the whole of the Transgalactic Empire to raid at their whim. Moreover, they are given more respect and authority than they have ever known. Among the leaders of the Free Worlds, there is not a single person who wants to give the pirates any excuse to go away; such a thing would leave the FWC with

only enough ships (24 captured Imperial destroyers and cruisers) to defend Good Hope, leaving the other twenty-six member worlds to die horribly in the fires of a Kreeghor orbital bombardment. The only downside to all of this, from a privateer's point of view, is that the Free Worlds offer only one real port of call. After a century of constant warfare, most of the cities in the FWC are little more than burnt-out wreckage, with no measurable infrastructure left. This leaves Good Hope, and its capital city of Bossada, as the only place the pirates can go for ship repairs and re-supply.

Having limited resources and facilities, the FWC space fleet remains relatively small. Thanks to the orbital yard over Good Hope, they have the ability to repair and even modify existing starships. Still, the rebellion has never been able to capture a functional *construction* yard. This means that they have no way to design or build new types of spacecraft. Therefore, of its 225 available capital ships, more than 80% of the Free World's fleet are privateer vessels dating back more than a century. The majority of these ships are ancient *Corister*-class frigates backed up by a handful of *Stonewall* cruisers. Additionally, the FWC has managed to purchase, salvage, or steal a small wing of Star Ghost space fighters, several hundred Draygon fighters (all types), and hundreds of *Proctor*-class Interceptors.

The problem that now looms largest for the FWC is not this limited number of starships, but the government's decision in recent years to try and "go legitimate." The change has been slow and painful, but the FWC now has both a standardized army and an Aerospace Corps (see **Three Galaxies™** for more detail on the new military O.C.C.s; **The Rifter® #50** for more background on their attempt to restructure themselves). However, what should be done concerning the pirates? In the wider realm of geo-galactic politics, it looks very bad for the Free Worlds to claim that it is a solid and law-abiding power bloc while using cutthroats and raiders as its space fleet. Being pirates at heart, there is simply no way that they will want to become career pilots and crewmen. Many of them chose this life to get away from rules, regulations, and rigid chains of command. Yet, as stated previously, the Free Worlds really can't do without them. This crisis will eventually lead to a very hard decision: do they get rid of the privateers and trade their fleet for a chance at a military alliance with other major blocs, or do they keep them and relegate the FWC to never becoming anything more than a second-rate power?

The Central Alliance

For the past three hundred years, the space lanes in the northeast portion of the Anvil Galaxy have been particularly dangerous to travel through. The problem first began when the planet Ulmore decided to secede from the Golgan Republik. The ensuing conflict not only devastated the planet, but also caused a mass diaspora. Many former members of the Axillary Guard commandeered the vessels upon which they were serving, and declared themselves to be free from any master. As neighboring worlds followed Ulmore's example and likewise threw off the shackles of Golgan control, the entire area descended into anarchy. With the collapse of all local infrastructures, the spacefarers soon turned to raiding one another for spare parts, ammunition, and food supplies. After three centuries of this continual back and forth, the number of functional, FTL-capable starships in the area had been reduced to a fraction of what it once had been. Fur-

thermore, the pirates crewing those ships were the distillation of a dog-eat-dog, survival of the fittest lifestyle that dated back ten generations. They were bloodthirsty killers through and through who took whatever they wanted without pity or remorse.

Then, General Noldek arrived on the scene. Using a brutal gladiators' code (the only kind of authority anyone around these parts would both recognize and respect), he crafted a personality cult around himself and used it to bring the dilapidated, independent planets under his rule. Upon each conquered planet, he installed a dictatorial overseer, subservient to himself. Thus, the foundations for a new power bloc were laid: the Central Alliance. However, although he ruled the planets and their populations, the General had no way to bring the local pirate gangs under his control. He had no space fleet of his own with which to intimidate or subdue them, and there was no single pirate leader that he could usurp in hand-to-hand combat.

General Noldek made his way to Grighton, a tiny planetoid on the edge of his newly-claimed territory that had long been a haven for smugglers, thieves, black marketeers, and pirates. He proposed a deal that any pirates who agreed to act on behalf of his government would not only get to keep a share of what they stole, but would also receive discounted bionic and cybernetic upgrades courtesy of his government. Several thousand agreed to his terms, and in short order, the Central Alliance had earned itself a space fleet nearly three hundred vessels strong. The majority of the ships are retrofitted *Merchantman*-class frigates (5,000 M.D.C. Main Body, can have up to eight point defense type weapons and four medium weapon systems with a cruise missile launcher taking up two slots). As well, there are also fifty *Auntin*-class patrol ships (see below) left over from the days of the Golgan overseers.

Noldek's Privateers are best thought of as a barely-leashed rabid dog. While they gladly attack the General's enemies – which mostly include the Splugorth and any unaligned planets that the Alliance currently has a problem with – they are just as happy to dart into the crumbling remains of the Golgan Republik or the CCW and stir up whatever mischief they can. They relish any opportunity to blow something up, and crave the bloody close-quarters fighting of boarding actions. They rarely bother with kidnapping and ransom-holding. In fact, they rarely show any kind of quarter at all. They feel that General Noldek has, in some way, legitimized their already harsh lifestyle, allowing them to engage in it with abandon.

Common Pirate Ships and Modifications

Although the pirate cartels and privateer fleets of the Three Galaxies will use just about any kind of ship they can capture, steal, or otherwise get their hands on, the most common ones are small to frigate-sized and support a crew of roughly fifty.

Contrary to what many might think, when pirates capture a starship, what they care about most is not how many weapons it might have on it, but how fast it can go. Speed is the pirate's greatest ally; there's no point in trying to attack another vessel if it's simply going to outrun you. The first thing to be augmented on a captured ship therefore is the engine. Using a mish-mash of parts and some creative if not downright dangerous jury-rigging, a pirate vessel can increase its maximum speed by 25%.

This applies to both sub-light and FTL speeds, so for example, a Merchantman that has been transformed into a pirate raider will be able to travel Mach 3.75 in an atmosphere, Mach 8.75 in space, and can cross interstellar space at a rate of 3.75 light-years per hour. However, unless these enhancements were carried out by an actual Operator O.C.C., then there is a chance that this "overdrive" can cause a breakdown of other systems when engaged. Whenever the ship begins traveling faster than it was originally designed to do, there is a base 3% chance that something goes wrong. The odds of a breakdown are increased by 3% for every percentage of additional speed up to a maximum of 25%. So if the aforementioned pirate Merchantman travels at 5% faster than it was originally supposed to (3.15 light-years per hour), there would be a 15% chance that some problem would creep up. Roll once for every hour of overdrive travel. If a problem does occur, roll again on the table below to see exactly what happens.

Overdrive Failure Chart

01-07% Explosion: A power conduit buckles somewhere in the ship and explodes. Everyone in the affected room (G.M.'s choice) takes 2D6x10 S.D.C. Sparks and smoke are everywhere, but no fires break out.

08-15% Small Fires: 1D6 small fires erupt at various locations around the ship as electrical systems overload and cooling systems are shunted to the main engines. Easily extinguished by an alert crew in two melees.

16-23% Power Drain: All weapon systems built into the hull of the ship become sluggish, and anyone using them is -1 attack per melee. Repairs will take 1D6 hours.

24-31% Power Drain: All long-range communications are knocked out suddenly, including the tach-line transmitter. Repairs will take 1D4 hours.

32-39% Power Drain: All the lights in the ship go out save for those in critical areas like engineering and the bridge. Hope the crew brought plenty of flashlights, because repairs will take 2D6 hours.

40-47% Electrical Short: Half of the internal communications system, provided the ship had one to start with, goes out. Repairs will take 1D4 hours if anyone cares.

48-55% Controls Damaged: Several external thruster ports blow out, making the ship slow to respond to the pilot. All piloting rolls are performed at a penalty of -15% until such time as repairs can be made. Requires 1D6 hours and an EVA mission to fix.

56-63% Controls Damaged: Several external thruster ports blow out, making the ship slow to respond to the pilot. Speed is unaffected, but the vessel is now at half bonuses to dodge. Repairs will take 1D6 hours and can only be done outside.

64-71% Cosmetic Damage: The ship starts to overheat and compensates by venting drive plasma out behind it in long, smoky trails. Any custom paint jobs, chrome trim, or fancy murals are burned off, leaving the hull looking scorched and blackened. On the other hand, your pirate ship is on fire, which looks just as cool.

72-79% Navigation Disruption: The ship's sensors cannot compensate for the increase in speed, and become misaligned. Anyone using them suffers a skill penalty of -35% until they are repaired, which will take 1D4 hours.

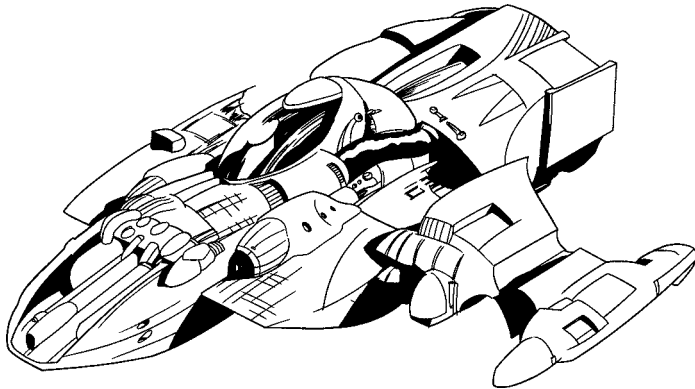
80-87% Exterior Electric Failure: Radar, ladar, and radio systems all die suddenly. The tach-line transmitter is unaffected, but fixing everything else will take 2D6 hours.

88-95% Hull Buckles: She's a good ship, but she just wasn't designed to go this fast. 1D4x100 points of damage are inflicted to the Main Body, accompanied by lots of rattling and shaking as sympathetic vibrations begin to affect the internal superstructure. Also, there's a constant, disturbing sound in the air; exactly what this is left up to imagination of the G.M. It could be anything from a small whine or whistle, to the consistent sound of strained and crumpling metal.

96-00% Stall: The contra-gravitic field surrounding the ship collapses. The sudden jolt slams everyone aboard into the nearest wall, bulkhead, or floor, inflicting 2D6x10 S.D.C. damage.

If the pirates become really successful, they can upgrade to a completely different engine class that will allow them to go faster without the danger of overloads, stalls, and explosions. Given the cost of such an upgrade however, it is rarely seen.

Once the engines have been sufficiently souped-up, the pirates will add additional weapons onto the captured hull. All other systems are considered secondary, which only adds to the short life expectancy of a space pirate. Because it was most likely stolen in a firefight, a pirate ship will start out beaten up, and can remain in that state for some time owing to the high costs of professional repair jobs. Many are lacking amenities such as an internal communication system, decent lighting, or water filtration.



Skiff

“Skiff” is a general spacefarer’s term for a tiny transport vessel that falls somewhere between a space fighter and a shuttle. It is generally piloted by a single person, and only usable at sub-light speeds. Space pirates typically build skiffs in order to transport them aboard a vessel that they have targeted. The skiff is also used to haul loot back to their main ship. Although the actual design of a skiff varies greatly from one pirate gang to another, they are almost always outfitted with a pair of chemical booster rockets. This helps them to overtake a fleeing vessel, or escape from a planet’s surface if need be.

Skiffs are typically made of cheap materials and recycled scrap parts, and have none of the standard features of fighters or shuttles (as listed in **Fleets of the Three Galaxies**, pages 20-21). They are small enough to be carried by any starship that has a hangar bay, taking up the equivalent of two space fighters.

Class: (Light) Shuttle.

Crew: One pilot.

Troops: Six human-sized passengers, or three wearing powered armor.

M.D.C. by Location:

* Optional Rocket Boosters (2) – 100 each

** Main Engine (rear 1/3 of the ship) – 300

*** Main Body – varies. Simple, open-topped platforms have 750 M.D.C., while an enclosed type can have 1,500 M.D.C.

* If the M.D.C. of the booster is depleted and it has all its fuel, it explodes, doing 4D6x10 M.D. to everything within 50 feet (15.2 m).

** Blowing off the engine eliminates all propulsion and steering control.

*** Depleting the M.D.C. of the Main Body destroys the skiff.

Speed:

Sub-Light: Mach 8 in space. Mach 4 in an atmosphere. Solid-chemical booster rockets can increase the speed 25% for a total of five minutes before they are exhausted. Note that skiff engines can be souped-up by an additional 25%, but will have to roll once on the Overdrive chart.

FTL: Not applicable.

Range: Extremely short; 500 miles (800 km).

Statistical Data:

Height: Average 10 feet (3 m).

Width: Average 30 feet (9.1 m).

Length: Average 100 feet (30.5 m).

Weight: 10-20 tons.

Power System: Typically cheap chemical or ion drive propulsion.

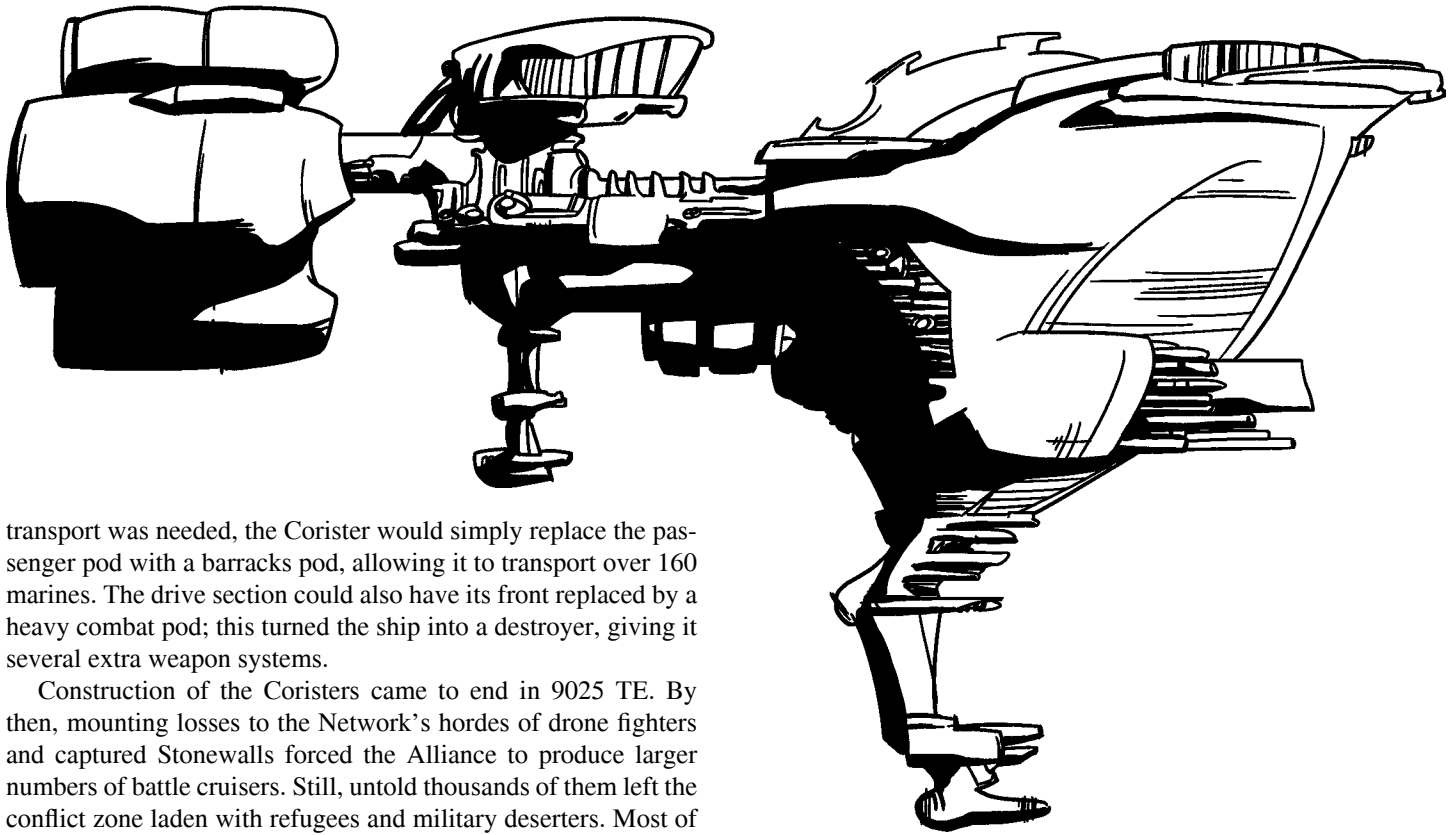
Cargo: Minimal. Room to load roughly two tons of cargo or captured booty.

Cost: Contains roughly 2D6x100,000 credits’ worth of parts and materiel. The booster rockets go for 2.5 million credits per pair.

Weapon Systems: Typically none, as a skiff is designed to be a cheap, potentially disposable transport. If all goes well, it will never even get into a fight. Still, it may be fitted with a single, front-mounted weapon of the “light” type, such as a laser cannon or rail gun (2D4x10 M.D. and 2D6x10 M.D. respectively). As well, some skiffs are little more than open platforms, which allows the passengers on board to use whatever ranged weapons they themselves might be carrying.

Corister-Class Frigate (Human Alliance)

The *Corister*-class is a lineage designed on Terra Prime millennia ago. They were built as long-range frigates, back in the days when the Human Alliance was only about 1,000 light-years wide, and could be crossed in ten days. The *Corister* was a unique approach to shipbuilding that has since been discontinued and never again tried; an engine and a bridge attached to one of five types of interchangeable main bodies. The rear drive section was armed with two main lasers and four smaller lasers for point defense. The remaining two-thirds of the ship could be replaced with a tailor made unit depending on whatever mission the ship had to undertake. For example, if it was to be used as a passenger vessel, a front pod would be attached to the engine which had comfortable accommodations for up to fifty people. If a troop



transport was needed, the Corister would simply replace the passenger pod with a barracks pod, allowing it to transport over 160 marines. The drive section could also have its front replaced by a heavy combat pod; this turned the ship into a destroyer, giving it several extra weapon systems.

Construction of the Coristers came to end in 9025 TE. By then, mounting losses to the Network's hordes of drone fighters and captured Stonewalls forced the Alliance to produce larger numbers of battle cruisers. Still, untold thousands of them left the conflict zone laden with refugees and military deserters. Most of these would eventually end up in the hands of pirate bands. At least 150 are being used by the Free World Council. Although they are ancient by modern standards, these vessels, if properly maintained by a competent Operator, can still hold their own in a space battle. The *Corister*-class was officially replaced by the Scimitar in 9314 TE.

Class: Frigate.

Crew: 46 (8 officers, and 38 enlisted).

Troops: Varies. See below.

M.D.C. by Location:

Laser Cannon Mounts (2) – 800 each

Point Defense Laser Turrets (4) – 200 each

* Bridge – 1,000

** Main Engines (rear 1/3 of the ship) – 1,000

*** Main Body (interchangeable pod) – 3,000

Variable Force Field – 1,000 per side (6,000 total)

* Destroying the bridge will kill most of the officers. The ship can be run from engineering, but is sluggish and will be at -3 to strike and dodge. All weapon systems will be at local control.

** Blowing off the engines eliminates all FTL propulsion, and reduces sub-light speeds by half.

*** Depleting the M.D.C. of the Main Body destroys whatever pod was attached to the drive section. In an emergency, the damaged pod can be jettisoned, and both the bridge and the star drive section can run away.

Speed:

Sub-Light: Originally Mach 4 in space, and only Mach 1 in an atmosphere. A pirate version can increase this by 25%.

FTL: Original top speed was 4 light-years per hour. A pirate version can increase this by 25%.

Range: Usually carries enough supplies to keep the base crew alive for three months at a time.

Statistical Data:

Height: 130 feet (40 m).

Width: 200 feet (61 m).

Length: 490 feet (149 m).

Weight: 10,000 tons.

Power System: Anti-matter with an operational life of 20 years.

Cargo: About 1,000 tons in the drive section. If equipped with a cargo pod, then cargo is increased to 5,000 tons in total.

Cost: Discontinued and no longer available for purchase. Might go for 200 million to a collector for restoration purposes.

Weapon Systems:

1. Laser Cannon Mounts (2): One of these double-barreled HI-Laser turrets is mounted on the top of the star drive, and the other is mounted on the bottom. Each of the turrets can rotate 360-degrees, and has a 180 degree arc of fire. Originally, these weapons were all directed by computer, but during the Automaton Wars the targeting AI's were ripped out to prevent them from becoming corrupted by Network. Today, these will be manned turrets.

Primary Purpose: Anti-Ship.

Secondary Purpose: Anti-Installation.

Weight: Not applicable, part of the ship's hull.

Range: 16 miles (25.6 km) in space, or 5 miles (8 km) in an atmosphere.

Mega-Damage: 2D6x100 M.D. per turret.

Rate of Fire: Each can fire up to four times per melee.

Payload: Technically unlimited. These weapons do not have their own power supply, but draw power directly from the main reactor.

2. Point Defense Lasers (4): These small weapons are also manned turrets, since the targeting AIs were all forcibly re-

moved long ago. Two are located on the port side of the star drive section, and two are on the starboard side.

Primary Purpose: Anti-Missile.

Secondary Purpose: Anti-Space Fighter.

Weight: Not applicable, part of the ship's hull.

Range: 2 miles (3.2 km) in space, but only 1 mile (1.6 km) in an atmosphere.

Mega-Damage: 2D6x10 M.D. per turret.

Rate of Fire: Equal to the number of hand to hand attacks of the gunner.

Payload: Technically unlimited. These weapons do not have their own power supply, but draw power directly from the main reactor.

3. Cruise Missile Launcher (available only with a Heavy Weapon Pod): If the front of the Corister is fitted with a Heavy Weapon Pod, then it gains several additional weapons systems. Foremost among these is a heavy cruise missile launcher. The launcher port has 1,000 M.D.C. It can only fire one missile at a time, and each new missile must be loaded by a manned crew (all the robotic systems that once did this job were destroyed in the Automaton Wars). When firing at its top rate, the heat produced off the launcher is intense, and temperatures can reach as much as 40 degrees Celsius (104 F). A bunch of shirtless, filthy, sweating pirates working away in the missile room is a common sight.

Primary Purpose: Anti-Capital Ship.

Secondary Purpose: Anti-Installation.

Weight: Not applicable, part of the ship's internal structure.

Range: 1,000 miles (1,600 km).

Mega-Damage: Either 2D6x100 for nuclear or 4D6x100 for anti-matter.

Rate of Fire: One at a time. Average number of firings is five per minute.

Payload: 50 missiles.

4. Interchangeable Main Bodies: As stated previously, the *Corister* was a unique design which featured interchangeable main bodies. This allowed the Human Alliance to field many different types of starship for a reduced cost. There were five types of "pods": Passenger, Troop Transport, Cargo, Fighter, and Heavy Weapon. Each of these can still be found in the more remote parts of the Three Galaxies today. Pirates tend to favor the Weapon Pod.

● **Passenger Pod:** This turns the Corister into a small liner suitable for transporting rich passengers and government officials. It provides enough comfortable staterooms for up to 50 guests, plus several large conference rooms, a dining room, and forward lounge.

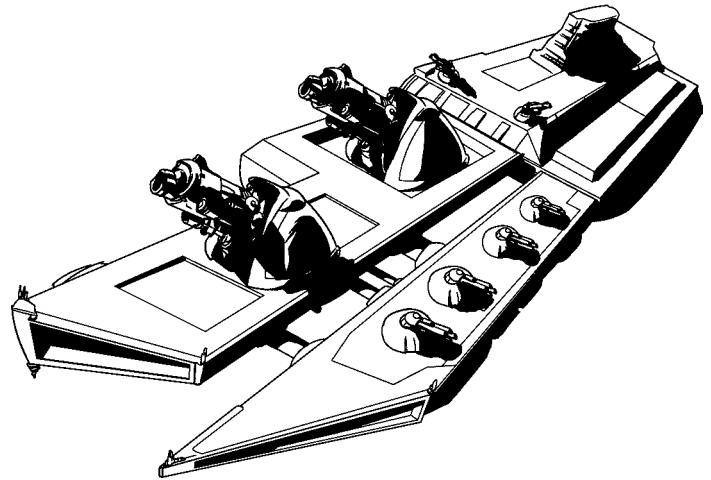
● **Troop Transport Pod:** This turns the Corister into a trans-atmospheric drop ship, able to carry 165 marines, plus all their gear. The star drive could also detach this front section after touching down, providing the marines with a bunker or forward firebase.

● **Fighter Pod:** Also called a "mini-carrier," this front section allows the Corister to carry up to 12 space fighters. It also provides enough accommodation for 24 pilots, in addition to the ship's regular crew. Originally, the fighters it carried were all Scorpion Attack Fighters. Today however, it can carry any type or assorted mix of space fighters.

● **Cargo Pod:** This is a big, empty section that could loaded up with 4000 tons of goods or gear. This type of pod could also be

used to move tanks and giant robots into combat zones. During the Automaton Wars, it most often was filled with Bombarb Robots (up to 150 units).

- **Heavy Weapon Pod:** This turns the Corister frigate into an all-out destroyer, and is the type of body most often seen today. The Heavy Weapon Pod has an extra Laser Cannon Mount (2D6x100 M.D. per shot), six additional point defense lasers (2D6x10 M.D. per blast), and most importantly, a cruise missile launcher. All of these weapon systems were manned during the war, and those in the hands of the pirate cartels still are. After all, why spend good money on a computer when there are men sitting idle?



Auntin Patrol Ship

The *Auntin* is a common patrol and escort ship of Golgan design. Big enough to handle a squadron of fighters, its main guns can seriously damage larger vessels and its combined armor and force fields can take a pounding from all but the heaviest weapons – at least for a short while. The ship is fast and maneuverable, plus it is small enough to be able to operate in an atmosphere with only minimal penalties. Besides its own firepower, it has a small bay able to hold up to six space fighters.

The *Auntin* is still widely used in the Republican Argosy, but hundreds of them have fallen into the hands of the independent systems that broke away from Golgan control. An equal number eventually became pirate vessels, particularly in the area around the Central Alliance. Presented below are the original, unmodified statistics for the patrol ship.

Model Type: RAACPS-V4.0.2.

Ship Class: Frigate (rigged as a Destroyer).

Ship's Complement: 180-280, including officers.

Embarked Troops: 100, plus has room for as many as 640 additional troops/people, but in cramped conditions in the cargo holds.

M.D.C. by Location:

Main Disruptor Cannons (2) – 800 each

G-Cannon Turrets (2) – 200 each

Particle Beam Cannons (4) – 150 each

Mini-Missile Launchers (8) – 100 each

Fighter Hangar Door – 600

Variable Force Fields – 1,000 each side (6,000 total)

* Bridge – 2,000

** Main Body – 5,000

*** Main Ion Engines (2, at the back) – 1,200 each

* If the bridge is destroyed, the ship can be controlled from the engineering room, inside the ship, but all piloting skills are -20% and combat rolls are -2.

** Depleting the M.D.C. of the main body shuts the ship down, causing it to drift in space. The secondary weapon turrets have independent power supplies, however, and can fight on.

*** Destroying the main engines eliminates FTL systems and leaves only sub-light systems.

Speed:

Flying: Mach 8 in space (maximum speed). Or up to Mach 2 in an atmosphere. Fully transatmospheric.

FTL Drive: Gravitonic drive. Maximum speed: 5 light-years/hour.

Range: Effectively unlimited. Carries enough life support and supplies (including hydroponics garden) for two years of uninterrupted travel (could be stretched to five or six in an emergency). Typical patrol mission lasts six months in space.

Statistical Data:

Height: 80 feet (24.4 m).

Width: 140 feet (43 m), wingspan of 220 feet (67 m).

Length: 500 feet (152 m).

Weight: 12,000 tons fully loaded, plus up to 1,000 tons of extra cargo.

Cargo: Cargo hold is 20 feet (6.1 m) tall, 20 feet (6.1 m) wide and 200 feet long (61 m). Maximum cargo weight is 1,000 tons. Does not include the normal complement of supplies and equipment.

Power System: Nuclear reactor; average energy life is 20 years.

Cost: 400 million credits.

Weapon Systems:

1. Disruptor Cannons (2): These are heavy artillery pieces used to engage large ships, space stations and other important targets. They can also be found in Golgan orbiting defense arrays, and on the *Bindas*-class cruiser.

Primary Purpose: Anti-Ship.

Secondary Purpose: Anti-Installation.

Weight: Not applicable; integrated into the vessel's hull.

Range: 14 miles (22.4 km) in space, 5 miles (8 km) in an atmosphere.

Mega-Damage: 2D6x100 M.D. per cannon or a double blast that does 4D6x100 M.D.

Rate of Fire: Each weapon may fire no more than 4 times per melee round.

Payload: Effectively unlimited.

2. G-Cannons (2): Each cannon is in a separate turret. It is used for anti-ship combat, or to engage enemy fighters and robots if they get past the ship's normal defense (robots and fighters are +2 to dodge these attacks, however).

Primary Purpose: Anti-Missile.

Secondary Purpose: Anti-Spacecraft.

Weight: Not applicable; part of the ship's hull.

Range: 16 miles (25.6 km) in space, one-third that range in an atmosphere.

Mega-Damage: A burst is 80 rounds and does 1D4x100 M.D.; can only fire bursts.

Rate of Fire: Equal to the total number of hand-to-hand attacks of the gunner. A lone Zebuloid can handle this job, in which case the weapons may fire 7 times each per round.

Payload: 32,000 rounds per turret (400 bursts).

3. Particle Beam Cannons (4): Mounted in turrets, these are standard, non-upgraded beam weapons. They are used as point defense, and to combat enemy space fighters.

Primary Purpose: Point Defense.

Secondary Purpose: Anti-Fighter.

Weight: Not applicable; part of the ship's hull.

Range: 3 miles (4.8 km) in space, or one mile (1.6 km) in an atmosphere.

Mega-Damage: 2D6x10 M.D. per blast.

Rate of Fire: Equal to the number of hand-to-hand attacks of the gunner (usually 4 or 5). One or two Zebuloids will usually share this job, in which case the number of blasts per melee (per cannon) is anywhere from 3 if a lone gunner, 7 if two Zebuloids share the job, and 14 if a dedicated gunner is used in each turret.

Payload: Effectively unlimited.

4. Mini-Missile Launchers (8): Used for point defense against enemy fighters and missiles. Each turret usually fires a volley of at least two missiles to help ensure a hit.

Primary Purpose: Point Defense.

Secondary Purpose: Anti-Fighter.

Weight: Not applicable; part of the ship's hull.

Range: About two miles (3.2 km).

Mega-Damage: Varies with missile type. Usually plasma – 1D6x10 M.D.

Rate of Fire: One at a time or in volleys of two, three or four per launcher, per round.

Payload: 100 missiles per turret.

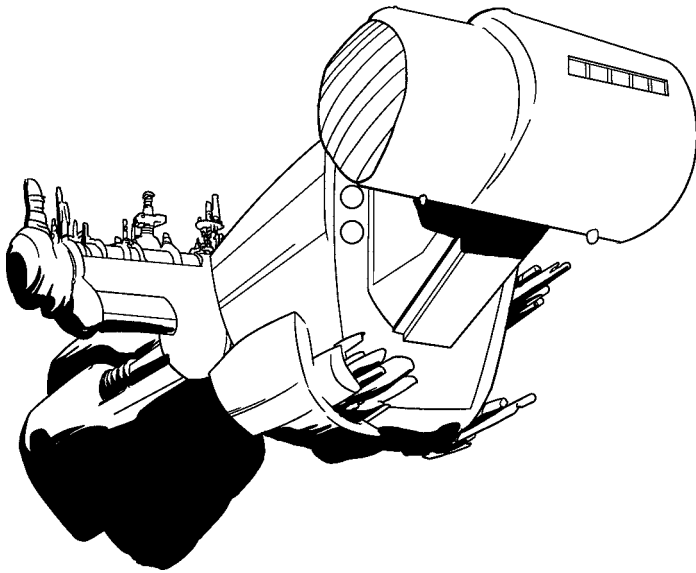
5. Aircraft: In addition to its main weaponry, the ship carries a complement of 6 *Jesstra*-class fighters. There are 100 infantrymen on board as well.

6. Combat Performance: Spaceship combat bonuses (basic) apply, but the ship is -2 to dodge attacks from three miles (4.8 km) or closer.

Stonewall Cruiser (Human Alliance)

One thousand years ago, this ship was one of the triumphs of the Human Alliance. The Stonewalls were automated battle cruisers, each operated entirely by an artificial intelligence. It did not have a human-like personality, as this would have only lowered its efficiency, and could remain in constant contact with the planetary mainframes of almost every Alliance world via its tachyon communication array. The Stonewall had enough room on board to transport two hundred people, but typically only had a token crew of ten to oversee operations should the computer encounter any problems.

Then, in 9006 TE, the planetary computer core on Terra Prime decided to eliminate its human creators. Network quickly took over the other Alliance planets by copying itself into their mainframes. It also took control of every automated system that was tied into the overall Alliance web, which included most of the Stonewalls. The ships, now accepting orders from Network, killed their crews by opening all the airlocks and blasting them into space. On Goldielox, Network ordered the shipyards to assemble more of the cruisers, which it then planned to send against the Outer Colonies.



What few Stonewalls were far enough away from the Alliance Core Worlds to escape takeover were gutted by the human resistance, their AIs ripped out and smashed to pieces. These vessels were then crewed entirely by men and women. However, since the ships had not been designed to be run by living hands, conditions were cramped and often dangerous. Crewmembers suffered from extremes in heat and cold, poor water supplies, a lack of storage, and even basic plumbing. When the Human Alliance finally stood victorious, these un-automated cruisers became the backbone of the reconstruction fleets.

Today, there are fewer than one hundred fully functioning *Stonewall*-class cruisers in the Three Galaxies, all of which are in the hands of various pirate cartels. These ships are between seven hundred and a thousand years old, and barring a complete professional rebuild, will not be able to continue operating for more than a few centuries.

Class: Cruiser.

Crew: 200. The ship can be run by as few as ten people, but will start to suffer massive breakdowns within 1D4 hours.

M.D.C. by Location:

- Main Laser Batteries (2) – 1,200 each
- Cruise Missile Launchers (4) – 1,000 each
- Secondary Lasers (4) – 700 each
- GR Gun Point Defenses (8) – 200 each
- Hangar Bay – 5,000
- * Bridge – 7,000
- ** Engines – 12,000
- Outer Hull per 40 foot (12 m) area – 100
- *** Main Body – 30,000
- Variable Force Field – 3,000 per side (18,000 in total)

* Destroying the bridge will eliminate the guidance computer and main controls. The ship can be piloted from engineering, but those controls are very sluggish: all actions are -3 to strike and dodge.

** Destroying the engines eliminates all FTL propulsion, and reduces sub-light speeds by half.

*** Depleting the M.D.C. of the Main Body leaves the ship floating in space as an unpowered wreck. The crew can still evacuate, but no weapons will fire, and the vessel cannot move in any direction.

Speed:

Sub-Light: Originally Mach 5 in space and Mach 2 in an atmosphere. A pirate version could increase this by 25%.

FTL: Originally 4 light-years per hour. A pirate version could increase this by 25%.

Range: Carries enough supplies to keep the crew alive for four months at a time.

Statistical Data:

Height: 100 feet (30.5 m).

Width: 150 feet (46 m).

Length: 500 feet (152 m).

Weight: 80,000 tons.

Cargo: About 4,000 tons in scattered holds.

Power System: Anti-matter reactor with a 20 year life span.

Cost: Discontinued and no longer available. Might go for 1.5 billion credits to a collector as a restoration project.

Weapon Systems:

1. Main Laser Batteries (2): These large guns are exactly the same as those found on the *Warshield*-class cruisers (which replaced this original series of ships in 9314 TE).

Primary Purpose: Anti-Capital Ship.

Secondary Purpose: Anti-Installation/Planet.

Weight: Not applicable; part of the ship's hull.

Range: 100 miles (160 km) in space, but only 30 miles (48 km) in an atmosphere.

Mega-Damage: 1D4x1000 M.D. per turret.

Rate of Fire: Each weapon may fire twice per melee round.

Payload: Technically unlimited. These weapons do not have their own power supply, but draw power directly from the main reactor.

2. Cruise Missile Launchers (4): These launching systems are quite different from those used today. Once highly automated and crewed by intelligent robots, they must now be manually loaded and fired.

Primary Purpose: Anti-Capital Ship.

Secondary Purpose: Anti-Installation.

Weight: Not applicable; part of the ship's hull.

Range: 1,000 miles (1,600 km).

Mega-Damage: Either 2D6x100 M.D. for nuclear, or 4D6x100 M.D. for anti-matter warheads.

Rate of Fire: One at a time. Average number of firings is sixteen per minute (four per melee round), per launch tube.

Payload: 50 missiles per launcher, for a total of 200 warheads.

3. Secondary Lasers (4): These turrets are mounted equally around the midsection of the ship.

Primary Purpose: Anti-Ship.

Secondary Purpose: Anti-Fighter.

Weight: Not applicable; part of the ship's hull.

Range: 16 miles (25.6 km) in space, but is reduced to 7 miles (11.2 km) in an atmosphere.

Mega-Damage: 1D6x100 M.D. per turret.

Rate of Fire: Each turret can fire twice per melee.

Payload: Technically unlimited. These weapons do not have their own power supply, but draw power directly from the main reactor.

4. GR Gun Point Defenses (8): Again, now devoid of any robotic or computer-driven gunnery programs, these weapons must all be aimed and fired manually.

Primary Purpose: Anti-Missile.

Secondary Purpose: Anti-Space Fighter.

Weight: Not applicable; part of the ship's hull.

Range: 2 miles (3.2 km) in space, but only 1 mile (1.6 km) in an atmosphere.

Mega-Damage: 2D4x10 M.D. for a burst of 20 rounds.

Rate of Fire: Equal to the number of hand to hand attacks of the gunner.

Payload: 10,000 rounds (500 bursts) per auto cannon.

5. Additional Vehicles: The Stonewall has a tiny hanger bay that can fit twelve space fighters of any assortment (originally they were all Scorpion Attack Fighters).

Other Weapons and Equipment

Pirates are opportunists. They will use anything and everything they can lay their hands on as a weapon. The nature of their work however, means that they tend to leave rail guns, grenades, rockets, and missiles behind in favor of smaller, hand-held weapons. Some pirates don't even like using a rifle because it takes two hands, instead preferring to use a brace of pistols, or a pistol and blade weapon. Pirates fight at short range, and try to close into melee combat as fast as they can because most people are terrified to fight with bare fists or knives. Their fear gives the pirates a decided advantage.

Preferred types of pistols include all types of CAF HI-lasers, the TGE EPR-5, and anything by Hartigal or Naruni (although the ammunition for the latter can be hard to acquire in some places). Phase beamers are the most highly sought after weapons since they can easily kill a captive crew, but leave their ship unharmed. Below are some of the more interesting items that one might find amongst a gang of space pirates, although, technically, two of them are tools commonly found on most spacecraft.

Neural Whip (Captain's Daughter)

This is a stun weapon that resembles either a long bullwhip (rare) or a cat-o-nine-tails with a short handle. When the end of the whip strikes bare flesh, it sends out an energy charge that overloads a person's nervous system. There is a chance that the victim will be knocked unconscious, but even if they aren't, they will be severely impaired. **Penalties:** -8 to strike, parry, and dodge for 2D4 melee rounds. The character must save versus non-lethal poisons: 16 or higher every time they are struck (P.E. bonuses apply). The duration of the effect is increased for every time the person is hit.

The neural whip is usually locked away in the Captain's quarters and brought out only when it is needed. Depending on the nature of the infraction, a member of a pirate crew could be sentenced with anything from a "school master" (ten lashes) to "Moses' Law" (forty lashes minus one, or thirty-nine times!). There are some records of a pirate taking fifty or a hundred lashes and living to tell about it, but this was probably gentleness on the part of the man with the whip, rather than the physical toughness of the condemned pirate. Physical damage from the whip is 1D8 S.D.C. plus any applicable P.S. bonuses. It cannot harm people in fully environmental armor,

but works just fine if the target is wearing no helmet or a suit of half armor.

Arc Welder

This device is supposed to be used when patching a hole in a ship's hull. It fires a high-intensity electrical beam that will fuse M.D.C. materials together, and so is perfect for welding patches, or sealing bulkheads. It can be used as a hand-held unit, or mounted into an industrial suit of robot or powered armor (and hooked to the nuclear power supply for unlimited payload). When used against a person, its effects are horrible, as might only be expected when an industrial tool is turned on living flesh. The arc welder produces a powerful shock to the nervous system, and heats body armor to the point where it fuses to the wearer's skin.

Weight: 8 pounds (3.6 kg).

Mega-Damage: 2D4 per blast. Additionally, most races must make a saving throw of 14 or higher versus electrocution! Failure means the person inside the armor takes 4D6 points of damage (S.D.C. to S.D.C. beings, but M.D. to M.D. beings), and is -1 to all combat actions with no initiative for 1D4 melee rounds. This will effect people in body armor, and even power armor suits with 400 M.D.C. or less.

Range: 1,000 feet (305 m).

Rate of Fire: Single shot only.

Payload: 15 blasts. Uses a standard Energy Clip.

Cost: 25,000 credits. Commonly available in many larger starports.

Rivet Gun

Also used in ship repair, the ReddenDekker Rivet System drives small spikes into M.D.C. materials to hold down a hull patch. Think of it as a really big nail gun. The spikes it fires are meant to penetrate both the patch metal and the undamaged hull underneath, and have a barbed tip to help hold it in place. When combined with expanding foam insulation (available in spray cans), it makes for a solid, if temporary repair. Of course, the rivets can also be fired into people. The damage isn't great, and the range is poor, but it makes a hell of a bloody mess, and will punch through most environmental armor 90% of the time.

Weight: 20 lbs (9 kg).

Mega-Damage: 1D6 M.D. per rivet. On a successful strike, roll percentile. 01-90% means the dart will punch through any body armor whose M.D.C. is 100 points or less. The person inside then takes an additional 1D6 points of damage (S.D.C. to S.D.C. beings, but M.D. to M.D.C. beings). The dart is best removed surgically, but if simply ripped out it will inflict another 1D6 points of damage. Note that body armor is still fully environmental until it is reduced to 34 M.D.C., even if riddled with rivets.

Rate of Fire: Single shot only. Each shot counts as one melee action.

Range: 30 feet (9 m).

Payload: 40 rivets in an attached drum. Each dart is about the size of a human's thumb.

Cost: 1,000 credits for the gun. Rivets are available in boxes of 100 for 50 credits. Commonly available in any spaceport.

Skipping Stones

A Rifts® Story

By Brett Caron

“Magic. Technology. Ultimately, it is simply through innovation that humanity is able to escape, avoid, destroy, or otherwise circumvent any enemy – except humanity itself, of course.”

– Urgash Voidheart, Shifter

Even with the sun hanging low, bloated, and orange in the sky, the light cast through Lazlo at sunset was always lavender.

Ka’hadris felt the springing thrum of the ley lines in his blood. Normally, it would be like a gentle stream lapping around him, perhaps stronger, more akin to a powerful down-sloping river rapids. The magic rising from the very earth was channeled by arcane ingenuity – somewhere in the metaphysical between a hydroelectric dam and an irrigation system.

Here, in the center of the first city on the planet to truly bend the raw power of the lines to its will, the energy of the Rift generator at the heart of Lazlo beat cobalt life into the metropolis around him. The yellow star shining on Earth met the blue haze of Lazlo’s aura to emerge a soothing purple, darkening to mauve before the night-glow of the ley lines would emerge.

By then, he might be very far from the familiar skyline. It was difficult to know for sure. He tried to take in moments like these whenever he could. While he still could.

Walking down the Spartan but welcoming white stone avenues of the university’s grounds, the autumn maple leaves still clutching mostly to their branches and reflecting the tinted rays, he allowed himself that moment. He approached the glass and steel entrance to the lecture hall, which opened unbidden. His dark blue cloak fluttered with a faint, almost avian sound passing into the threshold’s calm air. Behind him, the doors gracefully reached back together with a gentle click.

* * *

“The real tragedy in North America at the moment, indicative of human-centric population centers worldwide, stems from one factor: humans are terribly binary creatures. It is a failing many other species succumb to, but it is particularly pronounced in humans.”

The professor cleared his throat — a whickering almost-sound not unlike a bicycle pump — and gestured to the display behind him with a translucent pseudopod. A map of North America resolved on the screen, kingdoms and empires reduced to highlighted holopixels.

“Humans can’t just be ‘for’ something. It’s simply not enough for their psychology to have a cause. They also need to be against something else for the first to matter – ‘us’ and ‘them’ – even if the other is ‘everything else.’ By way of two very obvious examples, take Chi-Town and the Federation of Magic.”

Two of the blotches on the screen resolved independent of the rest, their territories shrinking and altering in scope. Perspective changed, showing the empires in their infancy.

“In years past, the two cultures had diverged on enough issues to be called polar opposites, but mostly it was just one: magic or

technology. We know the result, of course. The burgeoning techno-paradise of Chi-Town instead twisted into the brainchild of the Proseks and who corralled other industrial powers to its banner as the Coalition States, growing in power and stature to this day. The supposed haven of magic and free-thinking subtly but surely became corrupted by evil power and demonic influence, not to mention the egos of the Dunscon family.

“After the first great war between the two giants, the Federation fractured into smaller factions of varying philosophies and strength.”

He waved again, and the calendar in the bottom of the screen began to count forward. In the few seconds it took to reach 110 P.A. and stop, with vague violence animated ebbs and flows, their fragments and foundations settling into their present selves.

“With the loss of Tolkeen some time ago, even with Free Quebec emerging separate from its Coalition brothers, we find ourselves revisiting that binary human thinking. Why is it that only select few havens like our own pioneering home are able to embrace all forms of learning and ways of life? Lazlo is the historical home of Techno-Wizardry on Earth, and even in the Megaverse, this specific fusion of magic and technology is particular to this planet alone, or at least traceable to it.”

The map resolved on Lazlo’s digital image. Above the timid glow of desk lamps, the multihued diversity of the picture was echoed by what little of Lazlo’s sunset still splashed across the upper stone wall’s bleached surface.

Professor Joshua Nikilrghz’s lecture was winding down, but the iridescent plasm that composed his body was shining with pride. Lacking any orifices, the prominent educator spoke only through telepathy; but even though the students only heard his voice inside their own minds, the pride with which he spoke with was evident. His words were mirrored by the pulsing glow of three small lights buried within the head-level portion of Nikilrghz’s jelly. He reached to turn off the projector. Although he could have done it with a flex of telekinesis, he was somewhat partial to the grained feel of the control panel’s wooden housing.

Ka’hadris smiled, seeing the pseudopod stroke almost lovingly down the maple. He stood cowed in the doorway, out of view. It had taken years of wondering, but only one question, to learn that his former tutor was an avid woodworker and carpenter. He had noticed the predilection of his d-bee professor to forgo his race’s normal preference in order to handle finely-carved pieces directly many times. It had also resulted in an hour of frustratingly unrequested details of the art of woodworking, but in hindsight, Ka’hadris found himself smiling at that too.

He’d always been put off asking about his master’s quirk by the very same theme running through this very lecture: Nikilrghz didn’t care much for humans.

His smile faded, half-obscured anyway above the gas mask hanging loosely around his neck. He had come to speak with Nikilrghz, not listen to another of his tirades. He had learned what he considered to be the finer points of manipulating ley line energy from the respected mage and teacher, but had never enjoyed his condescending speeches.

It might have stemmed from what Nikilrghz called his ‘unbiased insight into the human problem.’

Ka’hadris cast a quiet spell, channeling energy from around him through muttered words and half-gestures. A moment later, he reached out with new senses and was vindicated to see the muffling boredom clouding the room, even catching whiffs of mild annoyance threaded through the human students.

The ley lines were just coming up as Nikilrghz dismissed his students. Ka’hadris stepped into the auditorium as the first of them

headed for the door, craning their necks to get a better look at the stranger who approached their professor. Although the gas mask and headgear marked him as a Line Walker, that wasn't anything particularly out of the ordinary in Lazlo. Likely just the fact that he was wearing body armor on the school grounds.

More to the point, it might've been what was plastered across the breastplate of his armor that was causing those perplexed looks.

If Nikilrghz had a face to speak of, it too would have furrowed in confusion as he spied his former student. His face-lights glowed brightly in surprise and happiness; then one of them dimmed in an imitation of a squint.

"Ka'hadrís, my boy! I'm glad you've come so quickly, although I wish now that you'd just taken your time and changed first."

Nikilrghz pointed at the device emblazoned on his chest.

"What is that garish symbol? The Shifter wore it as well."

Ka'hadrís winced. He had come straight from a field meeting, and he still had his company armor on. The uniform grey and black of the light armor was broken here and there by red banding, but what stole the eye of the viewer was the logo under Nikilrghz's jelly finger.

Garish didn't even begin to describe it. The utilitarian grey was interrupted by a splash of yellow — a grinning face staring outwards. The distended proportions of the jaw stretched the face too wide, and two rows of squarish white teeth heightened the mocking smile. The arched and knowing eyes were daubed, along with the other lines demarcating smile and shape, in thick black lines. It was an insufferably smug-looking character, and Ka'hadrís hated wearing it; although he knew that was sort of the point.

"The logo for Happy Endings. Valentine says it's his interpretation of a pre-Rifts symbol — the happy Troll's face. I'm not really a fan either. I came as soon as I received your message when we arrived back in Old Bones."

"Ah yes, I've been hearing more and more about your little mercenary company. Apparently, the irreverence they speak of is evident even in your uniforms."

Ka'hadrís gestured down to the Troll-smile. He shrugged, sensing another lecture coming on.

"Some of us are more irreverent than others. What can I do for you, Master?"

The gelatinous mage laughed in Ka'hadrís' mind. His twinkling lights shone in harmony.

"Master? Joshua, my boy! You haven't been my student for years. In all honesty, you're a more powerful wizard than I ever was—I suspect than I ever will be."

"Old habits die hard, Joshua."

They shared a moment before the professor burst out a telepathic cough of sudden remembrance. He slapped a pseudopod against his head.

"Yes, of course! The reason I called you here. Actually, it's two reasons. Walk with me, my boy."

* * *

Lazlo at night didn't have the same peculiar quality of its sunset, the particular shade that Ka'hadrís had missed on a hundred other worlds. It was still something to behold. The very air felt alive with magic, motes of dust or energy drifting as if on a slight breeze, permeating and connecting the entire city. The two mages turned from the polished floors of the avenues, meandering instead along the clear-cut paths that ran through one of Lazlo's many small, lightly forested parks.

Nikilrghz floated a hand's-breadth from the gravel of the path, a silent counterpoint to the crunch of the bleached stone under the armored boots of his human companion. Ka'hadrís had no need to walk when he was on a ley line — even if he hadn't known a spell to

teleport through space or beyond, he could've levitated just as easily as his friend. He might have wondered how much detritus and dirt made its way into Nikilrghz's mass during the course of any given day, had he not been constantly reminded of that inconvenience during his apprenticeship.

His musing was interrupted by Nikilrghz, who hovered to a stop near the center of the park's wood.

"Now that we're alone — well and truly — I can tell you what prompted my summons."

Almost without thinking, Ka'hadrís muttered a spell and stretched out with his senses. There was nothing within earshot save insects, plants, and one mildly curious squirrel. The latter presently was chittering with twitching tail to let them know he wasn't going to tolerate any foolishness in his territory, or possibly to beg for a handout of seed or nuts. Ka'hadrís smiled again.

"Yes, well and truly. What do you need of me, Joshua?"

"Nothing, my boy. I called you here because you need to know something."

"Still teaching me, are you?"

"Still helping you. Your associate, Valentine. The Shifter."

Distaste dripped from every telepathic syllable. Ka'hadrís wondered if it was Valentine's occupation or the Shifter's sometimes disconcerting mien that had set Nikilrghz off. The repulsion hadn't entirely left his voice as he continued.

"He came to see me four days ago. He had questions; questions that confused me. He should've already had the answer—if he had bothered to ask you, or if you had bothered to answer him if he had asked at all—so to be prudent, I sent him on his way without telling him much. He wasn't happy."

Ka'hadrís squinted, not fully understanding.

"Questions about what?"

He pointed to the sword belted at the Line Walker's waist. Greyish jelly grazed the cold metal of the pommel, the mysterious alloy composing it blushing faintly at the touch of a being so suffused with magic.

"It's time I told you everything I know about this blade of yours. I think you'll need all the insight you'll be able to get to prepare for what's coming. The world is changing, my boy."

* * *

Valentine looked up in mild interest, as if hearing something just outside the room. The feeling only lasted a moment. A brief twinge that drew his gaze to the far corner. He lowered the book in his hands, his fingers tracing down the yellowed pages with a whisper.

The utilitarian quarters he had been assigned within Dead Reckoning bored him immensely. He had other places to rest his weary head, and had declined to use them. He'd taken to spending more time in the common area of the airship when he found himself aboard. He'd had the ceiling painted black, first. Oil lamps now hung throughout the pillars, transforming the space into a pleasantly confused middle ground between a cave, a cozy dive bar, and a submarine.

The gunmetal-grey of the bulkheads in this room were covered in part by tapestries acquired in Atlantis, other areas plastered with pre-Rifts posters collected from around the world, and nooks of shelves full of books. Valentine had set out to make this place — what he had started calling The Grotto — the one area of Dead Reckoning where he would truly feel comfortable. Most of the other associates agreed; even Frost had grudgingly conceded that it was an improvement.

Now though, Valentine's gaze wasn't drawn by the decor but rather by a disturbance in the dimensional fabric. His attunement to those energies brought his senses to a spot next to a torn and faded superhero poster the Headhunter had fished out of the ruins of Madhaven.

Just in front of the black-shrouded figure crouched menacingly against a twinkling cityscape, the air felt *fuller*. Reality there was beginning to bend. Normal Euclidean geometry squirmed and wriggled as if struggling against something beyond.

Mouthing an incantation, Valentine cast his sight into the future. He followed the skeins of probability to a series of visual flashes.

Blue cloak.

Troll's face.

Oh, well. He supposed now was as good a time as any to have *this* conversation. Valentine flexed his mind, bringing his modest psychic senses to bear for the next few minutes. He yawned, keeping half an eye on the anomaly as he returned to his book and wine.

The airship was docked. Nevertheless, a mild shudder ran through the Grotto as Ka'hadrís abruptly emerged from a locus of bluish-white light in the corner. Wispy traces of magic, ethereal tongues of flame, and simpler glowing particles sloughed off the Line Walker. To many, it would have been quite impressive.

Valentine stifled another yawn. He didn't want to be rude; wine sometimes made him sleepy. Besides, given the thundercloud of surface thoughts and negative emotions washing off his associate and crackling through his aura, rudeness probably wouldn't get him anywhere anyway.

* * *

Valentine inclined his head, not appearing to be surprised at the sudden teleportation. The Shifter was even yawning as Ka'hadrís unbuckled some of the heavier elements of his armor, dropping them to a long, low table along one wall. He shook out of his dark blue cape, laying it over the breastplate followed by the rest of the uncomfortable armor he really didn't care to wear.

Underneath, tan traveling clothes were marked here and there by pendants and other magical foci. Eldritch symbols etched into strange alloys hung from string or chain in loops around his bracers, belts, and the tops of his sturdy boots of dark grey Fury Beetle leather. Removing the gas mask from around his neck, he stretched free of the sometimes confining garments of his trade.

As Ka'hadrís joined Valentine at his table, the chair pulled out for him seemingly of its own accord. Similarly, an empty goblet floated to his hand as he sat down. The Shifter didn't lift a finger, letting the wine pour and only putting his book aside when the goblet was filled. He reached out with a hand to what appeared to be empty air.

Smudged eddies, just greasy blurs hardly there at all, surrounded the manicured nails and uncalloused palm. Ka'hadrís saw them as amorphous blobs of psionic energy, featureless orbs. They flitted around the Shifter's fingers like playful puppies, nuzzling against his knuckles and across the veined back of his hand.

Valentine released a smattering of power, letting it flow through him out into the ether. The two shapeless but mischievous creatures greedily absorbed the treat, practically purring at the refreshing nourishment.

"Do you know what 'poltergeist' means, originally?"

Ka'hadrís frowned.

"No."

"It's a pre-Rifts German word. It means 'noisy ghost,' but I've always found if you keep them well fed they make excellent pets."

Dismissing them with a wave of his hand and a thought, Valentine looked Ka'hadrís in the eyes for the first time since the Line Walker had appeared. As always, they stared into him without betraying anything. He could feel the scrutiny behind the Shifter's unwavering pupils. The poltergeists busied themselves with a short-lived game, which apparently involved telekinetically blowing out several of the lamps and relighting them at random.

Valentine chuckled at their antics, smiling warmly.

"Ka'hadrís, my friend. It's been too long."

The corner of Ka'hadrís' mouth turned up in a half-smile, creasing his weathered but youthful face. Despite everything he disliked about his enigmatic associate, Valentine's genuine air was always somewhat disarming. Still, a blonde eyebrow arched between similarly hued, tousled hair and a piercing blue eye as the Line Walker took a sip of the dark, spiced wine. The strong drink coated his mouth, smooth but tart. It slid down his throat and warmed his stomach.

"Too long? I saw you two weeks ago. This is good, by the way."

The Shifter's smile stayed put.

"Ah yes, but I've spent most of last week doing research in the Void Isles, so it feels like considerably longer.

"Yes, it is quite good. Made from jazbae grapes. It's very popular in Warlord Seriyev's domain, but the Russians actually sell more of it than they drink themselves. As hard as that may be to believe."

Valentine took another sip, not offering anything more than his agreeable smile.

The Void Isles. He wondered how Valentine could find a place like that relaxing. It wasn't a very large dimension spatially, but it felt like a vast, desolate gulf.

The term 'isles' was a bit misleading. Valentine had described it as continent-sized masses hanging motionless in empty space; that space wasn't a vacuum filled with galaxies, stars and planets, but rather a breathable abyss of inky dark. The Shifter would often sequester himself there for days, even weeks, when working on a new spell or problem. Time in the Isles passed at a tenth of the time in their home dimension.

Of course, Ka'hadrís knew that the Void Isles weren't the only place Valentine had been spending his time in the last few days.

He decided to get right to the point, but as if he sensed that Ka'hadrís was about to speak, the Shifter lit the end of a small, black-paper cigarette and started to talk. The aromatic smoke carried his words.

"Do you know anything about threat displays in animals?"

At his shake of the head, Valentine smiled again.

"I can lend you a book on behavioral evolution I've been reading. It's fascinating.

"Consider the bear. You can scare off a bear simply by waving your hands and making a lot of noise. They don't feel confident tangling with anything that appears larger than them. It's an effective device, yes. Personally, I find it a little unsophisticated.

"But a bear won't try to eat a razorblade snake, either. This isn't because the snake is larger than it — it isn't, not by a long shot. It's because the snake carries warning symbols wherever it goes. Symbols that promise pain and agony to whatever would try to kill and eat it. More importantly, the bear knows what the symbols mean too. Red-banded frogs, tri-wave psychlodytes. It's everywhere in nature, here and on countless other worlds."

Ka'hadrís nodded.

"What's your point?"

"You don't like wearing the Happy Endings logo."

"Not particularly. I think I see it now — you're offended I don't enjoy your artwork?"

Valentine gave a hearty laugh, taking another drag and inhaling deep. Faint curls of smoke traveled from his nostrils past his dark eyes; black gems twinkling with mirth and candlelight. He turned slightly in his chair, spreading the mantle from his shoulder to show Ka'hadrís the insignia patched to his sleeve.

"Not at all. Well, I *had* hoped that you'd like it — as an academic at least, a student of history like myself. But that's not the point. You know what this is?"

"Yes, a Troll's face."

“Come now, Kay. It’s the snake’s warning. When someone spies this smirking yellow fellow, they will know that behind you is the rest of Happy Endings. I’ve managed to persuade Mengus to include a similar image for Dead Reckoning. Threat displays – there’s a reason they’ve evolved on most of the worlds that I’ve visited.”

He set down his half-finished cigarette, which smoldered in the ashtray. A thin line of smoke climbed from the pewter rim of the tray, its surface engraved with the serpentine forms of Japanese dragons. The poltergeists, now bored with the lamps, swirled invisibly around the pillar of smoke and snatched at it playfully. Ka’hadris leaned back in his chair.

“Point taken. Now you should hear mine.”

“I’m all ears.”

He made a point of unbuckling his scabbard and leaning it against the tapestry-laden bulkhead, the not-quite-metal of the weapon almost seeming to subtly take on the winding patterns, but not the color, of the woven thread around it.

“Joshua Nikilrghz asked me to visit him in Lazlo. I’ve just come from there. Is there a reason he’s telling me you’ve been asking questions about this?”

Ka’hadris watched a sardonic faux-hurt expression cross Valentine’s otherwise unreadable features.

“Yes, there’s a reason. In fact, there’s a few of them.

“That’s not the question you mean to ask, of course.

“What you mean to ask is why I came to Joshua and asked him about your sword. Why I questioned him about where it had come from, what the dimensional coordinates are. And why, of course, that I would bother to ask him any of this when I could’ve just asked you.”

Ka’hadris felt the self-righteous words he’d been mulling over dissipate like the upward ribbon of smoke before him. He’d sort of been looking forward to giving that speech, too. He nodded.

“That’d be about it. Why so interested?”

Valentine picked up the cigarette again, watching the trail of smoke in the air follow the movement of its burning ember. He looked at Ka’hadris levelly over their goblets.

“I’m interested because I’ve seen quite a bit in my few years around the Megaverse, and I’ve never seen anything like your sword there.

“I’ve spent some time identifying the P.P.E. wavelength of the radiation it gives off. For reasons I don’t yet understand, I can’t figure out where the energy signature originates from. It could have come from our dimension, or any other with a strong magical energy matrix – even *that* I’m not sure about.

“As for why I didn’t bring this to you directly; it’s because you don’t entirely trust me, and I wanted to make sure I was hearing the truth. You had mentioned Nikilrghz and the sword in passing, so I decided to see what I could glean from him first before I bothered you with it.”

Valentine began to smoke again.

“Now, I wasn’t entirely unprepared for this eventuality. You *are* somewhat earlier than expected, though properly attired.”

He nodded to the table. Ka’hadris met his gaze when it glanced back from the Troll’s face.

“Attired for what?”

“I have a lead. If it works out the way I’m thinking it will, then it could be a way to track down where your spellblade came from in the first place. Or more likely, another place it’s been – which would still be further along than we are now.”

“And if it doesn’t? Work out the way you think it will, that is.”

A wry grin stole over Valentine’s face.

“Like I said, you’re properly attired.”

This was too fast.

He still didn’t know anything about what Valentine was after here. There was a hungry look to the Shifter that Ka’hadris had always been unsure about. Sometimes he looked like a cat idly thinking about playing with a mouse. Other times, Ka’hadris just didn’t know what to think.

All that talk about warning symbols and threat displays had started him rethinking the formation of Happy Endings.

About how Valentine had suggested more than just the logo.

What exactly did an over-clever and enterprising Shifter need with his very own mercenary company?

He kept walking. Valentine would meet him in cargo bay three. Ka’hadris didn’t have a clue why two men would walk from one room to another only to teleport thousands of miles a minute later.

When he entered, he immediately understood.

The Shifter was standing in a circular ring of symbols and alien characters, one of three painted on the deck. Even dressed as he was in light, tight-fitting armor under a heavy and coarse, grey cloak, Valentine didn’t strike him as particularly threatening. Only the energy sphere hanging in the air nearby betrayed the Shifter’s might, a potent weave of stored magic waiting to be tapped.

The inhabitants of the other two circles, on the other hand, made his eyes itch to even look at. Abstract concepts bound to physical form, and none too happy about it. They were the stuff of nightmares generations old.

And they were glaring at him.

Also cloaked in their own way by their furled, batlike wings, the two Baal-Rogs smelled of sulphur, old meat, and worse. The smoky aura about them stung his nose and eyes both. The cargo bay wasn’t particularly cold, but their breath steamed from their fangs and nostrils.

He tended to forget the life spans of demons were immeasurably older than humans; they acted so strangely for such timeless creatures. The way one of the two leathery beasts growled something to its opposite number in their guttural tongue reminded him of petulant schoolchildren, barely constrained but told to stand still and behave themselves. Valentine shot a glance at the one who had spoken. Ka’hadris held out a hand, pointing an armored fingertip at the creature.

The dark speech of demons wasn’t pleasant to the ears. It was considerably more unpleasant to speak. Oily, thick words and inhuman sounds escaped his lips.

“Mind yourself, demon. Your little words can’t hurt me, but I know phrases that’ll send you screaming into the pit for a thousand years and a day. I might do it anyway just to freshen the air in here.”

Suitably chastised, the Baal-Rog’s horned brow drew down. The burning coals of its eyes stared into him. Ka’hadris could see the ancient malice behind those orbs, the patient and cruel intelligence glimmering there. It was a caged, calculating beast. Waiting and watching for any way to escape its captivity.

Valentine smiled.

“Demons. Nasty things. You know, behaviorally speaking, they’re not too dissimilar from gorillas — immortal, psychopathic, sorcerer gorillas, but you know what I mean. Sometimes all they need is a reminder of who the alpha is.”

Ka’hadris sniffed noncommittally.

“Or to be destroyed.”

That earned a hearty chuckle from the Shifter. He stepped from the protection circle, stretching his back from kneeling amidst his foci. He beckoned to the closest demon, who knelt at his side, head bowed. He scratched it behind the ear, disregarding the annoyed look that crossed its face at the indignity of it all.

* * *



“That definitely has its merits, too. But it will be handy to have these two around where we’re going. Help us to stay under the radar a bit.”

Ka’hadris was about to ask where two twenty-foot monstrosities of muscle, sinew, and dark magic would blend in.

Before he even opened his mouth, he realized exactly where the Shifter had in mind. What felt like drops of cold water dripping down his spine accompanied the sound when he spoke the name aloud.

“Atlantis.”

“Yes. I’m following up on a mid-range monster dealer. He’s quite good, and reliable. Most importantly, he’s discreet.”

“How important is discretion with a pair of Baal-Rogs in tow?”

Valentine laughed, placing a friendly hand on Ka’hadris’s shoulder.

“Even more so. I’ve found a pair of Baal-Rogs accompanying a human or two to be the perfect demarcation point between waving your arms at a bear and the red flag of the snake.”

He collected the rest of his things, buckling a utility belt around his waist. He beckoned to his demons, who moved in closer. Ka’hadris secured the gas mask around his nose and mouth, pulling goggles across his eyes. Finally, the stinging stench of the Baal-Rogs was muffled somewhat.

Watching Valentine open the Rift, funneling innate power into the bridge through space-time, he wondered again what it felt like. Ka’hadris had opened Rifts before, and traveled through many more. But he had learned a spell, from a book. Valentine just *did it*, only needing enough energy to somehow just tear the doorway in reality that hung fifteen feet tall before them.

On the other side he could see alien shapes and refracted colors solidify into a featureless hallway of pale stone, daylight around the corner. Valentine relaxed slightly, holding the d-portal open with sheer will. Even under the strain, the Shifter managed a tight smile.

“After you.”

* * *

The Splynn Dimensional Market was just as he remembered it. It was Ka’hadris who had changed.

He was profoundly different; stronger, more powerful. He had less to fear, and even if that wasn’t much, it was still something. Memories prodded at him, vague terrors threatening to return. He reminded himself to focus, going through a simple meditative technique in his mind and shedding his fear like a cloak. Eyes calm, breathing measured, Ka’hadris stood in the shadow of the Baal-Rogs. Right away, he had the exact same sensation he experienced every time he set foot here.

Splynn was like standing in a forest of monsters, in more ways than one.

When the height of the average inhabitant is somewhere between fifteen and thirty feet, all a human can see at eye level are the smaller demons and monsters moving around the larger groves of scaled or slimy legs. He had to constantly stop himself from craning his neck to glance up at the sheer scale of everything. The D-Market was a place that made it very clear who was in charge. Humans and equivalently-sized d-bees were mostly herded past him in clusters, shoved or whipped along by something twice their size. Others stayed to the shadows, slipping through oversized doorways and hugging the walls. He figured those were the smart ones.

Until he asked himself what that would make him and the Shifter.

The sounds pulled him in every direction. The thunder overhead was grumbling, growling, and shouting from a hundred terrible throats. It rumbled back and forth above them even as more disturbing noises lanced at ground level. Shrieks, cries for help, and mercy

begged for, often suddenly silenced before another would take its place. Ka’hadris felt every one, but this wasn’t why they had come. He glanced at Valentine to try and spy the same internal conflict, but didn’t see it.

The Shifter certainly looked the part. He had wrapped himself in enchantments, ablative layers of perception and protection. To Ka’hadris’ magesight, he was a font of power, wreathed in incandescent auras great and terrible to watch. His poltergeists were gone, replaced by a terrifying shoal of new ghostly entities. Strands of stretched cotton pulling and waving in phantom breezes, the ectoplasmic imprints of a dozen humanoids relived the last moments of their suffering. The conglomerate form wailed in agony constantly. Features appeared and vanished again through a hazy fog bank of pain and grief. The screams and gibbers faded in and out of their living, echoing counterparts in the marketplace like a bad radio signal. He noticed that the voices were always quieter when Valentine was speaking, leaning over to mutter a direction or comment.

He didn’t like it one bit. Playing with poltergeists was one thing, but this? He recognized some of those faces. He didn’t want to imagine how Valentine had created that thing.

Threat display, indeed.

They hit their first snag while they were walking out of one of the main arteries of the Market proper, heading to the less populated satellite districts. It came in the form of the two twenty-foot Gargoyles blocking their way. They had stopped to get a better look at the two humans. Predatory curiosity peered down.

Beakish snouts were caked with blood, as were their gore-splattered hands – all the way up to the elbows. Given the rancid meat odor they carried on the breeze, Ka’hadris wondered if it was human or not. He decided he didn’t want to know. Where the scaly, grey-green giants were not covered in offal and buzzing flies, rippling muscle corded and flexed underneath skin as tough as tank plating. The monsters were unarmored, but definitely armed—one with a giant-sized laser rifle, the other with a spiked maul easily half as tall as either Baal-Rog.

They croaked at each other in their vaguely avian tongue, and despite not knowing the language, Ka’hadris didn’t have to cast a spell to hear the condescension in their tone. To drive home the point, one of the winged humanoids reached out an arm as thick as a tree trunk and shoved the other playfully. They flapped their twenty-foot wingspans at each other, like threatening birds, before both stopped to mock Valentine’s subservient Baal-Rogs. Squawking guffaws were accompanied by their lashing tails, and the first Gargoyle bent over to reach for the humans.

At their sides, each Baal-Rog puffed out its chest. They were already riled up by their proximity to so many other demons; it was made worse by the attitude of these usually-subordinate Gargoyles, these impertinent *sub-demons*.

They cracked their wings out with a leathery snap, each drawing a flaming whip and axe as if from midair. Snorting fire from their nostrils, the sooty giants stepped between their master and the Gargoyles.

The scuffle was attracting attention. Eyes of every shape and shade turned to observe them, but so far, none appeared to belong to the Minion guards. Ka’hadris knew that if they wanted to stay unnoticed, then they’d have to resolve this quickly. While they were still being protected by the enslaved Baal-Rogs, he could use the time to take the other beasts out cleanly.

Protected by demons. Now that was something Ka’hadris had never thought he would say.

The Baal-Rogs snarled into the faces of the Gargoyles, pushing them back away from their human charges. As the sub-demons reached for their weapons, flaming lashes wrapped around their

wrists and hoisted them off balance. Valentine's eyes glowed briefly as he focused his will, and from his momentary chant, the ground underneath and behind the maul-laden Gargoyle wavered and became almost thickly fluid-looking, like a dully glowing resin. When the monster attempted to flap its wings and go airborne, the Baal-Rog roared in protest. Holding it fast with the fiery whip, the stronger demon slammed its bulk into its distant cousin.

When the Gargoyle hit the ground, the magical carpet stuck fast and it thrashed angrily, trying to free itself. Where it touched the stone street, the glow pulled like glue, elastically dragging it downwards. The angry screeches increased in volume as it became more desperate, but couldn't move more than to struggle.

The second Gargoyle fared better, managing to squeeze off a burst of laser fire before the other Baal-Rog could stop it. The beams stitched across the demon's bronze breastplate, but more got past. Several pulses sizzled close enough to Ka'hadrís that he could smell his robe singe, and he sniffed the acrid wisps even as he drew magic forth from within.

The Baal-Rog made a soulless sound that froze the blood; a demon's pain. Pulling its whip taut to yank the Gargoyle closer, the demon hacked off a wing with the broad-bladed axe in two vicious strokes. A howl escaped the wounded Gargoyle just as Ka'hadrís stepped forward, his spell primed and ready. He twitched with the barely-restrained power, unleashing it in a torrent against the one-winged monster.

The rush of the magic brought the mind of the sub-demon into contact with his own. Despite the foreknowledge of how alien a demonic mind really is from human, Ka'hadrís was still repulsed by the base, malignant thoughts inside the Gargoyle's head. He was glad he wouldn't be there for very long. He spoke a final word and gestured.

Flooding its brain with churning chaos, he neatly overloaded the wounded Gargoyle's nervous system.

The thing shrieked in unbelievable agony, digging talons into its skull as if to dig out the magical influence. He watched the bird-like pupils widen, go glassy and unfocused. Trying to stand, the Gargoyle fell over as if drunk. It looked around with dumb eyes, not seeming to comprehend anything around it except in the simplest of terms. He almost felt sorry for it.

The Baal-Rogs stood back at a command from Valentine. The temporarily lobotomized Gargoyle stumbled out of the way, falling into a nearby garbage heap and laying prone amidst the trash. Its fellow was still trying with all its might to break free of the mystic flypaper that bound it to the floor. The nearest of those in the crowd grew hushed, waiting to see what would happen next.

The grunting and huffing of the trapped Gargoyle seemed uncomfortably loud in the strange quiet.

Ka'hadrís drew his sword, unsure of what to do next. He was very aware that they were utterly surrounded by the Minions of Splugorth, an entire continent of the monster races, and even worse. He stood at the ready, watching the crowd nervously. Alien eyes stared back, but it was Valentine who commanded their attention.

Slowly, deliberately, Valentine approached the squirming Gargoyle plastered to the floor. From the unseen depths of his cloak, he produced an exotic-looking rifle. He looked around meaningfully at the towering monstrosities all around them, not hesitating to look them straight in the eyes.

The barrel pointed unwaveringly at the green, horned head for what seemed like ages.

He put round after round into the skull of the defenseless sub-demon, rainbow fire gouting from the Rechno-Wizard weapon to smash flesh and bone alike. He squeezed the trigger until the clip was empty, automatic fire tearing chunks from the head and shoulders until everything from the collarbone up was just bloody ruin and

half-cooked meat. The supernaturally tough skin ran like wax under the weapon's fury, and by the time the clip ran dry, even the last of the post-mortem twitching had finished.

Ka'hadrís kept half an eye on the crowd, but what caught his attention was the arrogant curl to the Shifter's lip. The barest baring of teeth. The eye not covered by sophisticated multi-optic headgear was wide, pupil dilated. On many, it would be a worrisome expression to see.

On him, it was frightening because Ka'hadrís still had no idea how genuine it really was.

Valentine methodically replaced the clip before tucking the gun back under his heavy cloak. He gestured to the Baal-Rogs, who once again took up their protective positions. Ka'hadrís slid his sword back into its scabbard, following the Shifter's lead.

The crowd gave them a wide berth as they left.

He blew a sigh underneath his gas mask. For a moment, he worried they'd drawn too much attention. Before they were even a block away, he watched a Gallu pull its human slave limb from limb. The man's cries were parroted and mocked by the half-circle of Ghouls and Shedim cheering on the laughing bull-demon. In the span of a few seconds, they were all but forgotten to the creatures of the D-Market.

It was then that Ka'hadrís remembered what passed for normal in Splynn.

They walked through immense avenues of Earthbound and alien stone. Occasionally, Bio-Wizard statues of bizarre birds or Gargoyle-like creatures turned metallic heads at their passing. In Splynn, one should know they're always being watched. They had Rifted in close to their destination; but in a city scaled up to the monstrous, a few blocks took longer than he thought. They followed some distance behind a necromancer carried in a palanquin before the fiend turned down a side street. Ka'hadrís tightened his fists when he noticed that some of the plodding skeletons in the mage's retinue were noticeably child-sized.

Twice, Minion patrols passed them. Hovering discs thirty feet around holding all manner of the Splugorth's muscle. They had better things to do than to hassle a pair of human mages, turning away tinted goggles and slavering teeth to glide silently past, towards the Market. Ka'hadrís felt a little better when he heard Valentine sigh under his breath in relief.

Signage hung across the tan stone of the smaller buildings – smaller in this case meaning only fifty or so feet high. When buildings are that tall, not a lot of sunlight gets to ground level, so the Splugorth had coated many of the upper floors of their city with reflective panels. Dappled sunlight fell from the broader avenues down the smaller streets, leaving shallow shadows in corners. Immense vendors' stands touted metal bowls filled with stinking offal and human heads, others offering bargain weapons and armor sized for giants.

Most of the signs around were incomprehensible, a million dialects of a thousand languages. The magic flowed through him easily, and Ka'hadrís watched the alien characters on the sign shimmer and contort until they made sense. He quickly saw the one they wanted.

"There it is. Qork'ng Creatures Deadly and Fair."

The Shifter squinted, looking around.

"Is it just me, or does this street remind you of Chinatown in the Iron Heart 'Burbs?"

"I wouldn't know. I don't like the 'Burbs."

Valentine snarled at the demons to stay outside. They stood to either side of the door, arms folded across their barrel chests peevishly. He turned to Ka'hadrís.

"Shall we?"

* * *

The monster dealer was exactly what Ka'hadris might have expected, with one exception. The stuffy, animal-cage smell was right. The dim lighting, broken here and there by shafts of sunlight cutting through the dust. Cages stacked in shelves, most of which were bigger than he was. The sounds were low, but the air hummed with the calls and cries of hundreds of species.

The one thing he hadn't counted on was the quiet. As soon as they passed through the outer curtain, the bustling background noise of the city was completely muted. Even the far-off screaming and crying of the slaves faded away.

He almost felt safe.

They paced past creatures familiar and completely alien, cloaks catching on spines and hooks that protruded between bars. Valentine silenced the shrieking chorus, looking sheepish. He shrugged.

"The wailing gets distracting. Qork should be back here."

Qork'ng was very much not what Ka'hadris might have expected. The creature closed the book she had been delicately manipulating with needle-like claws, letting the hardcover snap shut. Tough, leathery hide was broken here and there by clumps of horned bone that broke the skin and tented the loose-fitting robes she wore. Her face, the same red midnight color as the wine they had the night before, lit up with excitement when they came down the aisle.

Fifteen feet of flesh bent over them, shaking their hands with restrained vigor. A smile broke the giant's hideous face, infectious in its enthusiasm. Even though his arm felt like it had barely resisted being ripped from its socket, Ka'hadris grinned back at the good-natured glee before him. The monster babbled like a fifteen-year old girl in slightly accented American, the last syllable turned up slightly at the end of words.

"Val! I'm so happy you're here, I've been waiting forever! Who is this? Is he your friend? What's your name? You're a Line Walker, aren't you?"

The Shifter held out his hand to ward off the stream of questions.

"Hello Qork. This is Ka'hadris, a friend of mine. Yes, he is; that's very astute of you.

"How's your father? Your shop is as impressive as he described back in Center."

Qork sighed melodramatically. Her lips pouted around her fangs.

"On business again. Back to Phase World. He won't be back for two months. He said you'd be by, so I'll show you around anyway."

Qork placed a bookmark in her tome and held it loosely against her thigh. Ka'hadris would've had to cast a spell to lift it at all. Valentine twisted his mouth in mild annoyance.

"I thought he'd be here. Do you know what it is we're here to see?"

Ka'hadris didn't know what they were here for. He wondered if the Shifter even did. Their monstrous hostess straightened, drawing aside the curtains made from spiked chain that clinked and scraped against sandstone. The hallway beyond was dark, the only light glinting faintly around the first corner.

"Yeah, I know. You're here to see the Shooting Stars."

* * *

The creature behind the glass floated peacefully. If he'd been any closer to the tank, Ka'hadris would have steamed the glass with his breath. The small being didn't seem to mind. No bigger than a shrimp, it looked like a jellyfish spun from translucent chrome and neon. Its rainbow tendrils waved placidly in metaphysical currents, brushing away from the distinctively-shaped head that gave it its name. It was barely there at all; he could see his reflection in the glass clearer than the shades of the creature. He stepped back, the single Star, once again, just one of many drifting throughout the empty tank.

Behind him, he heard Valentine thanking Qork again, giving her the copy of *Sherlock Holmes* she hadn't been able to get her claws on even in Splynn. She squealed with delight, hugging the Shifter so hard his defensive wards kicked on in a pulse of invisible force. His feet dangled in the air. Valentine coughed a laugh, patting her on the shoulder-horns.

"Thank you, Qork. I can feel the bruises developing already. Now, how about telling us all you know about these 'Shooting Stars' of yours?"

She set him back down, looking as bashful as a fifteen-foot beast can. His eyebrow raised when Qork began to speak again, and Ka'hadris stepped back further from the glass. Her demeanor rapidly changing from giggling girl to serious academic, Qork held out a claw expansively.

"Well, they're called Shooting Stars in your language — a nickname. I'm not sure of the genus or species exactly in American, but the Stars are true metaphysical evolutions. Life forms that evolved in the space between dimensions. They feed on certain microorganisms that get caught in the dimensional fabric. These guys are like vacuum cleaners — or suckerfish.

"So the suckerfish clean the space between dimensions, and in doing so, they drift from plane to plane. Here's the kicker: they remember every single dimension they've ever been to! They have this little gland that records all of them. Like rings on a Dybok's horns, or the black box in a hovercraft. Daddy said they could act as a d-bloodhound, but you have to give them the scent."

It was coming together. Ka'hadris was impressed, but more than a little unsure. How long had Valentine been researching this? How long had his self-assured companion been watching, recording his observations, nursing this pet project of his? In the lull, Valentine made a pleased noise in his throat. He and Ka'hadris both turned eyes to the sword sitting innocuously in its scabbard.

"I think we can manage that, my dear."

* * *

Three hours later, they were beginning to get somewhere. At first, Ka'hadris and Valentine had spent precious time corralling the little Stars individually and exposing them to the spellword one at a time. Some of them seemed interested but wandered off after a few minutes, while others had no discernible reaction. Finally, they decided to just levitate the sword inside the tank to see what would happen. After that, all they could do was get comfortable... and talk.

Ka'hadris wished he loved anything as much as Valentine loved the sound of his own voice.

Now, staring at a gently swirling school of the small creatures instead of the aimless mass scattered about earlier, Ka'hadris felt better. He cradled the sword on fingers of invisible force, fingers outstretched. He let them drift across the blade, enjoying their dance.

Valentine yawned, and Ka'hadris could hear him scratching the short black hair at the nape of his neck.

"What do you think the odds are that any single one of those have been to the dimension we're looking for?"

Ka'hadris glanced over to him. The Shifter was cross-legged three feet off the ground, his back against the pebbled rock wall. A large hardcover and a smaller, leather-bound journal were similarly suspended before him. He didn't look up.

"You asking for a number?"

Valentine left his books hanging in the air, unfolding his legs from underneath him. He came smoothly to his feet, stretching like a cat before tucking the weathered text and notebook into his satchel. He draped his cloak back over one shoulder.

"No, not really. I was just making conversation. My turn."

He indicated the spot he had been sitting in. His hands brushed the wall with a light rasp.

“This section of wall is particularly comfortable.”

Ka’hadris let himself drift, unwinding as the other mage took his shift. His feet came off the ground, his body suspended on the ley line’s energy alone. The tinkle of his amulets faintly accompanied the floating sensation, and his back arched comfortably. His cape hung below him, a line of blue fabric, but he couldn’t feel its weight. He’d always preferred line drifting to levitation.

A thought occurred to him, and he raised his head somewhat to peer at the Shifter, now standing before the glass. Valentine was reading from a tablet computer, his back to Ka’hadris. He tapped intermittently at the screen.

“Why do you levitate, Val? I could never tolerate it as a novice, having to cast it again every few minutes. Even now it wouldn’t be more than half an hour before I’d have to cast it over again. How can you meditate? How do you even relax?”

The Shifter turned, lowering the computer to his side. He put his back against the glass, but standing on the cool stone. He scratched at his light stubble before crossing his arms over the slim belly of his armored bodysuit.

“I’ve always done it, ever since I learned how. When I’m on a line, that is. I suppose it became something of a habit. It helps to keep me focused. I use it to think, not to meditate. I tend to lose track of time, you know. Pulling more energy from the line every few minutes helps keep me in the moment.”

The tablet chimed gently in his hands. Valentine resumed his tapping, turning back to the Shooting Stars.

“It looks like we have something.”

Ka’hadris dropped to the floor, boot heels clicking with a hollow report. Rolling his shoulders, he joined the Shifter at the glass. The tablet in Valentine’s hands showed a representation of all the creatures in the tank, complete with tags. The ones closest to the sword flashed brighter than the rest, and one in particular blinked noticeably on the screen. Ka’hadris squinted at the actual sword before them, and spotted it without too much trouble. Valentine clicked his canines together twice in satisfaction.

“Let’s get a cage. A force field; if we put this little fellow in a pocket, it’ll just slide right through and we’ll never find it.”

They quickly said their goodbyes to Qork, still with her nose buried in the gigantic book. Valentine clipped the Shooting Star’s small forcecage to his belt with semi-numb fingers after another crushing handshake. The Shifter shook his hand as he once again draped himself in enhancing magicks, and Ka’hadris smartly avoided a similar injury by offering the monstrous girl a polite bow.

With both hands behind his back.

* * *

A problem with having a sensitivity to magic and the supernatural is that places like Atlantis tend to scramble those senses somewhat. Demons and magicians around every corner made Ka’hadris feel like he had a slight ringing in his ears, or a lingering aroma that just wouldn’t go away. Somewhere less saturated with monsters and magic, they’d flare up on his mental radar from a fair distance instead of getting lost in the shuffle. When he and Valentine stepped out into the street, squinting in the sun now sitting high in the sky, Ka’hadris had only processed the muddled feelings he was getting for what they were.

By then his adjusting eyes had told him what he needed to know.

The Baal-Rogs were gone, killed or banished back to their infernal home. It appeared that they hadn’t gone quietly. There were deep furrows of claw marks down the walls and patches of charred stone underfoot.

In their place, a semicircle of sneering, armor-clad demons brandished an assortment of heavy weapons and energy rifles. Bristling with cybernetic augmentation, some waved bionic blasters and hooted mockingly. They had the look of feral dogs, emboldened by numbers and the taste of blood. Each of them was easily nine feet tall. Mountains of distilled threat.

A handful of their dead littered the alley, lying prone or in pieces. They had been stripped of their belongings, leaving only half-clothed forms and limbs of greyish, scaly hide. The survivors didn’t seem particularly demoralized by the attrition, and Ka’hadris noticed that much of their equipment was spattered with the ichor of their fallen. They grinned with too many teeth.

Brodkil.

Frost had started calling Brodkil ‘lumpheads’ because of their lumpy craniums, and even Ka’hadris had to admit the name suited them. Underneath each of the misshapen skulls, some dotted with what looked like strange M.O.M. implants or bionic eyes, was several hundred pounds of demonic muscle, bionic armor, and the attitude of a high school bully in a pre-Rifts film. Grinning with too many teeth, the lumpheads jostled shoulders. Enjoying their numerical advantage. Psyching themselves up.

One spoke in American, the familiar words forced through fangs and hate. Aside from the unnatural deepness of the demon’s speech, bubbling up as if from a well, the drawl could have sprung from any drunkard in the New West.

“You two boys are a long ways from home, ain’tcha?”

Its cronies laughed, hard cawing like deep-throated crows. Their posturing would’ve been menacing if it hadn’t been so sycophantic. Ka’hadris rolled his eyes behind his goggles. He had to remind himself that this was Atlantis before he answered. The temptation to just eliminate these monsters was outweighed by the simple fact that they were surrounded by a city of their kin. For all they knew, the Minions of Splugorth were already on their way, responding to the battle between these thugs and the formerly enslaved Baal-Rogs.

They would have to play it careful, in case the locals took occasion to another fight in the middle of the street; the last time he had encountered a pack of Brodkil, it hadn’t exactly been a war of words. All the same, he spoke through a sneer. Strength was all these creatures seemed to understand.

“What do you want, filth?”

Valentine raised an eyebrow.

The Brodkil who’d spoken bared its teeth. Spittle gleamed from its lower lip. It silenced the rest of the group with a violent gesture. The leader held out a grotesquely over-proportioned mechanical arm. In the metal fist sat an ancient-looking axe, inscribed with sigils of power and strength.

Ka’hadris wasn’t sure if it was actually old — so many weapon dealers would artificially age their wares just so they could jabber about ancient enchantments and relics — but he could feel the magic dripping from the serrated blade.

The demon gnashed fangs again, producing almost more drool than words.

“We want *you*, boys. Big money to smash you, and we’s gonna bring you back home to the grill. We’s hungry!”

The demons chorused again, pointing guns and shaking fists. None made to fire before the leader gave his order. Ka’hadris was impressed at their discipline.

He spared a glance at Valentine.

“What do you think?”

The Shifter clucked his tongue.

“I think that I don’t have time for this. Give me a few seconds, then put your thumb out.”

That was enough for Ka'hadris. Before Valentine had even thrown the cloak back off his shoulders, the sword sang its way out of its scabbard, raised to a guard position. Even as he did, words of power escaped his lips. Mystic energy coursed through him and where two wizards had stood before the gang of demons, now six mirror images of the Line Walker held identical swords low over one shoulder.

Behind him, Ka'hadris could feel Valentine begin to warp space and time, the magic tightly focused through his will. The Brodkil leader raised his axe. Ka'hadris exhaled, controlling his breathing for the combat to come. Magic flowed through him, the man simply a peaceful conduit.

The first onslaught of energy blasts was unexpectedly inaccurate. The sword moved as an extension of his arm, seeming to blur; intercepting lasers moving at the speed of light isn't a problem when you can move your blade before the triggers are even pulled. It weaved through the air of its own accord, swatting beams away to dig chunks from pale Atlantean stone.

Valentine reached forwards, clapping his gloved palms together. Intertwining his fingers, he then pulled them apart, again leveraging himself as he tore through the fabric of existence. His cloak blew out behind him when the opening appeared. A teardrop shape, a rip, grew between his jet-black gauntlets. It seemed to gain traction as he did so, the roiling chaos beyond coalescing into a glassy image of a picturesque glade inside dense forest. Ka'hadris felt the portal dilate fully, the resonance of the Rift settling into harmony. Then the Shifter leaped through, and the d-portal was gone as quickly as it had appeared. It left behind nothing but the slight odor of grass and sea air.

Ka'hadris wished he could pull more power from the line nexus. It rolled sparingly into him; as close as they were to the magic-regulating Great Pyramid of Splynn, he had to draw deep of his own reserves of energy. He could still see the disturbance in the air, the vestige of Valentine's exit. He forced a wedge of power into the fading tear, hitching a ride along the remnant trail of the other traveler. Brilliant ultramarine light blinded him.

A second or a year later, he and Valentine stood alone in the tranquil clearing he'd glimpsed through the Rift. The near-silence was deafening. The sigh of relief he was just about to let out was interrupted by the harsh bang of teleportation.

The thunderclap of displaced air echoed again and again in quick succession. His cape blew forward in the rush of wind, Valentine's gusting behind him in sympathy. Ka'hadris turned, following Valentine's narrowing eyes amidst the rest of the crashes.

The semicircle of demonic thugs, weapons at the ready, was not what he expected to see.

Their almost-chemical stink, all pheromones and dumb fury, had been muffled somewhat by the exotic odors of Splynn. Here, in this clear air, it was palpable. Ka'hadris's gaze was drawn to something that had escaped his notice earlier. Each had a glowing medallion affixed to their armor. Against the scratched, faded, and bloody plate, they glowed dully with a sickly yellow light.

Somehow, the lumpheads had followed them.

He couldn't waste too much time wondering how they had done it. Valentine tapped an amulet and a transparent suit of armor shimmered briefly into place around his form. It snapped into existence just in time, the next volley of gunfire slamming into him so hard he almost lost his footing. The Armor of Ithan flickered almost invisibly under the impacts of a burst of rail gun rounds. Flattened chunks of metal dropped to the ground, but the Shifter still reeled under the impact. His voice rose in more mystic syllables, hands sketching glyphs that left afterimages on Ka'hadris' retinas even through the goggles.

He had problems of his own. Six of the Brodkil rushed him, barreling forwards with vicious-looking close combat weapons clutched

in demonic and bionic talons. Hoarse, unintelligible roars spouted from their maws. Baleful yellow eyes stretched wide and wild. One, faster than the rest by way of the elephantine bionics comprising its lower body, leapt for his throat. Ka'hadris barely got his blade between himself and the lashing claws of the beast. The impact of the supernaturally strong blow almost ripped the sword from his hand and sent a numbing shock up his arm. He imagined he could smell the fetid breath even through the gas mask.

Then the others reached him.

A pair of heavy alien broadswords carved the air towards his head and he batted them aside two-handed. He spun aside as the giant's momentum carried it past him, and the next ones were already on him. Desperately parrying jagged, saw-toothed blades, one sliced so close that he saw a charm drop from his gauntlet, its thin cord cut. The last reached out with metal-sheathed claws to deliver a punishing thrust to his abdomen. The composite of the Troll's face cracked under the stress, absorbing as much as it could before Ka'hadris was knocked bodily off his feet.

He landed twenty feet away, rolling with the impact to come up on the balls of his feet. Gasping through the mask, Ka'hadris readied himself for the next charge. He began to channel energy into the sword, panting the words of a spell. Magic slowly percolated into the weapon, the spellform building within the blade, but it was a complicated incantation.

There wouldn't be enough time.

The lumpheads were lunging forward again to close the distance just as he felt the spike of energy come from Valentine. The Shifter swept a wave of otherworldly light across the six of them, catching them in a cone of interdimensional radiance. Ka'hadris watched their movements stutter and jerk as the temporal distortion snared the demons in Valentine's grip. Dull confusion etched on their brutish features, the Brodkil lumbered as if through molasses.

The leader roared in frustration, goading forwards the rest of its demonic squad with swipes of his axe. Letting loose with another volley, the heavy weapons punched through Valentine's magical defenses. One Brodkil hefted a multi-barreled launcher, spewing missiles across the clearing. A percussive explosion close to Valentine's left cooked the air around him. The hazy field shattered like glass, dropping from his form. A last laser burst melted the armor of his thigh, eliciting a grimace of pain. Through the drifting smoke of the corkscrew trails, the leader appeared. The snarling demon took potshots at the wounded Shifter, firing bolts of plasma from its bulky alien pistol.

Valentine staggered back a few steps, pulling his cloak around him. The dark threads blurred together tenebrously, flickering like tongues of grey flame. Gnashing out more arcane speech through clenched teeth, he backed away under the crown of a massive nearby elm. Valentine stepped into the deepest green shade and disappeared completely. The Brodkil's shots blew deep craters into the soil and rock where they hit, throwing dirt into the air but not revealing the Shifter. The only sign of his presence was the chanting that continued in the shadows below the tree's dense branches.

Ka'hadris surged into a Brodkil with every ounce of momentum he could muster. Its disgusting face twisted in slow motion to try and follow his movements. Coming up under its guard, he rammed his blade into its rib cage. The spellsword, suffused with an enchantment totally anathema to their supernatural flesh, left only ash and steam in its wake. The desiccated remains tumbled to the ground, already scattering to the wind. He swung another heavy two-handed blow to his right on the backswing, but caught nothing but the screech of bionic plate. The Brodkil's claws contemptuously turned the swipe aside, its incredible strength showing even through the sluggish quantum mire. He rolled aside, invoking a protective ward that

blurred into existence around him. He reached up to his ear, pinging his radio, but only dead silence greeted him.

Where was the damn Shifter?

The leader was on him before he even knew it, chopping at his shoulder with inhuman ferocity. Ka'hadrís parried, his arms burning from exhaustion. As if sensing his weakness, the Brodkil fired his pistol point-blank and Ka'hadrís had to waste precious seconds dodging burning plasma. He slashed across the chest of another slow-moving demon, caving in the rib cage and reducing the hulking monster to a cloud of particulates. Its death cry wavered as demonic tissue turned to dust. His sword moved through alien flesh with consummate ease. He leaped back for a moment to take stock of his opponents.

He was counting the remaining Brodkil when another demon erupted from behind the elm. Scaly skin flush with exertion, a sinuous snake-like tail underneath drove forward half a ton of rippling muscle and sinew. The grotesque creature dripped a slimy mucus from every pore. Dirt clung to the viscous fluid covering a full fifteen feet of tail, and flung in thick ropes from claws the length of Ka'hadrís' forearms. A heavy jaw full of razor-edged teeth gritted, rivers of greenish drool churning down its fangs. Red, glowing eyes narrowed under a furrowed and saurian brow. He had never seen such a creature.

Luckily, it appeared to be on his side. Rushing into the nearest lumphead with an inarticulate scream, the snake-demon sank its talons deep into its hide and cybernetic armor alike. Groaning with effort, it lifted the Brodkil clear above its head before tossing it negligently aside. He heard skull strike an outcropping of rock with a sickening crack, and it remained slumped on the ground where it lay.

In the wake of the strange snake-thing's appearance, Valentine strode confidently from the shadows. He gestured at the Brodkil reloading its missile launcher, hand radiating a pulsating red light. The monster's right hand briefly mirrored the glow before the heavy weapon fell from nerveless fingers to thud solidly into the earth. The slow-witted warrior grunted and fumbled, hissing as it pulled a short sword in its good hand.

The leader had nearly reached Ka'hadrís, who was still trying to fend off the remaining Brodkil and keep the snake-thing in his line of sight in the midst of the swirling melee. Valentine might have summoned that one, but as far as Ka'hadrís was concerned, a demon was still a demon. He could feel the supernatural evil rolling off the abomination in waves.

Was it worth it to win the battle — was it right to win — like *this*?

What sort of person was Valentine if he would associate himself with such a vile thing?

He didn't have much time to consider such things. Too slow to dodge a lumpy blast of plasma, his wards crackled and shook to disperse the energy when it splashed over his shoulder. He ground his teeth against the magical feedback that screeched in his head. He only had his sword back up to guard when the lead Brodkil appeared not five feet away, skidding to a halt from a powerful leap. Eyes blazing, it raised an axe over its head, waving the blade threateningly. Ka'hadrís readied himself for its attack.

The attack never came. Magical tracers leaked from the axe-head, spreading like streamers in a radius around the Line Walker and the gang of demons. To Ka'hadrís' eyes and feelings, they were like a chilly void in space. Where they fell gracefully to land on the slowed Brodkil, the demons stiltedly began to move at normal speed. He felt the intangible ribbons drift to settle over him, too. They were so cold they burned, and his protection dissolved around them. He could feel the magic being leached from his spell, surely as the streamers that tugged at his sword nullified the deadly enchantment there.

Fighting through the malaise of the antimagic, he escaped the laughing lumpheads with a back flip, regrouping with Valentine. The

pack were organized again too, rallying around their leader. Together, some were making quick work of the snake-thing while the others reloaded their cannons. He shared a glance to Valentine.

"Escape?"

"No. We shouldn't leave them here, of all places. Besides, I'm not so sure we *could*. We fight. Actually..."

Valentine closed his eyes, then opened them again.

"Ah. I don't think it'll be much of an issue either way."

The leader laughed louder than the rest, over the squeals of the embattled snake-demon and the buzzing Vibro-Blades of his warriors. Beyond even that, as if in the faint distance, they could hear a hollow, shrill shriek, lowering in pitch but growing steadily louder.

"Can't run, squishies! Boss say you goin' nowhere! We catcha! We kills ya! We eatcha! We—"

Abruptly, all ten Brodkil and the wounded snake-thing vanished in the blinding flash of a massive series of explosions. The volley of missiles, announced by their telltale whistling scream, slammed into the demons and turned forty feet of grass and underbrush into a smoking crater. Ka'hadrís could feel the blistering heat on the exposed skin of his face as a shock wave of hot air whipped his cape out behind him. His legs shuddered underneath him as the impact rocked them. Over the ringing in his ears, he heard Valentine's voice in his head.

"Ah, *the cavalry*."

Even as bits of stone, dirt, dust, and detritus continued to pitter-patter on the foliage and soil around them, the smoke began to clear in the glade. Giant, bulky forms, each nearly ten feet tall, stomped purposefully through the cloud. They carried immense weapons, laser beams tracking from underslung mounts and drawing glowing lines through the dissipating brownish smudge. Valentine visibly relaxed, and Ka'hadrís followed suit when he saw them emerge.

Two suits of Samson power armor stood over the scattered remains of the Brodkil. Grey, overlapping plates framed the pilots within, but whereas one had a black helm bisected by darkly mirrored armorglass, the other's head and right arm were painted blood red. Rail guns lowered when the pair spotted the magicians, lasers fading and the motors inside the weapons cycling down with a whine.

Most reassuring of all was the familiar yellow insignia across their left shoulders.

Ka'hadrís had only static in his earpiece, and the voice that came next came over the external loudspeaker of the black helmet. Even through the speaker, it was a rough, tearing sound.

"I suppose you two were having too much fun to turn your radios on."

Valentine's voice next to him was surprisingly calm.

"We should say the same thing, Frost. We've tried to reach you more than once in the last minute or so."

The Headhunter made a noncommittal sound in his throat. The pilot of the second suit lifted the crimson arm, servos whirring. He pointed at Valentine. His words blared, amplified by his suit into thundering accusations.

"Don't need to sound so bored, Shifter."

He chewed the last word; it was almost a curse.

"If we hadn't been doing recon nearby, things might have gone different for your little demon party."

Ka'hadrís knew Falco didn't fear and mistrust magic the way Frost did, but he couldn't disagree with the disgust he heard in the pilot's voice. He had seen the things Valentine had pulled from the abyss today. The other mage seemed unconcerned with Falco's booming words even as he continued.

"Figure that other nasty tangling with the lumpheads was your doing. Aren't you mad we fragged your little pet?"

Breaking suddenly into a smile, Valentine waved dismissively.

“Not even a little bit. Thanks for saving me the trouble; it was just a demon, after all. No big loss. Besides, there’s more where that one came from.”

He briskly trotted past the other mercenaries, stopping at one of the dead Brodkil, laying where the snake-demon had thrown it. Its neck twisted at an unnatural angle, lying motionless on the rock. The Shifter bent over the corpse. He reached into his satchel, producing the tablet. Cocking his head curiously, he turned the computer over in his hands.

Ka’hadris joined Frost and Falco, nodding his thanks. Another voice spoke into his ear, his radio link returning from the silence they had labored under since he and Valentine had landed here.

“-hear me? What’s wrong with their comms?”

“We’re good here, Mengus. Targets are neutralized.”

Frost’s voice echoed over the external speakers and the link, a weird overlapping speech.

“I know they’re neutralized, Frost. I’m the one who fired two dozen damn mini-missiles at them. You and Falco just laser-painted the targets. Plus, I can see the smoking crater over your video feeds. But why are their comms dead?”

“They’re not, Mengus.”

He didn’t know when or how the link had been interrupted, but it appeared to be working again. Ka’hadris heard Frost and Falco’s external speakers click off audibly as they realized it too. Behind them, Valentine stood from his crouch, holding something in his hands. Over the link, the smooth, nonplused tone sounded mildly curious.

“Not anymore, anyway — and I think I might know why.”

“That’s great you guys, but why don’t you come inside and tell me about it? You’ll have to use the cliff hangar. I haven’t repaired the concealed entrances up there yet.”

Falco knocked a fist against Frost’s shoulder with a metallic clang. “Shall we?”

The four left the clearing, passing through a brief patch of forest that extended right to the edge of a sheer cliff face. Boosting their jump jets, the two power armors fell the hundred feet straight down towards the ocean below. Waves crashed against the rock, sending up fans of spray and salt.

When the Samsons reached the bottom, jets flaring again to cushion the impact, they swung into an overhang, safely hidden among the jagged rocks. Inside the wide tunnel, the smash of water on granite became hollow and near-deafening, but inside their protective shells, neither man even winced.

They came to a heavy blast door. The heavy plating shuddered upwards into the ceiling at a wireless ping from the suits. Valentine and Ka’hadris levitated down, following closely. They were just setting boots to rock when the door cycled fully open and the pair of soldiers crossed the threshold to their hidden base. He squeezed his gloved hands against his ears to block out the raging ocean noise, following them until they too were safely inside.

* * *

The newly-installed fluorescent lighting in the temporary workshop Mengus had set up rendered everything in clinical, washed-out starkness. Cold metal tables held up a variety of tools and gizmos that Ka’hadris didn’t know the first thing about, but the most mystifying piece of technology lay spread out between the four of them.

Frost and Falco stood in their flight suits, their armor safely stowed elsewhere in the cavernous hangar. Stripped to the waist, Falco towed sweat from his muscled torso and shaved head. He pulled a t-shirt over his head and cinched the flight suit’s sleeves as a belt. He accepted a cigarette from the Headhunter, who already had one hanging loosely from his lip.

“So what the hell is this thing?”

Mengus held a complicated-looking scanner over the dinner plate-sized mechanism. Ka’hadris recognized the device as one of the glowing yellow discs each of the Brodkil had been wearing. The Operator shrugged.

“Beats me, but it’s definitely Techno-Wizardry.”

Frost blew smoke. Falco lit the cigarette, following suit. The bluish cloud escaped his thick, black beard.

“How can you tell?”

“Because if it was anything else, I’d be able to tell you what the hell it is.”

Valentine chuckled. He put his tablet on the table, pointing to the screen. A list of diagnostic information scrolled down the display.

“I believe this is the reason our communications were disrupted when we arrived. Perhaps these are the Rechno-Wizard equivalent of a jamming device.”

“No.”

When Ka’hadris spoke, surprised eyes turned his way. He didn’t shrink under their questioning gazes, gesturing to the complicated weave of wiring and gemstones beneath the casing Mengus had removed.

“It’s more than that. This must be how they found us even after we escaped.”

Mengus frowned.

“How do you know that? Maybe they just teleported in with you.”

“That’s not the way it works. Dimensional transport isn’t something you can follow. It’s like skipping stones across water—you have to know where the stone is going to land. Following the ripples in the water doesn’t help. You can’t just chase after someone when they Rift away.”

Suddenly understanding, Ka’hadris halted mid-sentence. He met Valentine’s gaze across the table. Valentine arched an eyebrow, apparently guessing his conclusion.

“Well, Kay, *you* can. Are you suggesting that this device let them piggyback us, the same as you?”

Frost grunted.

“I don’t know anything about that, but lumpheads don’t usually carry the fancy TW gear. They might get the bionics and the energy weapons, but they don’t make ‘em. There’s always a supplier. Those nasties just ain’t bright enough to make anything themselves, and they certainly ain’t no Techno-Wizard.”

Valentine nodded in comprehension.

“That’s right. Brodkil love military tech, but aside from that they know next to nothing except combat and death. So what’s your point, Frost?”

The Shifter’s tone was conciliatory, even helpful, but Frost didn’t even bother to meet his eye. His cybernetic eye whirred, continuing to stare at the device. He took another drag.

“Point is, who set these ones up with gear like this? The hardware I get — ain’t too hard to lay your hands on that stuff. But some fancy TW deal? They’re working for someone.”

Mengus stood straight, rubbing his eyes with his palms after staring into the scanner. Falco produced a flask from his suit and took a swig. He handed it over to Frost, who nodded in thanks and tipped it back.

“Like who? Or what?”

The Headhunter dropped a pouch next to the disassembled tech. The black leather was singed and torn, but intact. The belt it had been attached to was neatly cut at both ends; the clean edges at odds with the damaged exterior.

“Thought this might help. I cut it off one of the lumpheads’ torso chunks as we were leaving. I think we might have more problems than our Canadian situation right now. I’m calling in Dead Reckon-

ing. We should go and pick up the rest of the team. This location might be compromised.”

Frost walked away without waiting, leaving a swirl of smoke in his wake.

Ka’hadris popped open the button of the pouch flap with a snap. He could still smell charred demon flesh wafting from the material. He upturned it over the semi-reflective metal.

Two pages fell from the pouch. White backing shone glossy in the light, just featureless blank squares. It was only when he turned them over that he saw that they weren’t pages. They were photos.

One of them, a candid picture capturing Ka’hadris speaking to a fellow magician he recognized from Dweomer. The high silvery towers of Lazlo rose behind them. One of Valentine sketching a sarcastic two-finger salute to the camera from a distance. The Shifter was in a tavern — Ka’hadris couldn’t tell where — with two well-dressed humans on either side of his table. The images seemed unrelated, bar one factor. In both photos, there was a common detail.

In each photo, they were wearing their Happy Endings colors.

Mengus whistled.

“Well, that’s just great. As if we didn’t have enough to worry about. I’ll start shutting down the systems, get the armors loaded into the trucks. Falco, gimme a hand?”

Falco nodded, another bracing shot from the flask hitting his lips before it was tucked back into the uniform. He followed the Operator, leaving the two wizards alone again. Ka’hadris was terse.

“What do you know about this?”

Valentine remained unreadable.

“Not much more than you, I’d imagine.”

Valentine tucked the photo of himself into his satchel, half-turning to leave. Ka’hadris stayed, looking at his own image still on the table.

“I don’t buy that. You know something. This is connected to *you* somehow.”

The Shifter grinned enigmatically. He began to walk from the room, leaving Ka’hadris alone under the harsh white light. His voice echoed from the shadows.

“Maybe. It’s not like I’ve never made any enemies before. And I suppose gangs of demons never attack *you*.”

He was almost at the door. Just before he reached it, Ka’hadris half-turned to regard him.

“Val.”

The Shifter stopped, but didn’t look back.

“We’re not done. After this is over, we finish what we started today. You still owe me an explanation about my sword.”

“Do I? That’s interesting. What makes you say that, Ka’hadris?”

Ka’hadris turned back to the photo and the bizarre gadget before him.

“We wear the same colors, Val. The same threat display. You know what the problem with your theory is? For better or worse, we’re a group now, and the world judges us accordingly.

“Even if just one snake turns out to be poisonous, everyone assumes they all are.”

There was no answer. The Shifter was already gone.

Ka’hadris sighed. When he’d arrived in Lazlo the night before, he’d already had enough on his mind. Now, with everything else, he’d have to keep a closer eye on their new companion — if he could. On top of that, Valentine still had the shooting star.

He exhaled through his nose in frustration. Paradoxically, he hoped that Valentine was at least right about his idea of warning signs to discourage predators. Happy Endings was getting a little too popular in all the wrong circles.

Something was happening. Bearing down on them all, but hidden from view. Inexorable, intangible, it hung over them with patient eyes.

Right now, he felt hunted.

* * *

Valentine didn’t even break stride as he teleported back to the Void Isles, jumping between the hallway and the warmly lit stone of his homely furnished cave among the silent rocky plateaus. Just one footfall to the next. He set his computer’s chronometer alarm for Earth morning as he put his poltergeists to making him a cup of tea.

Producing a second teleport homer device, he placed it gently on a darkwood table. He shrugged out of his armor and vestments, reclining into an easy chair and sipping at a mug of hot, sweet liquid. He left the object where it sat, instead contemplating the Shooting Star before him. He watched the creature dance in its prison. It was difficult to know where to start.

Maintaining his status within Happy Endings was too useful to be allowed to expire. He enjoyed the power he wielded on its behalf, of course, but he supposed it was nice to be a part of a team as well. They were capable, dynamic; far more interesting than just another pack of sub-creatures.

He idly cursed the physics that had brought this problem to him at such an exciting juncture in his research.

Still, the security of their organization had to come before this, interesting or not.

He stood, moving to one of the densely-packed bookshelves lining several walls of his lair. He tucked the Shooting Star onto a shelf, along with his journal of spellsword research thus far and the associated texts. Returning to the chair with a fresh journal and pen, he left them in his lap to consider the photo again.

Reaching out with his mind, he traced the dimensional history of the glossy plastic square. The psychic memory of the clumsy, scaly claws of Brodkil belched from it, and Valentine scrunched his nose in revulsion as he kept focusing, stretching further into the imprints of the object’s previous owners. Its photographer. He scratched impressions into his notebook; some not making sense until context appeared underneath quite separately after another splash of insight.

He would have to do this many times to get a clearer picture, but every little bit would help.

Valentine knew the principled Line Walker was suspicious of him. Frankly, he wasn’t very concerned. Let him suspect what he would. He had no intention at present of acting against the interests of Happy Endings; that included his fellow shareholders. He had a vested interest to keep Ka’hadris and his sword around — at least until his research was complete.

Another visual cue from the object reading hit him, and more words appeared on the paper in his tight, neat handwriting.

The dragon seeks the Troll’s doom.

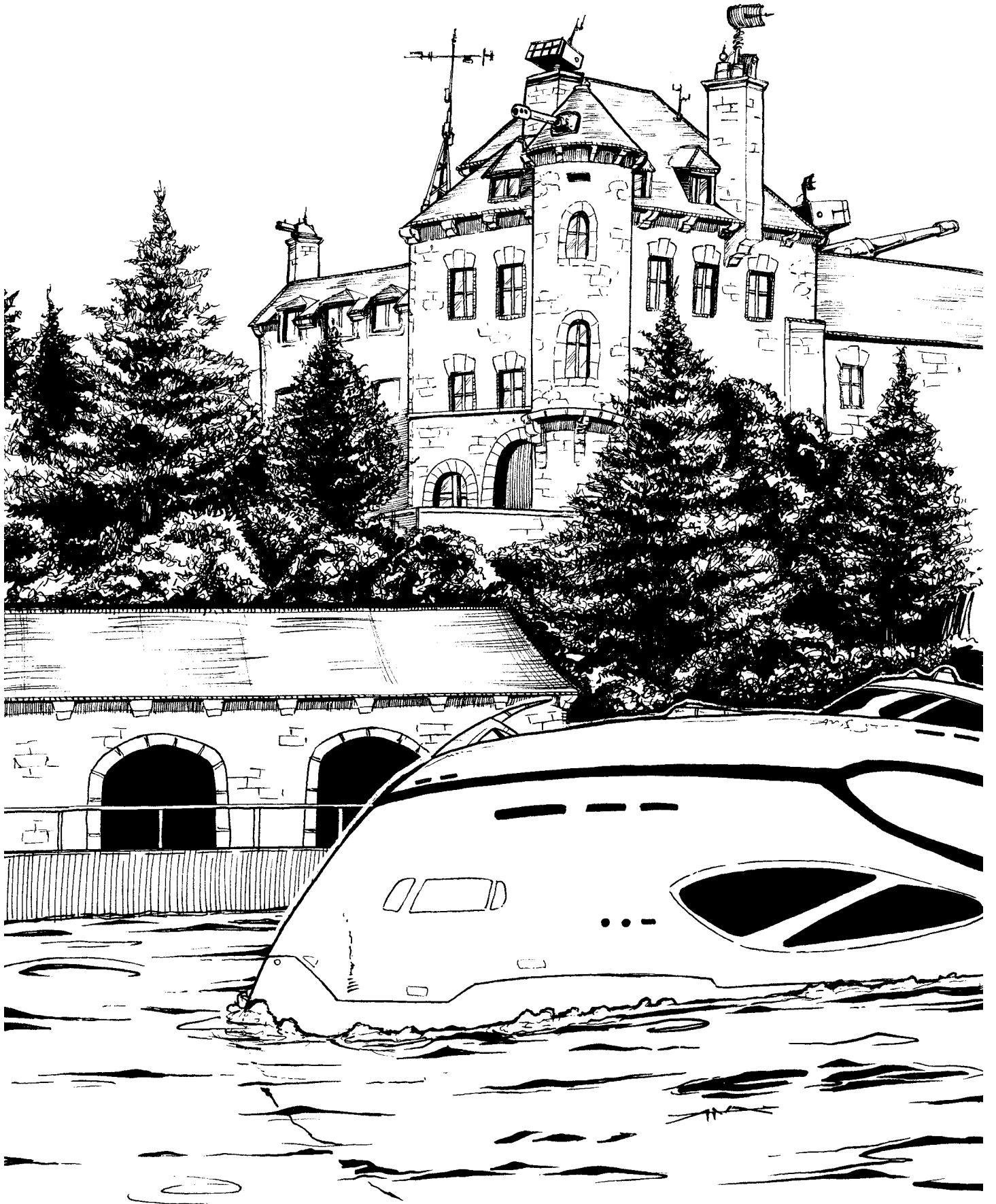
He cast his mind into the future again, trying to pick out which strand of probability belonged to him. It was a confused timeline to figure out. There was a heavy, tricky knot of disturbance surrounding himself and the rest of the mercenary company. Evidently, a lot of conflict and uncertainty was coming their way. Not just for them, either. The ripples were meeting each other to create chaos; skipping stones, indeed. Events were converging, carrying with them flashes of blood, suffering, and death.

War.

War, with a Troll’s face in the middle.

Valentine, who some once living had named Urgash Voidheart, took another sip of tea.

Why was he not surprised?



Rifts® Black Market: Rise to Power

Optional Source Material for Rifts®

By Maxwell Kautsch

Part Two

Note: To read all about the Black Market Town of Singer, New York, please see Part One in **The Rifter® #65**.

Artesian Arms Co.

The crowning achievement of Rembrandt's brainchild, **Artesian Arms** is a relative newcomer to the Techno-Wizard arms market in North America. Like many children growing up in the war-torn Magic Zone, Rembrandt was fascinated with weapons. However, he was much less fascinated with the business of killing, finding it was usually difficult, time-consuming, and often unnecessary. Knowing that he was not the only practitioner of magic who felt this way, he focused his company on manufacturing light, effective, and versatile weapons designed to incapacitate rather than kill. His own spell repertoire includes more air and fire spells than earth and water, and the weapons tend to reflect that bias.

Working for AA is akin to joining the Hand, as employees are not recruited so much as drafted. Rembrandt always has his eye on top students at the Artesian Academy, and employs graduates at a high rate. Employees are committed to work for the company for a minimum of two years, and must sign a strict non-disclosure agreement when they leave. The few who have violated that agreement met with untimely ends via "accidents."

Artesian Arms weapons are not powered by a clip or other external device, requiring the user to pump the appropriate amount of P.P.E. or I.S.P. into the weapon to load it. Powering the weapon with the required energy to completely recharge it takes one melee action.

AA-600 Befuddle Mace

Intended to be the TW equivalent to the Coalition's Neural Mace, victims struck by this weapon suffer the effects of the Befuddle spell: -2 to strike, parry and dodge, attacks are reduced by half and all skills suffer a penalty of -20%. These effects last for 1D4+1 melee rounds, but the potential victim gets to save each time he is struck by the mace.

Weight: 6 lbs (2.7 kg).

Range: Melee Combat.

Mega-Damage: None. The Befuddle Mace inflicts 1D8 S.D.C. damage, plus any applicable P.S. damage bonus.

Payload: One; must be recharged after each use. Each Befuddling strike requires either 6 P.P.E. or 12 I.S.P. to recharge the weapon with ONE Befuddle attack.

Saving Throw: Affects only the person struck by the mace, and he gets a standard save versus magic. Spell does NOT go off if the mace is successfully parried.

Cost: 19,000 credits.

AA-310 Lightning Trident

Another weapon designed more out of mass appeal than morality, this versatile weapon (and virtual knock-off of the Lightning Spear found in the **Rifts® Book of Magic**, page 320) has become a popular choice among frequenters of the St. Lawrence. Often gold in color, this 4-7 foot (1.2 to 2.1 m) weapon actually appears as a three-pronged trident. Due to the common association between tridents and slavers, the weapon is rarely available in Singer, but common up and down the St. Lawrence, especially in places like the Pirate Kingdom of Montreal and Perez's Rogues' Alley. Its most unique feature is its ability to return when thrown, as the spell **Teleport: Lesser** is always included in AA models of this archetype.

Weight: 8 lbs (3.6 kg).

Range: Hand to hand combat or thrown. Distance when thrown depends on the P.S. of the thrower: 200 feet (61 m) for most humans with a P.S. of 18 or higher, 300 feet for a P.S. of 28 or greater; increase by 50% for Robot equivalent P.S. and double for Supernatural P.S. The range of the return teleport is only 1,000 feet (305 m), but it always successfully returns to the hand of the person who threw it. **Mega-Damage:** 3D6 M.D. per each successful strike/stab attack; 4D6 M.D. when thrown. An uncharged Mega-Damage Trident does 1D4 M.D.

Duration/Payload: Upon activation, the weapon remains electrically charged for one melee round (15 seconds). The act of teleporting back to its owner counts as one melee attack and takes 3-4 seconds.

P.P.E. to Activate: 15 P.P.E. or 30 I.S.P. to give the weapon its M.D. electrical charge. An additional 15 P.P.E. or 30 I.S.P. is required, in advance, to get it to magically return to its user. Remember, each return teleportation uses up one melee attack, but is still very effective. **Cost:** 450,000 to 650,000 credits. Very popular among warrior races and men-at-arms who pride themselves in hand to hand combat.

AA-811 Dragonfire Rifle

One of the only AA weapons designed for pure stopping power, and one of AA's largest and most powerful weapons, it competes with other heavy TW rifles such as Stormspire's Starfire Rifle.

Weight: 9 lbs (4 kg).

Range: 1,200 feet (366 m).

Mega-Damage: 1D4x10 M.D. per shot.

Rate of Fire: Fires a single blast and each counts as one melee attack. **Payload:** Requires either 18 P.P.E. or 36 I.S.P. to fully recharge the weapon with one powerful blast. The weapon can hold a maximum of four charges (18 P.P.E./36 I.S.P. each).

Cost: 180,000 credits.

AA-B1 Goblin Bomb TW Cannon

Designed to look like a pre-Rifts 18th Century ballista or cannon, these *TW Goblin Bomb* launchers can be mounted on vehicles or modified into hand weapons for giants and robots. The types of bombs that can be launched include all Goblin Bombs listed on pages 63-64 of **Rifts® Coalition Wars® One: Sedition**. These cannons are placed at strategic points around Singer, where access to ley line energy reduces the P.P.E. cost for the gunners by half.

Weight: 45 lbs (20 kg).

Range: 2,000 feet (610 m) for ballista-style launchers, 4,000 feet (1,219 m) for those that are actual cannons.

Mega-Damage: As per the Goblin Bomb fired. May all be the same or a combination or different types. A common load for Singer defense guns is mostly Fire Bombs (4D6 M.D. to a 3 foot/0.9 m radius), with every eighth shot being a Carpet of Adhesion grenade.

Rate of Fire: Single shot only. Fires one Goblin Bomb at a time, and each shot counts as one melee attack.

Payload: The ballista can only hold one bomb at a time, while the cannon itself can hold 8 Goblin Bombs. Regardless, for either version there is usually some kind of feeder mechanism (belt, hopper, etc.) that can hold as many as 24-36 Goblin Bombs, which are fed into the weapon one at a time. Requires 50 P.P.E. or 100 I.S.P. to power the Goblin Bomb launcher/cannon to fire 24 grenades; half those costs while on a ley line.

Cost: 300,000 credits for the ballista, 450,000 for the cannon version. Both are among Artesian Arms' best exports to other enlightened, magically-inclined city-states.

Rogue's Mall and Carnival

The Rogue's Mall and Carnival is a fixture in both its Gametown headquarters and on the traveling entertainment circuit, such as it is, from Queenston to the Magic Zone to Lazlo, and most every pit stop in between. The cornerstone tenant of Gametown, the Carnival is the brainchild of **Marvus Lusk**, an 8th level Aluta Headhunter Black Marketeer, and his buddy **Roundabout**, a 5th level Phlebus City Rat Black Marketeer. Roundabout's charisma (M.A. 23) and flair for the dramatic makes him an ideal ringmaster, while Marvus (I.Q. 15, M.E. 21, M.A. 19) pulls the strings from behind the scenes. Marvus has also served as Gametown's N-Rep for the last two terms, and there are no challengers on the horizon. The Director of Security is **Ryker**, a 7th level Human Wilderness Scout Black Marketeer equally at home on the city streets or leading a traveling contingent of the Mall.

The Rogue's Mall has the feel of a never-ending street party. Jugglers, minstrels, and barkers are constantly mingling with the Gametown crowds. Attractions include a pre-Rifts style roller coaster, a psychic fortune-teller, showgirls, exotic petting zoo, and a small freak show. Revelry is rampant, as cheap drinks are available from vendors throughout the carnival, and random fights, altercations, and crime breaks out on a daily basis. High-end drug dens, peddling everything from Psi-Cola to Elementum, openly advertise their wares.

Although a portion of the Carnival is always on the road, Lusk understands the importance of keeping the lights on in Singer, and always has some sort of show on tap virtually every evening. One of the more unique attractions is the Horror Forest Funhouse, a maze and obstacle course that offers daily admission to typical paying customers, but can also be reserved and customized to the level of difficulty (read: danger) as the customer desires. Mercenary teams are known to test their wits and pay top dollar for Marvus to design particularly challenging exercises.

While the Carnival is deserving of its reputation for high-quality acts, its real purpose is to covertly gather information spilling from the mouths of residents and transients in town for the show alike. Anything suspicious is relayed to Marvus, who, in turn, alerts Rembrandt if necessary. Most of the information gathering tasks are left to four City Rats who would, under different circumstances, be pickpockets. Although the Rat Pack, as they call themselves, may or may not lift a wallet or purse here and there, their main objective is to get a feel for the pulse of the crowd and keep tabs on dissension in particular. The Pack reports daily to Marvus.

The vast majority of the Rogue's Mall employees are loyal Hand operatives. Le Marche Noir may succeed in placing an insider in a low-level, menial position such as maintenance, but nearly everyone involved with the Carnival takes great pride in Singer and devote themselves to making it the Hand's crown jewel. Imposters would be punished harshly.

Rogue's Mall and Carnival Stats

This regionally well-respected Carnival travels from late March through late September, and offers daily shows at its permanent facilities in Singer. The small carnival starts out with 240 points to use on any of the different features. An additional 50 points is available for acts and another 10 points are available for reputation. As a Black Market Front, the carnival receives additional bonuses of 10 points to Internal Security, 10 points to Defense, and 50 points for Criminal Activity, for a grand total of 370 available points.

- A. **Sponsorship:** #4 Black Market Front: 0 Points
- B. **Outfits:** #4 Specialty Clothing: 20 Points
- C. **Equipment:** #3 and #4 Electronic and Medical: 15 Points
- D. **Vehicles:** #4 Deluxe Fleet: 20 Points
- E. **Communications:** #5 Deluxe: 25 Points
- F. **Security:** #4 Iron-Clad: 20 Points
- G. **Defense:** #4 Militia: 20 Points
- H. **Acts:** Many, see descriptions: 167 Points
- I. **Alignment:** #3 Anarchist: 2 Points
- J. **Criminal Activity:** Many, see descriptions: 46 Points
- K. **Reputation:** #5 Excellent: 25 Points
- L. **Typical Salary:** #4 Good: 10 Points
- Total Points Spent: 370 Points**

Performers, Acts, and Criminals

- 8 Expert Clowns
- 4 Expert Jugglers
- 4 Expert Tumblers
- 4 Expert Minstrels
- 2 Barkers
- 1 Psychic Fortune-Teller
- 1 Non-Psychic Fortune-Teller
- 1 Skill
- 6 Expert Acrobats
- 3 Animal Acts: 24 snakes, a small riding Dino, and exotic pre-Rifts animals.
- 2 Real Magic Acts
- 8 Showgirls
- 12 Inanimate Oddities
- 3 Carnival Rides, including the Horror Forest Funhouse
- 4 Games of Chance
- 1 Gladiatorial Arena (see Artesian Arena elsewhere)
- 2 Live freaks
- 5 Smugglers and Sellers of Contraband
- 4 Pickpockets/Information Gatherers
- 3 Prostitutes
- 3 Expert Worms

Note: The total carnival staff is around 225, including more than 60% D-Bees.

Notable Places

Travel to Singer from the south usually means a lengthy overland trip through the infamous, dangerous, and extremely dense Horror Forest. Daunting as the landscape is, the Hand's Warlocks and Shifters tap into elemental forces to create mounds to make walking more difficult, countless vines to encumber travelers, and impregnable thickets up to twenty miles (32 km) south of the peninsula. The IDF patrols the region religiously, and the Hand is usually well aware of the presence of any overland threat. Any visitor who actually makes it to Castle Singer's gates (a relative rarity) is subject to a Singer

Security search and are required to check any weapons, robots, and vehicles prohibited within city limits at the castle's South Wing facility.

However, Singer is quite accessible via the St. Lawrence. Its harbor is open virtually all hours of the day and night. The River Watch patrols Eel Bay around the clock. Visitors landing at Singer are subject to search and required to leave any heavy gear on board their ship. Violators are immediately expelled from Singer and blacklisted, although the blacklisting tends to be by word of mouth among River Watch troops and is usually only effective for as long as the violator's vessel is in port.

The following are only a sample of the establishments and residences that exist in a diverse community like Singer.

Wellesley Park

Primarily because most Exempt Citizens call Wellesley Park home, this neighborhood is Singer's most affluent. Much of the faculty and staff at the Artesian Academy live nearby. The neighborhood also features Eel Bay Beach, Park and Marina, offering extensive recreational opportunities. Carven has held the N-Rep seat since the first election almost a decade ago.

1. Artesian Academy. Consistent with Black Market organizations in general, the Immaterial Hand takes a benevolent approach to education and other means of self-advancement. But there is no doubt the Hand's refurbishing of pre-Rifts Castle Singer and founding of the school was for its own benefit. For one, it became the cornerstone of the **Southern Wall**, the massive barrier separating Singer from the Eastern Wilds and spanning the breadth of the peninsula. Accordingly, the castle itself has been magically converted into a Mega-Damage structure, and serves as a fallback position in case of serious attack, not unlike a medieval castle's keep. It bristles with weapon turrets from every rampart capable of supporting one, and the only entrance is fortified with a heavily-guarded IDF checkpoint just beyond the main gates, an outbuilding bristling with weaponry. In addition to the structure's stout Mega-Damage material, it features a plethora of Techno-Wizard defenses, many of which are within close enough proximity to Styx Major to increase their range, damage, and payload.

Although the school offers rudimentary general education courses for children and adult alike, its real purpose is to allow Singer's children and teens the opportunity to develop their magic talents. Singer natives are automatically eligible for admission, although citizens are subject to an increase in their payments under the Tiered Tribute System as long as they are enrolled. The Academy also offers admission to applicants from other city-states, but the application process is rigorous and the tuition is steep. Promising students are offered employment at Artesian Arms upon graduation, and the amount of time necessary to "graduate" is entirely on a case-by-case basis depending on the student's work ethic and talent. This gives AA an endless pipeline of technicians, most of whom have dreamed of working for the company their whole lives.

Naturally, the school's curriculum focuses on learning spells and techniques to create Techno-Wizard and other magic weapons. The faculty includes the Scathach Druid **Heston Thicketrond** (see 5, below); the Ley Line Walker **Rockwell Westin**; the Mystic Kuznya **Isabella Valkyrie** (see 4, below); and the Techno-Wizard **Pulcifer Prinz**. Both Pulcifer and Rockwell live in quarters in the castle itself.

Although the Hand was largely successful in ridding the castle of its ghostly inhabitants, a number of entities, especially poltergeists and tectonic entities, still inhabit some of the more-deserted rooms. It is a common hazing ritual among the student body to force new

students into one such room just to get a reaction from the "newbie." For the most part, the castle has enough remote nooks and crannies that the ghosts can coexist with the students, faculty and staff without causing too much mischief.

Black Market Activity: Minimal. A student here or there may be on the take, particularly the adults in the rudimentary education courses, but Le Marche Noir has not been able to infiltrate any of the magic classes largely due to its distaste for magic in general. The information gleaned from its few operatives is hardly worth the bribes, but Rex Oldquist likes to have access to as much information as possible, and it is a comparatively simple matter to have an insider at the school at all times.

2. Southern Wall Command Center. This is the nerve center for the Southern Wall defenses. It is the IDF's key communications, defense, and storage facility, featuring a bank of four ion cannons (1D6x10 M.D., 3,000 foot/914 m range, effectively unlimited payload) and two AA-B1 Goblin Bomb TW Cannons (see above; 44 rounds each). Further, members of the IDF are always on duty, supplementing the wing's defenses with their own small arms. It also includes a warehouse where Singer's military stores much of their heavy equipment, and also allows for storage of visitors' gear that is prohibited in town.

Black Market Activity: None. The crew who operates this command center has proven its loyalty to the Fist over the course of many years. Their placement here is essentially a reward for that loyalty; it's a pretty cushy job, after all. Plus, Singer's myriad of entertainment options keep everyone's Black Marketeer urges in relative check.

3. Circle K Ranch. Childhood sweethearts and Exempt Citizens, **Mathis** and **Suzanne Kellog**, had always wanted to find a plot of land to call their own. They were both scrupulous human Vagabond O.C.s, but with a lifelong interest in farming. That interest paid off when Suzanne manifested the superpower Control Elemental Force: Plants when she would have otherwise been crushed by falling trees felled by stray Coalition States M.D. blasts. Coupled with Mathis' affinity for animals due to his unusually high M.A. (21), their farm in Minnesota thrived right until the Xiticix invasion that changed their lives forever. Having landed on their feet as Exempt Citizens, their plot of land has grown to over 50 acres of ranch and farmland, making them the single largest private property owners in town. Unbeknownst to the Hand, they are also high-ranking members of the Faerie League.

Their son, **Stephen**, 18 years old, 2nd level human Wilderness Scout Black Marketeer, Unprincipled, is champing at the bit to seek his fortune, but has agreed to stay in town for now. He wants to see if the unrest will actually lead to revolution. He works mostly with the livestock, which includes goats, pigs, horses, and chickens. **Tank**, 5th level Principled human, Exempt Citizen Operator, runs and manages the farming operation, where the rich topsoil helps him churn out bumper crops of soy every season. He's most likely to drive the tractor and pull the M.D. plow, and often clandestinely repairs Faerie League gear in his free time.

Black Market Activity: About two months ago, the Kellogs hired two more hands, the mysterious scrupulous human, Shamanic Native American, **Willowhawk** (6th level male human Plant Shaman; **Rifts@ Spirit West**, page 50) and **Paz** (5th level female human Animal Shaman). Although they perform excellent work, their purpose is to investigate on behalf of the Longhouse Preserve whether the rumors that the peninsula is no longer safe for Faeries are true. In fact, these particular hands were brought on as the next step in a budding alliance between the Faerie League and the Longhouse Preserve.

4. Isabella Valkyrie's House. Isabella "Val" Valkyrie lives and crafts her wares in a little bungalow near the southern coast in an upscale section of Wellesley Park. See description in Singer Notables, below.

5. Heston's Hand-Crafted Weapons. Heston Thicketround, 6th level human Scathach Druid (see **Rifts® England**) came to Singer as a guest lecturer at the Artesian Academy. Rembrandt was taken by his creativity and gentility, and offered him a full-time position teaching TW Horticulture (a class focused on how to use magic safely and productively in nature). The store is also his home, which he shares with his wife, Gwyneth, a 7th level Dryad (**Rifts® England**, page 40) and their 7-year-old, potentially future Operator or Techno-Wizard son, Wynn. Heston's unique pieces attract a great deal of interest among well-heeled travelers and Singer residents alike.

Black Market Activity: None.

6. Wellesley Park Emergency Services. A captain in the Hand, Collins Opherum, an Aberrant, 7th level Kremin Cyborg, and his crew are responsible for extinguishing fires and generally cleaning up messes. In addition to operating the fire and sanitation departments, Chief O's crew gets the call to clean up Singer's impromptu battlefields after each of the increasingly regular firefights between gangs, Le Marche Noir interests, and the government. Rembrandt has renewed his contract for each of the last five years, and in light of Chief "O's" dedication to both his job and looking the other way when the SS is overzealous, would seem to ensure his employment for the foreseeable future. The bulk of the fire department is a fleet of three Big Boss ATVs outfitted with water cannons.

Constructed as part of the Town Council Public Works Project, the structure was designed to blend in with the surrounding wooded area that gives way to Eel Bay beach along the peninsula's southern coast. The structure is tall enough and close enough to Eel Bay that it also serves as watchtower for that body of water. Built as something of a glorified "treehouse," the Hand took advantage of the structure's elevation and built an elaborate sensory system on the structure's roof, utilizing both technology and magic to maximize the range and type of surveillance. Weapon systems include dual AA-B1 Goblin Bomb TW Cannons and a pair of TK-80 Heavy Rail Guns.

Black Market Activity: Chief O and his crew are master salvagers, and generally profit to some degree selling finds from their jobs. Rembrandt and the SS repay in kind Chief O's willingness to look the other way, and profits from these sales have never been subject to tribute. The crew's other specialties are covertly destroying evidence of Singer Security violence and, when the opportunity presents itself, planting evidence against the Hand's enemies.

7. Singer Security Headquarters. This building is a massive Mega-Damage structure and the primary checkpoint for anyone traveling through Wellesley Park. Whether the SS actually stops and frisks a visitor or resident, or lets them pass entirely unimpeded, is totally within its discretion. There are at least between four and seven (1D4+3) SS agents at the headquarters at any given time. The facility features a garage for most of the SS fleet of vehicles, which include ATVs, motorcycles, hovercycles, helicopters, and fighter jets. The Hand, with the financial backing of Artesian Arms, has spared no expense outfitting its police force.

Black Market Activity: Moderate. There is a 25% chance that 1 or 2 of the SS agents at the checkpoint are on the take from Le Marche Noir.

8. Faerie League Meetinghouse. Constructed first as a monument to Faeries who had abandoned their mound, the meetinghouse is a camouflaged cave and rock formation that has gradually become something of a safe haven for members of the Faerie League. The

League keeps caches of weapons, food, and supplies here in case of emergency. To this point, Singer Security is unaware that the structure is anything more than ruins.

9. Interior Defense Force Headquarters. An impressive structure designed to blend in with the surrounding light woodland, the IDF HQ stands as an emblem of safety to most Singer citizens.

Black Market Activity: Extensive. Up to 40% of IDF troops are on Rembrandt's payroll, while Le Marche Noir has a handful of the "honest" troops on the take. This means Le Marche Noir remains in the dark about Rembrandt's arrangement with the Splugorth for now.

10. Carven's House. The residence of Elven Wilderness Scout and Wellesley Park N-Rep, Carven, is just within Wellesley Park's northernmost border. This location allows him ready and welcome access to the relative peace and quiet of the adjacent Outskirts, the term Singer natives use to describe the last remaining plot of undeveloped land allowed to Singer under the terms of the Faerie Edict. Although he yearns for the freedom to travel freely, as has been the case for nearly all of his 252 years, Carven had agreed to spend a small portion of his extended lifespan inside Singer's city limits. To compensate, and even though the Outskirts are a far cry from the breadth and wonder of the Horror Forest, his picturesque residence is a sufficient compromise to help his friends for a while longer.

Despite his characteristic aloof, distant demeanor, Carven has acted as Wellesley Park's N-Rep for since the first elections nine years ago. His status as Singer founder made him an easy choice, although Rembrandt was as responsible as anyone for Carven's political career. Before that, he was an integral member of the volunteer forces that had defended Singer from Horror Forest threats. During his time as Singer's eyes and ears in the Horror Forest, which included more than a few encounters with Splugorth, he had grudgingly come to accept the Hand's role in saving refugees he, Orin and Tessa had failed to keep safe.

After the Hand reorganized Singer's government in 100 P.A., he found himself out of his element deep in city politics. He participated because he felt needed; Orin and Tessa both wanted him to have a position in the new government, and he felt a duty to his people who lived, by and large, in the Wellesley Park neighborhood. Moreover, Rembrandt's confusing (and expensive) acts of benevolence convinced him he could keep closer tabs on things if he had an official title.

But by now, Carven has spent far more time within Singer's city limits than he would like, and he is strongly considering declining to run in next year's election. Rembrandt has been a strong supporter of Carven's tenure, mostly because his ulterior motive was to get Carven out of the woods and into politics. If and when he finds out about Carven's plan to step down, he will certainly try to talk him out of it.

11. Eel Bay Park. A haven for children and their parents, Eel Bay is the most family-friendly recreation spot in town. It includes an extensive playground, outdoor TW-powered grills, and a shallow swimming hole. Another portion of the park caters to magic users and others looking for a quiet moment, and features a botanical garden, small waterfalls (courtesy of an itinerant Water Warlock), and benches and small gazebos designed for meditation.

12. Eel Bay Marina. This large Mega-Damage structure features a walking bridge spanning the mouth of the Eel River and is the hub of the beach's recreational activity.

A. Lifeguard Patrol. Rembrandt employs a lifeguard during daylight hours to ensure the safety of the families often frequenting the park. These individuals are always skilled in swimming and CPR, and are usually psionics or mystics with empathic abilities. Working at the lifeguard station is a sought-after summer job for students at the Artesian Academy.

B. Adventure Tours. Owned and operated by the semi-retired mercenary company, Tour of Duty, this establishment offers adventurous, well-heeled clients the opportunity to embark on a modern-day safari, either through the Horror Forest, on the St. Lawrence, or exploring the river's depths. All clients are personally accompanied by at least two of the six founding members of the company, which include a privateer, two Psi-Stalkers, a wilderness scout, a salvage expert, and their commander, **Gus Marshall**, 6th level freeborn Dog Boy, Monamo Headhunter.

As the leader of one of the most notorious mercenary organizations in town, Tour of Duty, and the owner of one of its most elite service providers of Adventure Tours, the self-titled Major Gus Marshall enjoys wealth and social status that is a far cry from his feral upbringing. He is nothing short of amazed at his good fortune, and perfectly happy with the tribute he and his company pay the Hand. From his perspective, Rifts Earth is a very dangerous place, and the Hand has taken great lengths to carve out a little niche of safety. In his mind, they were entitled to some reward for their efforts.

Gus formed Tour of Duty in the Magic Zone a decade ago. Due, in part, to his desire to move away from the Coalition's reach, the group made a niche for itself as navigators and covert operatives within the Horror Forest. His team arrived in Singer about three years ago, and has flourished due to the availability of wealthy clients, particularly Exempt Citizens. These days, Gus himself often leads forays into the Horror Forest, but he leaves excursions on and under the St. Lawrence Seaway to others in his organization more suited for those tasks. Adventure Tours has been a nice sideline, and though Gus prefers to make his living showing hardy (read: wealthy) clients the sights of the region, he still accepts mercenary contracts if they are noble (and lucrative) enough.

Though he has no desire to be an N-Rep, there is a groundswell among the non-exempt residents of Wellesley Park to convince him to run for office. He will have to decide within a few weeks whether to submit his petition to the Hand for this year's election.

C. Brownie Nibbler Cafe. Known for its sweets and breakfast items, this family-oriented establishment is a popular place for residents and visitors alike to gather in the morning and early afternoon. Located on the second floor of the building it shares with Adventure Tours, it features an open-air deck for patrons to enjoy the view onto the bay. Prices are relatively reasonable, and 3 to 5 credits can get you a fresh-baked donut or a handmade shake. The shop closes each day well before sundown, but is the first establishment open on the beach each morning.

Black Market Activity: Members of the Faerie League gather for breakfast on a regular basis, although their association with the gang remains widely unknown.

13. Techno-Wizard Water Treatment Plant. Fitted with Techno-Wizard features based on the Purification spell, the treatment plant ensures the water flowing down the Eel River is fit for consumption. It is the primary water source for the community. The Plant is also infused with numerous TW Defenses, such as Energy Absorbers and Defensive Shielding. As a nod to its importance to the community, Singer Security is particularly vigilant about patrolling the area nearby. Le Marche Noir has thus far been unsuccessful in gaining access to the plant.

14. Beastmaster's Stables. The treatment plant is immediately adjacent to the bestiary owned by **Tysin Beastmaster**, an unprincipled 8th level Titan, Keeper of the Garden (see **Rifts Madhaven**). The Stables offers a place to board travelers' mounts, traditional or exotic, and also offers a fair selection of horses and exotic animals (selection is fair; prices for any exotic mount are 25% higher than list). Tysin and his human Squire, **Winslow** are "retired" combatants

who would rather avoid conflict, but they keep their abilities honed with weekly rides that usually culminate in spirited sparring. Their friendly exteriors can evaporate in an instant if threatened, and the threatening party may not like what they find.

Black Market Activity: Also in the Stables' employ are **Tark** and **Sly**, a pair of 3rd level Psi-Stalkers, both Anarchist. They moved to Singer within the last 6 months because the word is out that Singer is a good place to prey due to all number of transients and poor with a great deal of P.P.E. Their loyalty in any conflict is to themselves, and probably wouldn't mind stealing a mount or three on the way out of town if it came to that. But they are smart enough to appreciate Tysin's easygoing nature and not to abuse it; they get their work done so they can prowl the town as much as possible. Tysin understands they are not the most desirable sorts, but as they say, good help is hard to find, especially if you're looking for Psi-Stalkers or Simvan to help with the animals. So far, he has looked the other way and gives no indication he might suspect what the pair are up to during their time off.

15. Boardwalk Cafe. Another nice spot to grab a meal, this restaurant offers outdoor dining and its own small pier to accommodate the small vessels routinely traveling Eel River. The pier also includes a footbridge spanning the Eel River. Its docks offer the last place to land before the marina. Also, it signals the boundary between Wellesley Park and the Eel Bay Market District.

Black Market Activity: Another establishment under tacit Faerie League control, its owner is a member of the gang.

Eel Bay Market District

Singer's most populous neighborhood, it is also the most profitable for the Hand. A trio of Mega-Damage government buildings (Town Hall, Singer Bank, and the Singer Media Corporation building) line Main Street and herald the Downtown commercial district where high-priced commodities in the financial and magic markets are bought and sold. Shoppers also have the option to frequent the more low-key Open-Air Market. Virtually any good or service not involving the slave trade or Bio-Wizardry is likely available in one of the neighborhood's many shops, booths, and back alleys. The N-Rep is the arms dealer and aged, but still lovely, Elf Shifter, Calypses Endago.

16. Singer Community Walking Bridge and Power Depot. Rembrandt designed a walking bridge to encourage foot and horse traffic to the Downtown shopping district. It features multiple kiosks with holo maps of the city and is a common meeting place for visitors.

17. Singer Bank and Trust. This is the place to get those high-interest Black Market loans. The bank president is **Mara Executrix**, 8th level Black Market Banker and a Lieutenant in the Hand hierarchy. She shares Rembrandt's appreciation for the free market, and she tends to encourage investors to take on debt. Singer's booming economy gives her the freedom to lend money somewhat speculatively, but the Hand's repossession policies are right there in the fine print, so what's the worry? The facility includes an outdoor monetary exchange kiosk for convenient withdrawals, deposits, and of course, payments on loans and fines.

Singer Security deploys a permanent guard detail to patrol the exterior and interior of the building 24/7. The building itself is a Mega-Damage structure augmented with Techno-Wizard defenses, including Defensive Shielding, Energy Absorbers, and Implosion Field Generators. The Keeper of the Vaults is **Te'o Alabaster**, 7th level Diabolist Black Marketeer, whose sole task is to maintain the network of circles and symbols that keep the Hand's assets safe.

18. Town Hall. Along with the bank and SMC building, this Mega-Damage structure where Town Council meetings are held was one of the first completed as part of the Singer Improvement Project. In addition to the large meeting hall capable of seating up to 500 humanoids, it includes office space for Orin, Tessa, and each N-Rep, along with their respective staff. An extensive bomb shelter is built into a cavernous basement, stocked with food, weapons, and supplies for up to 250 people to survive a month. Techno-Wizard defenses, including Enhanced Defensive Shielding, Energy Absorbers, and Implosion Field Generators, supplement the Mega-Damage walls.

Black Market Activity: Extensive. About half of Le Marche Noir's cadre of tipsters are most associated with the Town Hall and Singer's political process. More than a few of the 100 aides, constituents, and financial backers are either on the take or Le Marche Noir operatives themselves. Le Marche Noir is eagerly anticipating the next round of elections, when it believes it will have enough influence to possibly buy an N-Rep.

19. Singer Media Corporation. Although originally touted as a media watchdog, the SMC's real purpose is to broadcast entertainment, advertising, and Hand propaganda to Singer's residents. To a lesser extent, it functions as a public relations firm representing Singer's image to the world at large, publishing ads in publications such as the Warhawk Journal and selling broadcast rights and recordings to media companies in other city-states. It produces new content on a daily basis that it broadcasts on the Singer Television Network, featuring news programs designed to put Singer's leaders in the best possible light and completely devoid of investigative reporting. Other regular programming includes talk shows, live sporting events from Artesian Arena, and reality shows, often based on buying, selling, improving, and developing weapons. The SMC also shows pre-Rifts movies and television programs, as well as independent films from Perez producers. Most residents could care less about the news as long as the profits keep rolling in, and the SMC is widely regarded as a leader in the Singer's entertainment industry.

The SMC building is one of the tallest buildings in Singer. It houses three separate studios and employs a staff of close to 50, including audio and video technicians, reporters, anchormen, news analysts, PR personnel, sportscasters, and a Techno-Wizard. **Davidson Curry**, a 9th level human Rogue Scholar Black Marketeer, is the company's chief executive officer, and answers only to Rembrandt. He has a brilliant sense for the pulse of Singer's population (Black Market Special Abilities include Friends in Low Places) and he has a knack for cancelling a show before it has a chance to become stale while also giving promising fledgling shows a chance to gain an audience.

Black Market Activity: Less than you might think. While a cameraman or other field operative has been on the take a time or two over the last year or so, the SMC's higher-ups are close-knit Hand operatives. Propaganda is important to Rembrandt, and the company's inner circle has yet to be compromised.

20. Magic Pigeon Courier. For the last eight or so years, this business has provided Singer citizens and businesses with reliable long-distance communication and parcel delivery service. A group of five ex-Tundra Rangers, fed up with the do-gooder lifestyle and sharing a mutual interest in parlaying their skills to making a few more bucks, decided to pitch their services to Artesian Arms. Fearing the company's reputation would soon be tarnished if they were unable to meet increasing demand, and genuinely appreciating rogues who would defect from the Tundra Rangers to the Black Market, Rembrandt contracted with MPC to outsource distribution. It has been the exclusive overland distributor for Artesian Arms ever since,

and has met deadlines for shipments as far south as Stormspire and MercTown.

Further, within the last three years, Singer has grown to the point that inter-city delivery has started to generate revenue. The company now has 18 staff members, many to perform this new service, but the founders still make all the most important out-of-town deliveries themselves.

Black Market Activity: Maril Greeves is a human courier and fairly representative of the sort of Black Market operatives Le Marche Noir seeks to deploy in Singer. When Singer experienced its first boom almost a decade ago, the prosperity did not reach Maril's family, as her parents' bed and breakfast fell into disrepair, undone by competition and her father's gambling addiction. Unable to pay its vig, the family was forced to leave Singer, eventually settling in New Lazlo. Maril blamed the Hand for her plight, and eventually made her way to Wingham and met Rex Oldquist. She jumped at the chance to spy on Singer, and thanks to a phony identity of Rex's own creation, she has been reading correspondence and spying on enterprises and residents for almost three years.

21. Main Street Inn and Brewery. A large, rough and tumble establishment, open 24 hours and home of the largest casino in town, the **Cardsharp**. This three story, several thousand square foot building contains 60 rooms, restaurant, bar, and the aforementioned casino, which is known for craps, poker, dice, and sports betting via closed-circuit television (magically powered; some of the most popular events are gladiatorial combat and Juicer football from the local arena, Kingsdale and MercTown). It is a popular place for visitors and locals alike, tending to attract a hard-partying crowd who likes to drink and hang out, play cards, and watch the games.

Black Market Activity: The Cardsharp is not unlike any of the other six casinos in town (or any other, for that matter) in that there are always losers in the house. More often than not, these losers are looking to try their luck again, and need a Hand loan sha... err, loan *officer* to get back into the game. The Hand makes a killing on interest and vig from the plethora of compulsive gamblers that frequent Singer. But this prosperity is also a chink in the armor, as desperate gamblers on the take at their jobs in town are more likely to sell any information they can to coerce a bonus from their Le Marche Noir benefactors. There is a 75% chance that 1D4+2 gamblers at any given establishment are on Le Marche Noir's payroll.

22. Kennison's TW Alterations. Conveniently located on the same side of Main Street as the Brewery, Kennison's is the place in town for Techno-Wizard augmentation of small arms, ancient weapons, and body armor. Kennison's will augment any hand rifle, pistol, or hand-to-hand weapon, but not rail guns, vehicle-mounted, or field cannons. Likewise, the shop will augment any light, medium, or heavy environmental or conventional armor, but refuses to work on power armor or robots.

The establishment is capable of any modification listed in the original **Rifts® RPG**, and charges about 10% less. The establishment can also fill custom orders involving more sophisticated spells, but the price will be negotiated on a case-by-case basis. Due to the store's popularity, a customer can expect to wait at least three weeks before their item is ready.

The owner is **Gage Kennison**, a 7th level Techno-Wizard who found his hometown of Stormspire oversaturated with startup TW companies. Having just begun to hear whispers of Singer's prosperity at the turn of the century, Gage decided to sell his meager assets and make his way to Singer. On the back of a Black Market loan, he found his niche augmenting small arms and body armor, and business has boomed from nearly day one. Today, he has a staff of three Techno-Wizard interns who are students at the Artesian Academy;

he will have anywhere from two to four interns at any given time, and the interns never stay on longer than a year (the internship is something of a finishing course for their Techno-Wizard studies). However, he oversees all the work himself, and each augmentation comes with a money-back guarantee.

Gage is an example of the Hand-backed business owners in town who gladly pay their 10%. As far as he is concerned, he would be destitute if it weren't for the doors opened by the Hand's Black Market line of credit. He is greatly appreciative of the stability and safety the Hand has offered Singer's citizens, which makes him and his ilk something like patriots. He has no quarrel with the government whatsoever as long as customers keep coming through the shop's doors.

Black Market Activity: Gage's sincere demeanor and trusting personality makes his shop rife for corruption at the hands of Le Marche Noir. In reality, Kennison's is a longstanding fence; the standard tactic is to sell the unsuspecting Gage stolen TW components, some right off shipments to and from Singer, laundering the theft and making a profit to boot.

23. From the Vaults. Adjacent to Kennison's sits From the Vaults, where the Elf, **Calypses Endago** (9th level Shifter/7th level Merchant), lives and works. She has taken full advantage of her long life span to travel extensively throughout the Megaverse, honing her eye for quality items and her skills as a trader. She is the only Singer resident other than Rembrandt who participated in the Hand's original military actions against the Coalition States almost a century ago. After the conflict between the CS and Federation of Magic began to simmer down, she began to focus in earnest on buying and selling magic items, and did well enough over the next half-century to become an original investor in Singer. Her status within the Hand (she is now an Advisor) allowed her to occupy a prime commercial location, and she has parlayed that opportunity into a lucrative career. She is a licensed Artesian Arms distributor, but also offers obscure magic weapons and items she has picked up over the years on her travels.

Calypses has always been fascinated with collecting, and distributing rare items has been her stock and trade within the Hand. The business is profitable enough to support her occasional adventures and dimensional trips, which is why the shop is closed during normal business hours about 15% of the time (Calypses doesn't trust employees). While out, Calypses always has her eyes open for good prices on items she knows will sell.

Calypses opened her doors about eight years ago, stocking her shelves with various duplicates and pieces from her collection she no longer cared to keep. In addition to items she acquired along the way, her stock includes a good selection of Artesian Arms products. Calypses will sometimes barter or outright buy stock from customers, and will sometimes pay up to 40% or higher, but only if it is something truly scarce or which she might want for her own collection.

Black Market Activity: None. Calypses is loyal to the Hand.

24. Iron Horse Network: Central Station. A Hand project built along with the network itself during the public works construction boom of 100 P.A., this depot accommodates both passenger and cargo trains, leaving passengers within walking distance of the central business district and sending agricultural surplus to the docks of the St. Lawrence. The interior features screens highlighting arrivals and departures in Dragonese, American, and Gobblely, and a spartan waiting area. Outside, the nearby street corner doubles as the best place in town to hail a taxi.

Black Market Activity: Not unlike the "cabstand" in Goodfellas, this establishment is not a criminal enterprise per se, but is rather a hotbed of information. The volume of travelers, and their overheard

conversations, make Central Station a key component to Singer's rumor mill. There is a 10% chance at any given time that 1 or 2 of the attendants are on Le Marche Noir's payroll, always looking to impart information to their benefactors.

25. Artesian Advancements. The premiere vehicle repair and modification TW facility in Singer, and a subsidiary of Artesian Arms, the technicians and Techno-Wizards on staff are capable of modifying most high-tech weapons and vehicles with any of the traditional features listed under the Techno-Wizard O.C.C. description in the **Rifts® RPG**. Custom orders usually take 1D4 weeks to complete, and the cost is 25% over list price for customization.

Black Market Activity: The other component to the business is a bit more shady. The Hand regularly repossesses vehicles and other fixtures from business owners and tenants unable to pay tribute or debt. The Hand then delivers these items to Artesian Advancements for parts, refurbishing, or resale. While this appears to be a "chopshop" by definition, and seems to fly in the face of the Hand's prohibition against property crimes, Rembrandt's position is that the repossessed items have to go somewhere. Besides, if the items no longer have owners because of a violation of Hand policy, it's not theft, is it?

26. Singer Security Station. A small security checkpoint close to the shoreline designed to keep an eye on Eel Bay and monitor the bustling Open-Air Market at the same time. At any given time there is a 25% chance that at least one of the agents on duty is on Le Marche Noir's payroll.

27. Singer Theater. A small, pleasant venue that offers live concerts, dramatic plays, comedy shows, and other forms of entertainment. One of Eel Bay Market's main attractions, it is an M.D.C. structure and seats up to 350 humanoids. The Theater is an opportunity for a handful of stage hands, a small company of local actors, and freelance entertainers to ply their trade. It could potentially be used as a gathering place for civic meetings, but no one in Singer, even the gangs, is ready to openly protest against the Hand in general or Rembrandt in particular.

Black Market Activity: The Theater serves as a common meeting place for dissidents of all sorts, usually under the cover of an audience taking in a local acting troupe or band.

28. Iron Horse Train Network: Switchback Shipping Company. Conveniently located near the center of the neighborhood, this train station's purpose is to ship supplies and wholesale goods to Singer's businesses.

Black Market Activity: This shipping company bought out the previous owner about two years ago, paying a handsome sum for the opportunity to refurbish and improve delivery of Singer's goods. While Switchback has succeeded in that goal, the Hand is unaware that Le Marche Noir is a silent partner. The increase in hijackings and other thefts has increased steadily over the last two years, and although it is true the volume of shipping has also increased, the reality is that Switchback's inside information on the contents of the shipments and their security detail allows Le Marche Noir to pick and choose its heists.

29. Neighborhood Open-Air Market. The hub of the Eel Bay Market District, hundreds, sometimes thousands, of people will pass through each day. It is blocked off to vehicle traffic, making for a quaint setting, albeit one bustling with pedestrians.

Black Market Activity: Generally speaking, minimal. The majority of the open-air establishments qualify as "holes in the wall," and generally are what they appear to be, both for good and ill. The Market in general is, of course, a haven for consumers of every loyalty.

A. Mosa's Outdoor Bake Shop. Mosa, a female Phlebus, specializes in tasty baked goods, including doughnuts, scones, cakes, and cookies. Most treats can be had for 2-3 credits each.

B. Farmhand's Grocery. A large outdoor market owned by the Wellesley Park Co-op, an organization featuring most of Wellesley Park's private landowners, it offers delicious and inexpensive in-season produce. Even in winter, items such as maple syrup and handmade clothes keep the stalls occupied, even though the foot-travel decreases dramatically.

C. Diggs' Digs. Perhaps the best place to find pre-Rifts artifacts in town, Diggs, a 3rd level Iktek Digger Merchant, specializes in excavating items with his pick and shovel. He then sells them at his booth in the Open-Air Market. He specializes in pre-Rifts entertainment such as DVDs, CDs, and novels, and has been known to have a functional pre-Rifts video game system for sale from time to time. Diggs himself is a cheerful sort, having escaped from his oppressive homeworld circumstances by happenstance and allying himself with the Hand. Rembrandt pegged him early on as an easy, but productive, mark, and Diggs has rewarded him by consistently meeting his Tiered Tribute System obligations and supplying Singer with a needed niche market.

D. Odds and Ends Weapons. An authorized Artesian Arms outlet, its owner, **Fabian Nicean** (9th level Rogue Scholar Black Marketeer), is a longtime Hand operative and one of the original investors in Singer. Although Fabian himself never pursued magic, he was always sympathetic. Growing up in the Coalition States, this made him an outcast, and he eventually found the Black Market to be to his liking. Rembrandt has few, if any, actual friends, but Rembrandt respects him due to his unerring loyalty and knack for recognizing weapon quality. He is a licensed Artesian Arms dealer and the most likely of any to have the most up-to-date models. He also specializes in non-magic weapons of high quality, and usually has a handful of Wilk's or Triax weapons in stock at about 10% over list price.

E. Elvyra's Exotic Arms. This shop is owned by a female D'Norr Devilman of the same name. Her shop is stocked with items with a dangerous, dark or evil flavor, and is making a name for itself as a go-to place for Rune Weapons of evil alignments. She is also an authorized Artesian Arms distributor, and usually has all the latest AA weapons in stock.

F. Market Park. This centrally-located green space features an eternal fountain Rembrandt built with the help of an itinerant Water Warlock. Young people tend to gather near the park benches and fountains, and crowds before and after shows at the theater are common.

G. Val's Custom Jewelry. Valkyrie puts her most commercial works up for sale at this small booth. Selection usually includes rings, necklaces, pendants, and small, magically improved daggers, throwing stars, and dirks. Prices range from 10 to 20 credits all the way to several thousand, depending on the item.

Artesian Arms Industrial Park

Visitors are aware of this neighborhood mostly because the Iron Horse Train Network takes them past its smokestacks and antennas before the cityscape gives way to Singer's shops, bars, and casinos. But as the home of Artesian Arms, this neighborhood is more responsible than any other for Singer's ascent. The neighborhood's N-Rep is Josephine "Jo" Aldridge, a human Artesian Arms technician and 4th level Techno-Wizard. She won her first term in the 108 P.A. elections, and is completely loyal to the company, its employees, and Rembrandt.

30. Singer Health Clinic. A full-range medical clinic operated by **Leonard Howell**, a human 7th level Cyber-Doc. The clinic has some of the best medical services available, including a full-immersion regenerative therapy for serious injuries. In addition to its impressive technology, Dr. Howell employs a Mind Melter with emphasis on Healing and Super Psionics. Bed availability is limited and prices are generally steep, but fees are based on a sliding scale depending on the patron's income. The clinic's obligations under the Tiered Tribute System are subsidized in part by both Artesian Arms and the Rogue's Mall and Carnival, because Rembrandt recognizes the value of available health care, while the nearby Carnival essentially subcontracts care for any work-related injury to the Clinic. So far, the good doctor has been able to stay in the black (barely), but Rembrandt is eagerly awaiting what he believes is an imminent request for a new line of credit.

Black Market Activity: None. The good doctor has a great deal of appreciation for the opportunity to ply his trade that the Hand has afforded him, and carefully vets all hospital personnel. He recruits mostly from the Hand's own ranks, often the spouses and family members of operatives, for those with healing psionics and/or an interest in providing medical care.

31. Artesian Advancements: Storage Facility. Built nearly adjacent to both Artesian Arms and Temple Artesia, this storage and repair bay gives Artesian Advancements plenty of space to "reprocess" repossessed vehicles. See description for Artesian Advancements, above.

Black Market Activity: Prevalent. Artesian Advancements is virtually a fence for stolen vehicles.

32. Artesian Arms Co. Processing Plant and Administrative Offices. This sprawling complex includes research, design, and weapon production sectors, as well as living accommodations for the 20 or so full-time technicians. Rembrandt has office space here, but has gradually spent less time on-site. See full description of Artesian Arms elsewhere.

33. Iron Horse Train Network: Turbine Station. This station serves as the exclusive distribution point for Artesian Arms' subsidiary shipping company, Turbine Shipping. A bustling industrial hub, shipments of materials arrive and weapons depart almost every hour. Its coastal location gave Rembrandt the idea to build a wind turbine system for backup power.

Black Market Activity: Ports, depots, and the companies that run them are generally rife with corruption to some extent, and Rembrandt has attempted to curb that impulse with rigorous background checks of all Turbine Shipping employees. He has been rewarded with significantly fewer thefts of cargo than any other depot in the city.

34. Power Plant and Weather Control Station. Singer's source of backup power is a Techno-Wizard wind turbine aided by a weather control device capable of casting Summon and Control Rain, Calm Storm, and the Air Elemental spell, Atmosphere Manipulation. Not only does the device protect Singer's farmland from inclement weather, it can create wind to assist the turbine itself.

35. Temple Artesia. The temple is an enormous structure near the western end of the peninsula made larger by the various dimensional pockets and anomalies Rembrandt and others have built over the years. He and his closest advisers all have their living quarters here. It is proof against Ley Line Storms, dimensional anomalies and the Dead Pool (**Rifts@ Underseas**, page 19) that festers just off the rocky beaches of post-Rifts Singer, and serves as Rembrandt's personal sanctuary. The Temple is where Rembrandt and his cronies can

sequester themselves from Singer proper and engage in practices that would make the average citizen (and Hand operative) blanch.

The lead designer and foreman on the project was **Artemis**, the talented but quite mad, 6th level True Atlantean Stone Master. Known in True Atlantean circles as a diagnosably insane sociopath, his own kind expelled him from Atlantis for some unknown act. He joined the Hand only recently, and the Hand's various experiments and connections resulted in a daily magical cocktail that keeps his schizophrenia at bay. Shortly after, his services were needed in Singer, and his status took off when the Hand committed to building a Stone Temple at Nexus Styx. Within Singer, he answers only to Rembrandt and the Fist itself, but his influence would be less anywhere else on the planet. Artemis realizes this, and has focused his efforts on maintaining the Temple and taking his medication. As long as he stays on the meds, he does excellent work. He has flatly refused the Hand's offer to bring on an apprentice, and has rewarded his employers with years of excellent service.

An 8th level human Shifter, **Narcophagus**, is primarily responsible for maintaining the nexus point's stability. Although he has succeeded so far, he has begun to grow restless in his perceived role as a mere caretaker. What used to be short sightseeing ventures to other realms have turned into recruiting missions for help in usurping Rembrandt. So far, these covert activities have escaped Rembrandt's notice (he's a busy man).

The odds he succeeds are reduced by the presence of **T'ok**, Rembrandt's unofficial second-in-command, long-time ally, and Rembrandt's closest confidant. He manages the day-to-day operations of the Temple. As a high level Temporal Raider, he also has some responsibility for the nexus point, and has stepped up his duties in response to Narcophagus' increasingly erratic behavior. He has suspicions about the Shifter's treacherous activities, but wants to wait until he has hard evidence before approaching Rembrandt with the information.

Contraticus (6th level Diabolist Black Marketeer) is responsible for the Temple's defenses, which include deadly wards, circles, and a stable of Infiltrator Automatons. Rembrandt has programmed the automatons to respond to the Diabolist's commands, but ultimately, they are loyal to the High Magus. Contraticus also has suspicions about Narcophagus, but he just tries to stay out of the way and do his job. Maintaining and improving the circles of protection and other protective symbols on and around the temple is his life's work.

36. Singer Security Outpost. This SS station is built into the rocky coastline and includes a dock for River Watch personnel. It marks the end of SS jurisdiction and the beginning of that of the River Watch.

37. Iron Horse Train Network: Headrock Station. Visitors and cargo first reaching Singer usually catch the train here for the trip into town.

Black Market Activity: Common. The greatest proportion of Singer Security's responses to property crimes are to this location. As the last stop on the way off the peninsula, smugglers and thieves find work particularly plentiful, as any number of security guards, dock-workers, and rail pilots, among others, are known to take a bribe to compromise a shipment if the price is right.

Dockside

The poorest of Singer's neighborhoods, Dockside is also the most violent. Conflict between Singer Security and Docksidiers is a common occurrence. Although the Hand certainly has the manpower to "cleanse" Dockside with a full military onslaught, Rembrandt has declined doing so because of the certain political backlash against

such a harsh policy. Dockside's N-Rep, Pat'ryn Niblis, is a long-time Hand operative and one of the original investors in Singer. He considers it his duty to make sure the Hand does not exterminate Docksidiers, if only because his profits would surely suffer.

38. Eel Bay Port Authority. Singer's only public port services the bulk of the traffic to and from the city-state. Outgoing vessels are required to obtain authorization before departing from the Harbor-master, **Clambucket**, a 6th level Vagabond Black Marketeer (I.Q. 15, M.E. 9, M.A. 14). The River Watch will stop, and if necessary, fire on, any who refuse. Incoming ships traveling the St. Lawrence are required to coordinate docking with the Harbormaster or suffer the same fate.

Black Market Activity: Clambucket was one of the original Minnesota refugees as a teenager. As one of the few Exempt Citizens to become a member of the Immaterial Hand, he has parlayed his status as an Exempt Citizen into this relatively high-ranking job. He is known to take a bribe to arrange the shipping schedule, but only for the right client and the right price.

39. Captain's Daughter Cafe. A popular eatery on the pier, virtually anyone who has visited Singer more than a time or two will have had lunch or dinner here.

Prices are reasonable, and it is open 24/7. The place entertains a rowdy crowd, but the 8th level, Diabolist, Black Marketeer owner, **Starana** combines circles of protection with the host of Black Market Special Abilities she has acquired over the years and their accompanying benefits, which have managed to keep the place calm, clean, and most importantly, profitable. The food is good, but it's the atmosphere that keeps customers coming back. A good meal and a Main Street Brewery beer runs about 15 credits.

Black Market Activity: None. Starana is 100% loyal to Rembrandt and the Hand.

40. River Watch Headquarters. Immediately adjacent to the shipping yards, this sprawling complex, a Mega-Damage structure, is a constant whirlwind of activity. It boasts sophisticated scanning equipment, both of TW and conventional design, and can track incoming vessels from up to 20 miles (32 km) in either direction along the St. Lawrence. It boasts an array of defenses, including four Artesian Arms AA-B1 Goblin Bomb TW Cannons (see above; 44 rounds each). Patrols are conducted in three eight-hour shifts, which means the HQ is busiest at shift-change. River Watch duty is generally perceived as the cushiest of Singer's military branches. For one, members can usually use their own ships if so desired, creating a diverse fighting force that keeps captains and crews on the ships with which they have the most skill and experience. Further, although the Watch battles its fair share of random aquatic monsters, it has few encounters with nations or other city-states, including the anti-magic, anti-D-Bee Coalition States and Free Quebec. While Singer's relative tranquility is due at least in part to its favorable foreign relations with nearly every trading partner in the region, it is also because of its fortuitous location. Far enough from expansionist Chi-Town to stay off the CS's radar, while also far enough from isolationist Free Quebec to be little more than a curiosity, there have been few casualties in the entire, albeit short, history of the River Watch.

Black Market Activity: Ordinarily none. Rembrandt is sure to well-compensate his militia units to decrease the possibility of corruption, and the River Watch is no exception.

41. Wayback Mining Docks. Generally a hub of activity during the daylight hours, Singer Security patrols regularly in order to protect the valuable cargo from attack.

42. Wayback Diving and Mining. One of the first non-Black Market businesses to thrive in Singer was **Wayback Diving and**

Mining, owned and operated by **Wayne Wayback**, 9th level human Operator, wife **Camilla**, 8th level Salvage Expert (**Rifts@ Underseas**, page 133), and their nephew **Charlie**, 3rd level City Rat with an emphasis on underwater and salvage skills (17 years old). Wayne and Camilla left the service of the Tundra Rangers when Charlie's parents were killed by Coalition forces, and the family was able to parlay their severance pay, Charlie's pittance of an inheritance, and some gear they had acquired into the *Frozen Nautilus*, a broken-down pre-Rifts submarine. The idea was to fix it up and get salvage work in Montreal, but as luck would have it, after only a few short months of refurbishing, on the way up the St. Lawrence Seaway near what they would learn was the town of Singer, the family stumbled on a previously undiscovered and fundamentally geologically incorrect mineral deposit, including veins of sapphire, rubies, and diamonds.

After using their admittedly meager machinery to extract enough to prove its existence, the Nautilus made port at Singer. A meeting with Rembrandt went well and allowed the struggling business to secure a significant line of credit from the Hand that Rembrandt would personally monitor. The mineral deposit would prove to provide Artesian Arms ready access to the scarcest of TW components: precious crystals, allowing the company to increase production and meet demand. Rembrandt was thrilled about this development, and vowed to do whatever was necessary, including subsidizing the company out of his own pocket, because that would prove cheaper than importing the stones.

Thanks to Rembrandt's free money, Wayback Mining has become one of the largest private businesses in town. The office/processing plant is a striking, cylindrical, Mega-Damage building the envy of Black Marketeers throughout Singer. The company now has six employees, all human Salvage Experts: **Northridge**, 4th level, who operates the three-wheeled mining sub *Rolling Thunder*, of Wayne's own design, and who suffers from a borderline obsessive-compulsive disorder manifested through his personification of the craft; **Malcolm** and **Robert Fisher**, father and son, 7th level and 3rd level respectively, known for their curiosity and tendency to find both treasure and trouble; **Marshall Spears**, good-natured expert pilot most often in the cockpit of the Sea Bat; and **Darren Owens** and **Libby Good**, long-time partners, both 5th level, who found common ground with their love for power armor and robots.

Today, the company's fleet includes one XS-24 Sea Bat Mini-Submersible and one XS-20 Sea Mite (**Rifts@ Underseas**, page 201); divers are outfitted in TXD series (**Rifts@ Underseas**, page 193) or MEWS-10 (**Rifts@ Underseas**, page 139) wetsuits and Naut'Yll weapons (**Rifts@ Underseas**, pages 153-155), including the Energy Trident and Harpoon Rifle; one Underwater Sea Sled knock-off (**Coalition Navy**, page 56); a TXD-100 Ultra Deep Sea Power Armor; and a heavily modified Titan Combat Robot (**Rifts@ Ultimate Edition**, page 273). Modifications include the sensor system package from the Titan Recon robot, underwater propulsion system, and interchangeable arm attachments, including a claw and variable laser. The Wayback team lives and works in a sub of Wayne's design roughly comparable to a CS Stingray, (**Rifts@ Coalition Navy** page 78), known as the *Wayback Machine*, outfitted with only the mini torpedo launcher and the laser cannons (Weapon Systems 3 and 4) in addition to its complement of advanced sensors and mining equipment. The hold features a repair bay that also serves as a place for Wayne to tinker.

Within the last month, Wayne has begun to suspect that the mineral deposit may finally be going bust. In his heart he knows that there hasn't been enough work for his employees to do for a while now, but he doesn't have the heart to tell them, his family, or Rembrandt. The stress of potentially losing his little cartel is really freaking him out.

43. One Night Stand Flophouse and Campground. Possibly the most densely populated 5 acres of Singer, there is always something happening at the One Night Stand. Rows of tents, trailers, and other vehicles line the grounds, and cooking fires, some larger than others, dot the landscape. The place is owned by **Charlie** and **Ramona Splinsdorf**, 8th level Vagabond Black Marketeers, childhood sweethearts and Minor Psychics (Empathy and Telepathy, 32 I.S.P. for him, Telekinesis and Nightvision, 34 I.S.P. for her), now in their mid-50s, who grew up poor in the Coalition 'Burb of Fire-town. They decided to leave before the policies of the then-fledgling Psychic Registration Program extended all throughout Coalition territory. Shortly after, they caught on with the Immaterial Hand, and have been polishing their Black Marketeer credentials ever since. The couple financed construction with the help of the Hand, and have never missed a payment despite keeping their prices remarkably reasonable.

Rates vary, ranging from 10 credits per night for a spot outside on the grounds to between 35 and 65 credits per night for a room inside, depending on the client and whim of the proprietors. Those who rent the rooms tend to stay a short time, overnight or a few days, and are interested in keeping costs low. This means the establishment caters to frugal Black Marketeers, frisky couples, and travelers down on their luck. However, the Campground includes a few tenants who have paid rent for two months or more. Singer Security keeps a close eye on the Campground, as there is always the possibility of unsanctioned black market activity occurring such as drug trafficking and prostitution.

Despite their Black Marketeer status, the couple has never forgotten where they came from, and have always had a soft spot for the poor. They keep their rates low for this reason, and as a result, their profit margin is lower than most Black Marketeers. They also have developed a relationship with the Regulators, and a few gang members are likely to hole up in one or more rooms at any given time. The Splinsdorfs believe they can maintain plausible deniability if Rembrandt were to discover the Regulators occasionally hiding out at their establishment, but are not particularly interested in testing that theory.

44. Streetwise PIs. This fledgling detective agency was ostensibly founded to capitalize on Singer's burgeoning legal system. Disgruntled neighbors, business partners, family members, and anyone else who can pay the fee, hire the firm to investigate the subject of the dispute, generate a written report about the findings of the investigation, and testify before the Town Council if necessary (costs double). The firm charges by the hour on a sliding scale depending on the difficulty and/or danger of the assignment.

In reality, the firm was founded by a quartet of Singer natives in response to the declining Faerie population, disturbing reports in the opposition press (the Faerie League pamphlet, the *Representative*) and their own experiences in and around Singer that just don't seem to add up. Their front as civil investigators finances their own independent look into Singer's government.

45. Pat's Bodega. Pat'ryn Niblis, 9th level Phlebus Merchant Black Marketeer and longtime Singer resident, owns this restaurant and grocery store; one of the most popular establishments in Dockside. In addition to being a common rendezvous point for mercenaries, and gang members, as well as Black Marketeers and well-meaning visitors, the selection and quality of the food is quite good. The restaurant is known for daily special and weekly "Tapas Thursdays," when all small plates are half-off at less than 8 credits. Pat, as he likes to be called, uses the shop as a mecca for information-gathering, and has parlayed his position into becoming Dockside N-Rep.

Black Market Activity: Unknown to virtually everyone, Pat is the on-site, shadowy leader of the Backhand. See the description of that gang elsewhere.

46. Grim's TW Supply Store. When Falgrim Gembeard arrived in Singer a decade ago, his mission was simple: learn as much as possible about the newfangled science of Techno-Wizardry and report to Odin. A decade later, his own TW business thriving, he convinced his god to allow him to continue to "investigate" Rifts Earth commerce. Grim has become a Merchant (5th level Techno-Wizard, 1st level Merchant Black Marketeer) and diversified his business interests, buying and remodeling the bar adjacent to the arena now known as Grim's Pub.

The Supply Store is just around the corner from Pat's and offers one of the widest selection of TW weapons and equipment in town. Common items are 98% likely to be in stock, items valued between 100,000 and 1 million credits are 60% likely, and items beyond a million only 30%. Grim is an authorized Artesian Arms distributor, but is one of the only dealers in town willing to offer a fair price on other companies' items. Any number of his many associates run the Supply Store these days, as Grim is far more likely to be at his bar.

Gametown

Singer's entertainment district is the destination of choice for many of Singer's visitors. All the action revolves around the small circus known as the Rogue's Mall and Carnival. The most important building is Artesian Arena, where events from concerts to gladiatorial combat draw crowds daily. Gametown's N-Rep is Marvus Lusk, co-owner of Rogue's Mall and Carnival. He has held office for the last two terms, and plans to continue to exert his influence politically in Singer and within the Hand. A Hand stronghold, Black Market Activity is risky business, and therefore not as common as one might expect.

47. Stone Dragon Tavern. The trendiest nightspot in town, it caters to adventurers and anyone else looking for good drinks and good music. Boasting an excellent sound system, the Tavern features live DJs every Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights, and even the house is known for playing the latest popular music alongside pre-Rifts hits. It also offers the widest selection of wine and exotic drinks in town, with rare bottles on sale for upwards of 1,000 credits or more. The owner, a 10th level Rogue Scholar Black Marketeer known for his taste in wine and appreciation for everything pre-Rifts, especially music, named **Rhinehold Carpmen**, makes sure the music is loud, the doors are open late, and the alcohol is cheap. That combination helps keep profits up, not only at the Tavern itself, but also next door at the Hand owned and operated Lion's Head Club.

48. Lion's Head Club. The only Hand-sanctioned brothel in town, this establishment also offers a bar and stage complete with pole on the first level. The ladies of the night ply their trade, and reside on the second and third floors. The girls charge whatever rates they like, which encourages individual entrepreneurship, and also gives the customer a range of options starting at 20 or so credits an hour all the way up to multiple thousands. They are required to pay tribute to the Hand, but in no greater proportion than most other merchants in Singer. **Whiplash**, a 6th level Enforcer Black Marketeer, is in charge of the security team that protects the girls and keeps the peace. Tok is known to frequent the place, both for business and pleasure. Under the circumstances, the Club is an extremely tight, efficient, and safe operation.

49. Rogue's Mall and Carnival. One of Singer's signature establishments. See description elsewhere.

50. Gametown Inn. Literally a stone's throw from the Artesian Arena, this Hand-owned establishment is the place for high-rollers and other spectators to crash after a night of revelry in Gametown. Built to resemble the arched entrance to a medieval town square, belying the neighborhood's almost completely commercial nature, it is one of the most visually striking buildings in all of Singer. It stretches over three stories in the air, many rooms situated in castle towers offering a striking view of not only the arena but in some cases, the St. Lawrence itself. Rooms are not cheap, beginning at 100 credits a night up to 500 for a room overlooking the arena. Most importantly, the inn signals the beginning of the Gametown district, which features establishments such as the **Gladiators' Waystop**, a restaurant that serves good, if overpriced meals, usually ranging between 20 and 50 credits. Offers Main Street Brewery beer for 5 credits a mug.

51. Grim's Pub. Owned by renowned Asgardian Dwarf, Falgrim Gembeard, this is the go-to establishment for drinks before and after events at the arena, which is literally just a stone's throw away. It features authentic Asgardian ale and spirits at reasonable prices (about 6 credits per mug). Unsurprisingly, the Kingsdale expatriate Dwarves are regulars.

Grim's Black Market accomplice, 4th level Shifter, Black Marketeer Phineas Thebes, convinced Grim a year or so ago to establish an interdimensional distribution agreement with Asgard to provide top-shelf alcohol, and Grim's Pub was born. They bought the building after the previous owner failed to meet his obligations under the Tiered Tribute System, remodeled accordingly, and business is booming. The pub's success has Grim thinking about other properties he might want to add to his Singer holdings.

52. Artesian Arena. Owned by the Rogue's Mall, this arena showcases the highest-profile gladiatorial combat in town. Bookmakers abound, offering patrons action on all the events. The gambling industry is remarkably well-regulated, as 90% of bookmakers are associated with the Hand, so Singer Security's presence is less than one might expect. This makes for a vibrant, generally good-natured environment that is quite conducive to people spending their money, both for admission into the arena and on any of the nearby establishments.

The Arena is open seven days a week and usually has fights on the hour beginning with matinee performances in the afternoons. Contests include one-on-one combat, exotic animals or "monsters" fighting humans and D-Bees, and the occasional exhibition Juicer Football Game. The Rogue's Mall also uses the facility for its weekly "Big Top" performances.

Black Market Activity: Little to none. There are always a few rogue bookmakers trying to get away without paying tribute, but for the most part, the abundance of legal, Hand-sanctioned gambling establishments makes for slim pickings. However, as with anywhere else, low-level security and maintenance personnel are susceptible to bribes under the right circumstances.

53. Daredevil Animal Control. A trio of energetic (some would say, foolhardy) Techno-Wizards with a knack for relating to animals have found their niche as the Arena's resident exotic-animal handlers. **Darryl** and **Ann Questington** and their cousin, **Reed Graft-plate**, grew up on the Questington family farm near Stormspire. Although they yearned to leave the farm for the city life Stormspire offered, as well as the opportunities to pursue the "it" career of Techno-Wizardry, it would be their experience handling exotic livestock early in life that would pave the way for their current success.

Although they all did eventually become Techno-Wizards through instruction at Stormspire, they found the city didn't agree with them as much as they thought it would. Rembrandt's success with the Hand and Singer's reputation as a haven for Techno-Wiz-

ardry was common knowledge in Stormspire by 100 P.A., and the trio set off to seek their fortune there.

They first worked at the Rogue's Mall and Carnival as animal handlers, trying to scrape together enough disposable income and time to work on TW designs. Eventually, Ann broke through with the now patented Illusory Crop, a simple-appearing whip or riding crop that allows the user to tame virtually any animal, exotic or otherwise. While she had no interest in mass producing the item, it provided the trio with the confidence to start the company and get a loan from the Hand.

The company constructed massive animal pens suitable for containing all sorts of dangerous and exotic animals immediately adjacent to the Arena. In fact, the arena is directly accessible from the pens, allowing exotic animals to be led directly from the pens to the Arena (to the delight of the crowd). The Illusory Crop has proved effective in protecting the audience from even the most aggressive beasts in all but a handful of instances.

Outskirts

Unclaimed by any neighborhood, the forest beyond the Daredevil facility has remained one of Singer's few undeveloped locations. Predominantly deciduous forest, Singer Security rarely patrols there, citing the heavily wooded landscape, while the IDF also refuses to do so, justifying its inaction because the area is technically within Singer's borders. This has led to something of a feud between the two branches in the military, and the region goes largely ignored by law enforcement.

54. Faerie League Hideout. The gang has taken advantage of the relative isolation to construct its de facto headquarters. As another abandoned Faerie Mound, the Hideout is really an expanded version of the meeting house in Wellesley Park, with weapons and food stores to last 100 people at least a month. There are likely to be 1D4+1 gang members there at any given time, and can hold up to 30 comfortably in the large conference hall.

55. Settlers' Cemetery. Another reason why the area has been more or less ignored is because of the infamous graveyard where the original pirate settlement in the 20s buried their dead. Hand efforts to rid the area of the myriad of Entities and evil Faerie Folk who reside there have been a complete failure.

56. Ruins. Although any number of fugitives and/or gang members have temporarily hidden out near this rock formation on the banks near the headwaters of Eel River, it has remained abandoned.

St. Lawrence River

The following are nearby points of interest beyond Singer's borders.

57. Naut'Yll Encampment. Aquata, (7th level Koral Shaper, **Rifts Underseas**, page 150, Anarchist), a free-thinking, female Naut'Yll, was savvy enough to keep her true political bent from her superiors growing up in the militaristic Naut'Yll magic academy. Knowing escape was the only way she could even think about being herself, she researched possible excursions to finally extract herself from the pervasive militarism. She convinced her superiors that a small vein of Korallyte near the Nexus Styx would be a suitable jumping off point for an invasion. The harried generals approved her idea, and she was deployed with a small group of advance scouts. Although she was excited to be off, she knew her excitement would be short-lived, because her job would be to open the door for her cor-

rupt society to gain a foothold in North America, and ultimately be accountable to her superiors once again.

Shortly after the team arrived, the Hand finished construction of Temple Artesia, and Singer's subsequent control over the Nexus prevented reinforcements from arriving there. Naut'Yll higher-ups were less than thrilled with the idea of a river occupation in the first place, and the latest development caused them to virtually write off Aquata entirely. Giddy beyond her wildest dreams, she devoted herself to developing structures out of the Korallyte and halfhearted attempts to convince her followers she is still focused on removing the Temple and opening the gateway for the invasion.

Her bodyguard, and self-styled closest confidant is **Brutux**, 8th level Naut'Yll Devastator (**Rifts@ Underseas**, page 150, aberrant). He, **Qu'rath** and **Mar'lu**, 4th level, anarchist Naut'Yll Mystics and **Kry'zee**, 7th level Naut'Yll Soldier (**Rifts@ Underseas**, page 149; Unprincipled) have been with her since they arrived through the Nexus Styx almost 15 years ago. At this point, Aquata's fellow Naut'Yll have doubts she really cares about attacking the Temple, and are split about whether to leave or whether to make a go of it in Singer. Their culture's value of obedience has compelled them to remain, in support of Aquata. The group's non-threatening presence has attracted **Volux** and **Volex**, twin KreeL-Lok Nomads (**Rifts@ Underseas**, page 152; Unprincipled), to the group's ranks, tipping the scales further in favor of sticking around.

58. St. Lawrence Piranhas Hideout. Although effectively a wing of the River Watch Headquarters, the Piranhas have extensively fortified the small island. The group's holdings include a base of operations featuring Mega-Damage walls and Artesian Arms AA-B1 Goblin Bomb TW Cannons. Thanks to this island stronghold, the Piranhas have managed to maintain a little more autonomy than the Fist would like, but the River Watch's performance, and loyalty, have so far been impeccable.

59. 1,000 Islands Undersea Quarry. The "mother lode" and a huge boost to Artesian Arms' stock of precision crystals essential for construction of TW weapons. Whether unknown in pre-Rifts time or transplanted through some dimensional anomaly, a veritable cornucopia of a mineral vein lies less than 2 miles (3.2 km) beneath the 1,000 Islands region of the St. Lawrence Seaway. Almost all of Wayback Mining's business is dedicated to exploiting the vein.

Singer Notables

Isabella Valkyrie always rose well before dawn. Each day, after a moment of meditation to commune with her god, Svarozhich, Russian God of Light and Fire, she would fire up her Kuznya forge in the shop adjacent to her quarters and get to work. In her more than a decade in Singer, first as foreman on the construction of the modern addition to Castle Singer as a part of the Singer Improvement Project, then as the owner of a thriving local metalworks and jewelry shop and now an adjunct professor at the Artesian Academy, she has had a lot to do. The Wellesley Park neighborhood's peace and quiet usually ensured her early morning practices were left undisturbed.

Except for this morning. "Ms. Izzy! Ms. Izzy!!!" If it weren't for the tension in both the tone and the incessant tapping at her shop's door, she might have laughed at the pre-pubescent cracks in the frantic voices.

"What in the name—"

"Ms. Izzy! Open the door!"

She did, ushering in Zak, Cade and Bobby and their wild-eyed faces. Their words were unintelligible gibberish as they all started speaking at once. "Silence!" she ordered. They complied. Imme-

diately sensing the gravity of the situation, the reprimand Isabella had planned died on her lips. “Boys, what’s wrong?” she asked, locking eyes with each one despite their attempts to closely examine the floor. They all opened their mouths simultaneously. “On second thought, how about just one of you tell me what’s wrong,” she hastily amended.

The three boys exchanged glances. Cade slumped his shoulders and looked at Val. “Ms. Izzy, we know we shouldn’t have been sneaking out.”

“Obviously. But somehow I don’t think you would be here if you were seeking penance for a breach of curfew.”

“You’re right, Ms. Izzy. We wanted to check out the Rumpleskunk Faerie Mound Professor Thicketround was talking about in class. He said the Faeries were most likely to celebrate a full moon, and it was a full moon... last night, I guess. What time is it, anyway?” he asked.

“Time for you to keep telling me this story so I can get back to work,” Val replied firmly. “What happened?”

“Well, Ms. Izzy, it was glorious. Just like the Professor said it would be. It’s just that we’d never seen so many Faeries up close. So we had to go. But then... then...” Cade couldn’t continue, choking up with tears.

Zak stepped forward. “We saw the Splugorth take them, Ms. Izzy. Just like in a nightmare.”

Isabella was stoic. “Boys, you should not have been there. There are reasons why you are not allowed beyond the Thickening. The world is wild. You are lucky to live in a place like Singer, with its peace and order. I’m sorry you had to witness a Splugorth attack like that, but there is evil in the world.”

Zak nodded grimly. “If that’s all it was, Ms. Izzy, I don’t think we’d be here.”

For the first time, Isabella sensed a tingle of uncertainty. “Alright boys, out with it. What did you see?”

Zak looked at his friends. Cade, sobbing, had found refuge in a nearby chair, while Bobby shuffled his feet near the door. “Ms. Izzy, we saw an Interior Defense Force squad, but they didn’t attack the Splugorth. They just watched them...butcher Faeries!” Zak’s last words trembled, and he sank down into a crouch on the floor.

Isabella just stood there. “Boys, it is very important that you answer my questions. Tell me, exactly what did you see the IDF agents doing?”

There was more than a moment of silence. Bobby finally spoke up. “There were two or three of them, I think, a few hundred feet from us. We didn’t know who they were or anything behind their IDF gear. The moon was full, and we could see pretty good, but...”

Cade finally composed himself. “Like Zak said, they just stood there and watched. It was a massacre, and they just... let it happen.” The boys descended into a sniffling silence.

By now it was clear to Isabella that the boys’ shock was due only in part to seeing a Splugorth Slaver for the first time or witnessing a brutal attack on Faeries. The mere thought of local heroes consorting with Singer’s most hated enemy left her cold. Imagine the impact of witnessing such an event on boys barely into their teens.

“Boys, look at me. I have no doubt you are telling the truth. And although I am glad you have told someone what you saw, I am perplexed why you chose me, but no matter. What you need to do now is remember that there are some who could find you a threat if they were to learn that you know what you know. You must keep silent. You must resist the urge to brag and gossip. Your lives depend on it.”

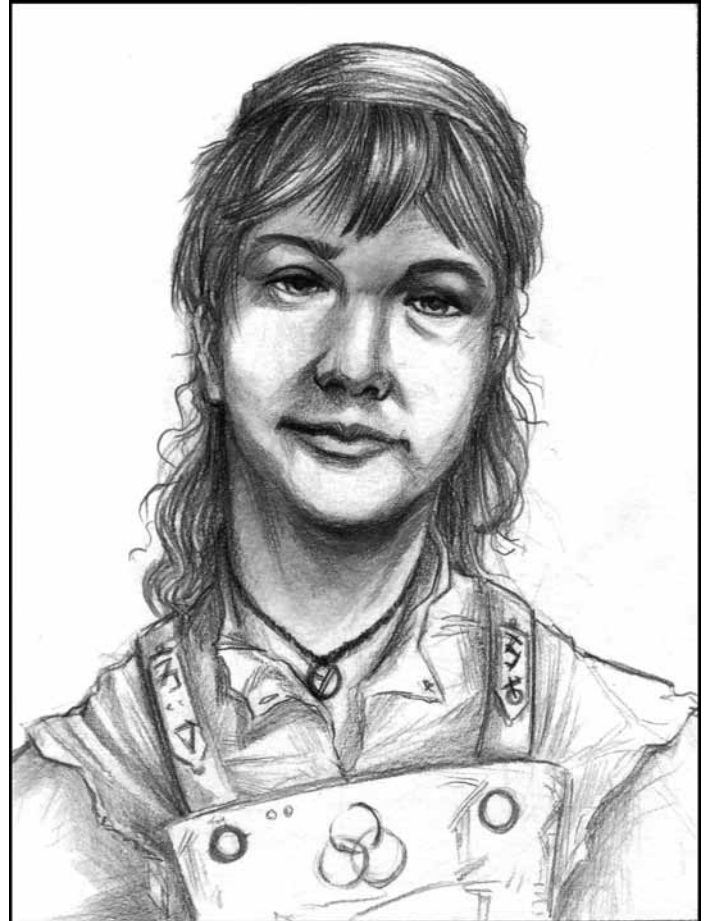
Bobby’s face blanched, but Zak and Cade swallowed hard. “OK, Ms. Izzy. Bobby, you with us?” Zak asked, as he thrust his arm forward. Cade’s arm met his, and Bobby’s too, albeit more slowly.

Isabella looked down on them and lowered her arm, placing her palm on top of the boys’ hands at the center of the circle. “You will tell none what you have told me this morning. Swear it.”

“We swear, Ms. Izzy.”

“Good boys. Now, I am going to look into what you have told me. I will be in class this afternoon, I will contact you then.” The four of them shared a squeeze of hands, then the boys headed for the door. “And be sly about it, now. The sun will be up momentarily.”

The three boys looked at her solemnly, excitement beginning to replace anxiety just a bit. “We will, Ms. Izzy,” Cade said, and the three slipped into Singer’s darkest hour before the dawn.



Brian Manning → Zak

Isabella Valkyrie

Always in search of new talent, Rembrandt has long appreciated Kuznya craftsmanship. Even though the Fist balked at first because of the expense involved, he personally pushed through the hire once word was out that a Kuznya was available. Val has rewarded the Hand with the design and construction of Singer Castle’s South Wing, and was instrumental in building the Iron Horse train stations. These days she spends most of her time crafting and teaching at the Artesian Academy.

The journey was long, but to Isabella Valkyrie, arriving in Singer just felt right. Until now. When she first arrived in 98 P.A., as one of the engineers the Hand hired to facilitate the massive investment in Singer at that time, she was struck by the close relationship between Faeries and their human and D-Bee counterparts. In all her vast experience with Faerie Folk due to coming of age in Eastern Europe, she had never seen such benevolent interdependency. The boys’ arrival at her door in those early morning hours cemented her grudging realization that this ideal is dead.

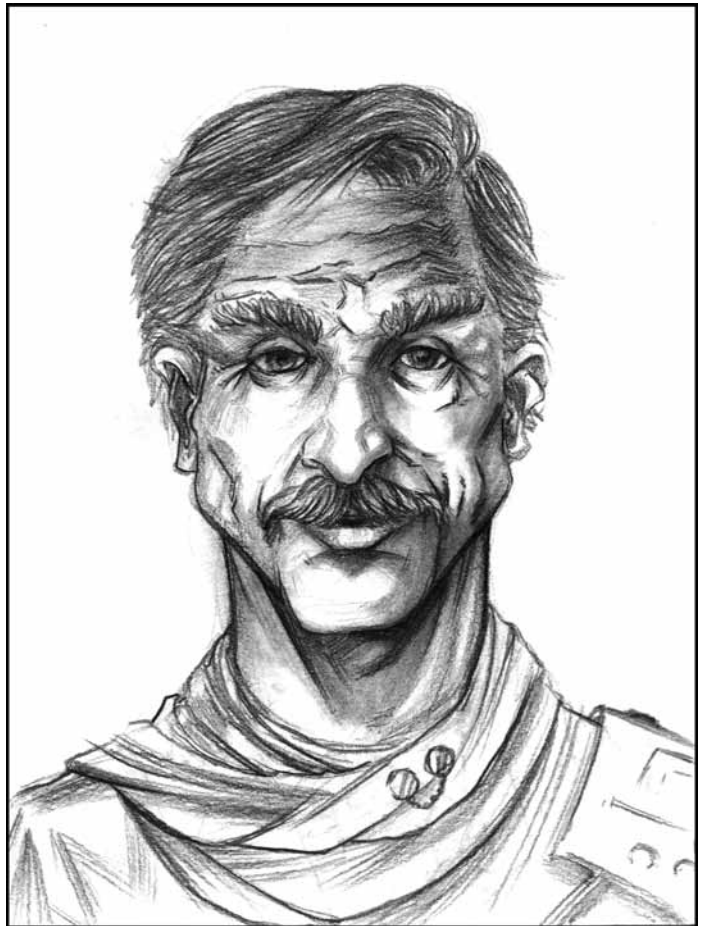
Real Name: Isabella Valkyrie.
Rank Within the Black Market: None.
Race: Human.
Alignment: Scrupulous.
Attributes: I.Q. 13, M.E. 17, M.A. 16, P.S. 31, P.P. 22, P.E. 17, P.B. 11, Spd 13.
M.D.C.: 104
Weight: 700 lbs (315 kg). **Height:** 6 feet, 2 inches (1.88 m).
Age: 25
P.P.E.: 144. **I.S.P.:** None.
Experience Level: 3rd level Mystic Kuznya (see **Rifts® Mystic Russia**).
Skills of Note: Gemology 60%, Metalwork and Forge 63%, Philosophy 45%, Military Fortifications 40%, Lore: D-Bee 30%, Prospecting 35%.
Special Abilities: As per **Rifts® Mystic Russia**, page 120, featuring M.D.C. body, Supernatural P.S., and the fire spells common to a Kuznya.
Psionics: None.
Spell Knowledge: Ignite Fire (6), Fuel Flame (5), Extinguish Fire (4), Superhuman Strength (10), Manipulate Objects (2+), Deflect (10), Ricochet Strike (12), Implosion Neutralizer (12), Create Steel (68), Power Weapon (35), Speed Weapon (100), and Enchant Weapon (400 to 1,000+).
Combat Training: Hand to Hand: Expert.
Attacks per Melee: Three.
Combat Bonuses: +3 to strike, +7 to parry, +6 to dodge, +9 to roll with punch/fall, +1 to initiative.
Weapons and Equipment of Note: Kuznya Sledgehammer (6D6 M.D.C., double to supernatural creatures, and requires two hands to effectively wield), three Gold Hammers (2D6 M.D.C.), and Kuznya Tongs. See **Rifts Mystic Russia**, page 122, for details.
Body Armor: Mega-Damage steel Chain Mail Armor (400 M.D.C.).
Vehicles: None, but could easily obtain a horse if need be.
Cybernetics/Bionics: None.
Money: Savings of 12,000 credits, but her inventory is worth millions. Kuznyas are not acquisitive by nature and Isabella is no different.

Rembrandt

By the time Rembrandt had concluded his training, he had a decent understanding that he was different from most High Magi. Although he shared their desire to create and build, his perspective had always been more worldly than most of his fellow students. For one, he recognized early on the niche that Techno-Wizardry could fill in the North American arms market. Although most High Magi are interested in other forms of magic to improve weapons and items, Techno-Wizardry was always most interesting to him because the price of TW items was not necessarily prohibitive.

As he went on in his studies, he found himself more and more interested in the arms market and “creating” profits. This outlook, combined with his interest in TW weapons, isolated him from his fellow students. Although he received the lion’s share of the abilities and skills afforded to any High Magus, the Lords of Magic were not pleased with his bent, and revoked his connection with them and denied him the abilities to create and command automatons. Rembrandt has considered this a minor setback, and has been more than happy to proceed in the role of Singer’s de facto leader.

Real Name: Rembrandt Karosh.
Rank Within the Black Market: Boss.
Race: Human/High Magus.



Alignment: Aberrant.
Attributes: I.Q. 19, M.E. 16, M.A. 18, P.S. 17, P.P. 13, P.E. 15, P.B. 10, Spd 14.
Hit Points: 54. **S.D.C.:** 32. **M.D.C.:** None.
Weight: 185 lbs (83 kg). **Height:** 5 feet, 11 inches (1.8 m).
Age: 111 years old.
P.P.E.: 298. **I.S.P.:** None.
Experience Level: 11th level High Magus.
Skills of Note: W.P. Blunt, Intelligence 86%, Mechanical Engineer 95%, Demolitions and Demolitions Disposal (both 98%), Prowl 85%, Philosophy 98%, Law (95%), Interrogation (85%), Street-wise (64%).
Special Abilities: Black Market Abilities include Informant: Corrupt Lawman, Read Black Market Operations, Read People, and Sincerity.
Psionics: None.
Spell Knowledge: All spells levels 7-15, Dimensional Pockets (20/140), Temporary Time Hole (100), Remote Viewing (30), Dimensional Envelope (60/380), S-Dep (50), Time Capsule (30), Wink-Out (20).
Combat Training: Hand to Hand: Basic.
Attacks per Melee: Seven.
Combat Bonuses: +1 to strike, +6 to parry, +7 to dodge, +2 damage, +6 to roll with punch or fall.
Weapons and Equipment of Note: Commonly carries a TW Starfire Pistol (3D6 M.D., 1,000 feet/305 m, 12 shots per P.P.E. clip), and a custom TW Befuddlemace in the form of a cane.
Body Armor: High Magus Body armor (50 M.D.C.).
Vehicles: A simple hover car.
Cybernetics/Bionics: None.

Money: Millions of credits available at any given time, plus access to Hand loans worth millions more.



BRIAN MANNING → ZOLA

Rockwell Westin

Distinguished professor, experienced adventurer, and member of the Order of the White Rose, Rockwell has been quite happy with his decision to quit adventuring, leave Madtown, and settle into his life as a teacher. Old by human standards at 55, but still hale and hearty, he sees Singer as something of his own personal retirement community. While he and Rembrandt do not socialize regularly, a deep mutual respect was formed the day Rockwell burst into Rembrandt's audience chamber in 101 P.A., demanding a position at the then just-completed school. Intrigued, Rembrandt hired him on the spot, hedging his bets by ordering constant surveillance (since curtailed). Like many of his others, the wager paid off, and Professor Westin is one of the most skilled and well-liked professors the school has ever seen. Eight years later, he is an established, trusted member of the community.

Over the last year, Rockwell has heard the rumors of the increased Faerie plight, but it's been longer than that since he's set foot outside Singer's walls. He is focused on teaching and generally enjoying himself, taking full advantage of Singer's entertainment opportunities (it is a rumor at school that he is one of the Lion's Head's best customers). He uses his high-level creation spells such as Talisman to make a little money on the side selling magic items, usually to friends and respected practitioners of magic. Although he tends to give Singer's government and Rembrandt the benefit of the doubt, he will contact the Garden to report the apparent relationship between the Splugorth and the Interior Defense Force if he gets wind of the boys' encounter at the Rumpleskunk Mound.

Real Name: Rockwell Westin.

Rank Within the Black Market: Adviser.

Race: Human.

Alignment: Unprincipled.

Attributes: I.Q. 15, M.E. 13, M.A. 17, P.S. 18, P.P. 13, P.E. 14, P.B. 14, Spd 20.

Hit Points: 48. **S.D.C.:** 70.

Weight: 215 (97 kg). **Height:** 6 feet, 2 inches (1.88 m).

Age: 55

P.P.E.: 225. **I.S.P.:** 68.

Experience Level: 9th level Ley Line Walker.

Skills of Note: Prowl 70%, Lore: Demons and Monsters 70%, Philosophy 75%, Land Navigation 68%, Pilot TW Vehicles 72%, W.P. Energy Rifle, W.P. Knife.

Special Abilities: Possesses all the standard Ley Line Walker O.C.C. powers and abilities.

Psionics: Mind Block, Nightvision.

Spell Knowledge: All Spells levels 1-9 plus Create Magic Scroll (100), Amulet (290), and Talisman (500).

Combat Training: Hand to Hand: Basic.

Attacks per Melee: Four.

Combat Bonuses: +2 to strike, +7 to parry, +3 to damage, +7 to roll with punch/fall, knockout/stun on a Natural 20, Critical Strike on a Natural 18, 19 or 20, Spell Strength 14, +4 to save vs Horror Factor, +2 to save vs Magic.

Weapons and Equipment of Note: A Lesser Rune Dagger named Silence, 3D6 M.D. and allows the wielder to cast Globe of Silence once per day at no P.P.E. cost.

Body Armor: Owns an augmented Crusader environmental suit of armor with the TW additions of Shadow Meld and Impervious to Energy. He wears it on the rare occasions he ventures beyond Singer's walls.

Vehicles: TW hovercraft.

Cybernetics/Bionics: None.

Money: Salary is thousands of credits a month, but is required to pay tribute whenever he sells magic items on the side. Has access to at least 100,000 credits at any given time, more if he chose to obtain a loan from the Hand.

Hook, Line and Sinker™ Adventures

The italicized narrative portions scattered throughout this book are the jumping-off point for what I consider to be the central storyline for this setting: who, if anyone, outside of Rembrandt's inner circle learns about his deal with the Splugorth, and how those who learn respond. The events in italics are intended to trigger nothing short of revolution. Whether revolution actually takes place is of course up to each individual G.M. Even so, rumors of unchecked Splugorth incursion will begin to spread, resulting in increasingly apparent loss of Faerie life. Faerie Folk throughout Singer, sympathizers, and the agricultural community will eventually petition their N-Reps to acknowledge and solve the problem. Will Rembrandt order that the government stonewall the citizens? Will Orin and Tessa find out about his arrangement with the Splugorth? What if the population becomes convinced the Hand is jeopardizing Faerie Folk safety?

Whether your game hits those plot points or not, the following Hook, Line and Sinker settings should provide some alternative avenues of adventure in and around Singer.

Manifest Destiny

Hook: Land area available for settlement under the terms of the Faerie Edict is rapidly diminishing. Other than a few rocky outcroppings near the western shores of the Lake of the Isles, Singer's existing land area is spoken for.

Line: At recent Town Council sessions and Neighborhood Conclaves, the expansion of Singer's city limits is a hot topic. Whether the player characters are involved in the political aspect of this HLS depends on their position in Singer; they are most likely to be involved at the Conclave stage. If they are participating, the following issues might be raised. Should Singer attempt to expand beyond the Thickening and onto the southern half of the island? Should the Hand send Tessa and Carven to try to renegotiate Singer's treaty with the Faerie Folk regarding land use? Would Tessa and Carven even consider doing so? If Singer expands unilaterally, how will the Faeries and Splugorth respond? A motion is made for a vote on the issue of whether to establish a settlement between the southern wall and the Thickening is scheduled for next session. "Manifest destiny" is a phrase increasingly common at Conclaves in every neighborhood but Wellesley Park, which is the only one expressly opposed to expansion.

Sinker: The Faerie League has finally had enough, and makes plans to make some kind of "statement" during the Town Council's next session. How much the player characters know about the plot depends on their Black Market abilities and connections. If they learn about it, what steps do they take? Make contact with the League and try to blow up city hall? Expose the plot to Rembrandt? Become double agents? Would the motion have passed, anyway?

Class Conflict

Hook: Regulators forces brutally bomb a Queenston Harbor merchant vessel docked at the Singer Port Authority, killing five of the ship's crew, including the first mate, and damaging the pier in the process. The death toll makes it the most deadly attack against Queenston Harbor interests to date, and expense was incurred. As anyone with the appropriate knowledge is aware, this will not go over well between Rembrandt and his close confidant and ruler of Queenston, Queen Lilia Seabreeze. Whether the player characters are involved in the attack or the investigation depends on their loyalties.

Line: Rembrandt authorizes Singer Security to use unprecedented force in its operations in Dockside, allowing SS troops to essentially "shoot first and ask questions later" until the Regulator menace is eradicated. Singer Media Corporation produces public service announcements warning citizens that Regulator activities were treasonous and offering rewards for the identification of the gang's leaders.

Sinker: Dockside residents are understandably furious, and most of the residents unaffiliated with the gang are thinking hard about selling any knowledge they have of gang activities just to root out the problem and get things back to normal. More politically-minded residents rush to meet with N-Rep Pat, who is in the awkward position of owing favors to Rembrandt and trying to represent his irate constituency. The Regulators themselves step up contact with Le Marche Noir, which is on the verge of committing forces to the conflict. Who will snitch? There is strong sentiment that the Regulators' guerilla warfare causes more harm than good, increasing the likelihood daily that the Hand will learn key intelligence about the gang. Will Rem-

brandt succeed in his debtor's cleansing, or will he start civil war? Which side do the players choose?

Rule of Law?

Hook: A home next door to Heston Thicketround's in Wellesley Park was abandoned recently for no apparent reason; the neighbor, a Shifter, had been a long-time resident, and generally considered a reasonably safe practitioner of magic in spite of his field. However, having failed to pay his monthly bill according to the Tiered Tribute System, the Hand has now repossessed his home and sold it to a trio of Asgardian Dwarves seeking safe haven. Heston has learned that these these uppity creatures plan to demolish the long-time structure to build something more fit for their kind. How the player characters become aware of this dispute at this stage depends on their connections in Wellesley Park and the Artesian Academy.

Line: Heston, a noted proponent of nature as a Scathach Druid, takes his dispute to Carven, who takes the problem to the last Town Council session scheduled before the Dwarves' plans go into effect. With Heston (and the player characters?) in audience, Orin and Tessa denied his claim, pointing out that the appropriate tribute had not been paid, the Hand had taken action to mitigate its losses, and the new owners had license to do with the property as they saw fit.

Sinker: When the Dwarves arrive to begin demolitions and construction, they find Heston barring their way, and students (and faculty?) from Artesian Academy, friends (the player characters?), and neighbors, along with a contingent of Faerie Folk, in contravention of the Council's order. Singer Security is summoned. Orin and Tessa are on the scene. Does a firefight ensue? If so, it would represent the first time the military had turned its weapons on Wellesley Park residents in Singer's history. What would that do to Singer's underpinnings? Can this situation be resolved without violence?

Faerie Carnage

Hook: While out adventuring in the Horror Forest near Singer, the players stumble onto a Faerie Mound that looks to have been destroyed extremely recently, perhaps within the last half-hour. Before the players can react, a squad of IDF soldiers led by Ashton Strythorn break into the clearing, demanding an explanation.

Line: Of course, this is the crew that alerted the Splugorth to the mound's activity and watched its destruction less than an hour ago. Its goal is to pin the carnage on the player characters.

Sinker: Before much of a discussion is had, a Splugorth slaving party crashes through the brush. It includes one Slaver and seven warrior women, along with two Kittani outfitted with Equestrian Power armor, although the Equestrians are more concerned with guarding a large convoy of slave pens just beyond the clearing. The Splugorth may focus on the player characters, especially if one or more make for enticing slave stock, but they are sure to defend themselves against the IDF firing on them from their position at the opposite end of the clearing.

What happens next is rather delicate. Will the player characters simply have to retreat in the face of the Splugorth? Will they be able to defeat the Splugorth and free the slaves? What happens to Rembrandt's relationship with the Splugorth if the IDF ends up helping the player characters accomplish that goal? Will the IDF agents turn on the player characters in the heat of battle and simply try to kill them to keep them quiet?



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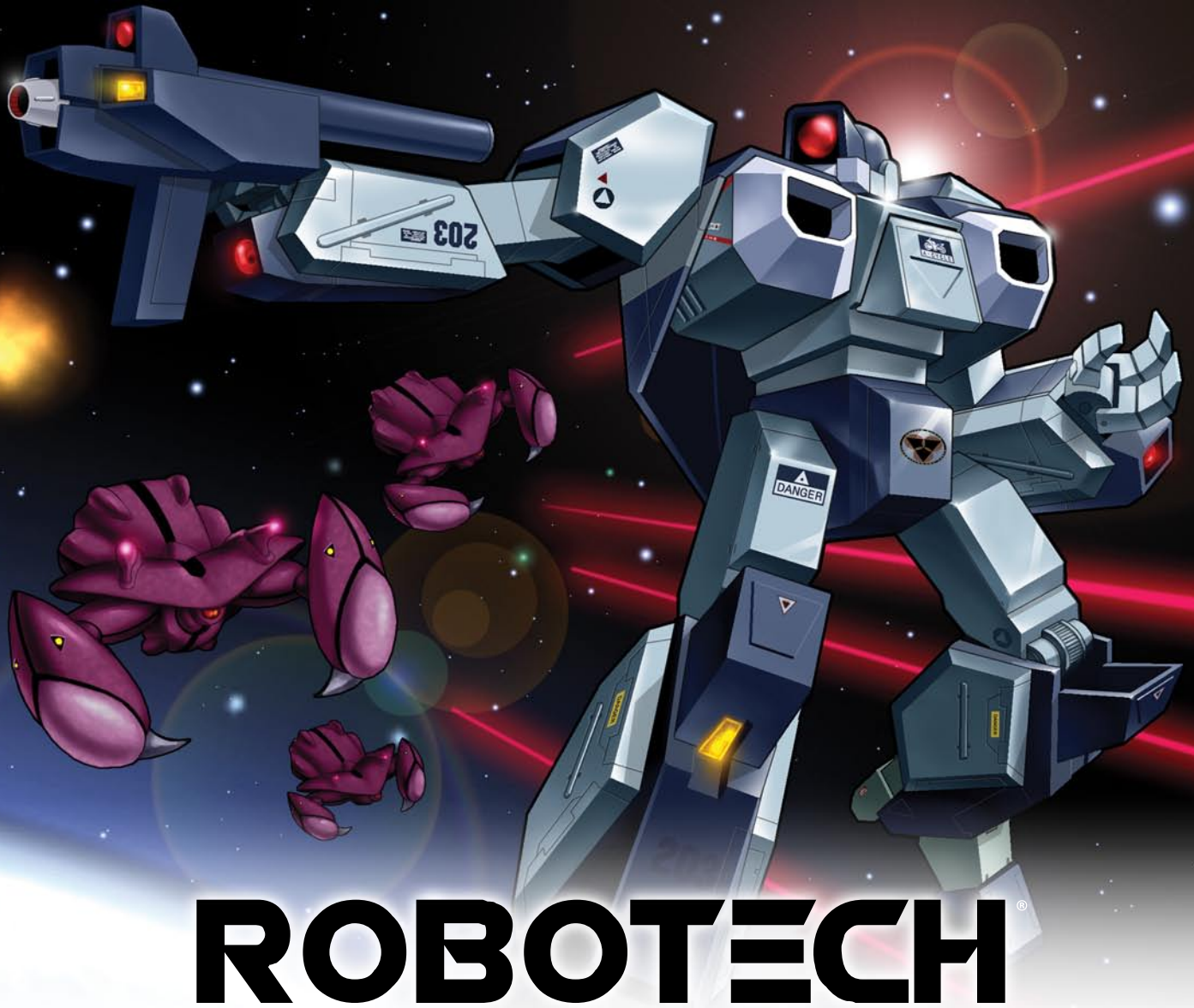
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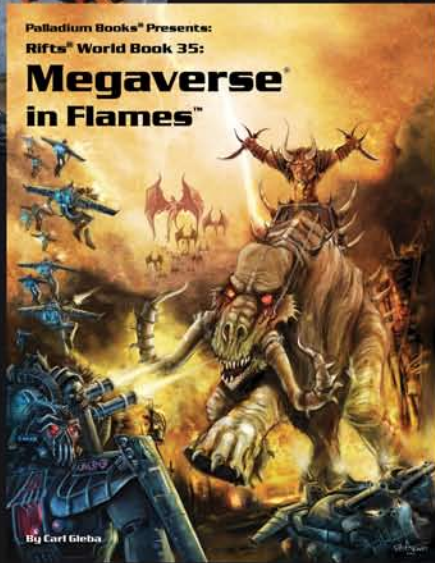
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